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**Analysis of
The Identity of the New Testament Text II
By Wilbur N. Pickering, ThM PhD**

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1. Introduction

The online syllabus requires the reading of “*The Identity of the New Testament Text*” and provides a link which specifically addresses an online version of “*The Identity of the New Testament Text II*” by Wilbur N. Pickering. For convenience, and to enable text highlighting and other notations, I downloaded a .pdf copy of this work (Pickering, undated).

Pickering’s book (*The Identity of the New Testament Text II* – hereinafter referred to simply as “II”) bears the copyright symbol, but shows no copyright date. Elsewhere, however, (Fuller, 1983, p. 216) notes that the book is based upon Pickering’s 1968 Th.M. thesis. Pickering, himself, confirms this in *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV* – hereinafter referred to simply as “IV”. (Pickering, 2014).

Amazon has a more comprehensive collection of different editions and versions. It (https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=sr_pg_2?rh=n%3A283155%2Cp_27%3AWilbur+Pickering&page=2&ie=UTF8&qid=1505929993) shows a *The Identity of the New Testament Text Revised Edition* dated 1981, *The Identity of the New Testament Text II Third Edition* dated 2003, a version entitled *The Identity of the New Testament Text III* dated 2012, and IV dated 2014.

In fact, II can tentatively be dated to 1997, on the basis that it states on page 7, “Fifty years ago Grant had said, ‘it is generally recognized that the original text of the Bible cannot be recovered’”, and Pickering indicated the reference for that work was “Grant, ‘The Bible of Theophilus of Antioch,’ *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXVI (1947), 173.” (i.e. 1947 + 50 = 1997). This tentative 1997 date for II is also supported by IV, where Pickering has changed the statement “Fifty years ago...” to “Over sixty-five years ago...” (i.e. 2014 – 65 = 1949).

This state of affairs is rather ironic, in that the various versions of Pickering's book show extensive differences throughout; significantly analogous in fact to the textual criticism which the book itself purports to address. To document this, I roughly collated IV against II, noting the following differences:

1. "An Aside – the implications of intended widespread circulation" is added in IV's "Chapter 5. The History of the Text", in the "Were the N.T. Writings Recognized?" section, between "The apostolic period" and "The second century".
2. In IV, "Chapter 7. Determining the Identity of the Text", and "Chapter 8. Conclusion", have been removed and replaced by a new "Chapter 7. Identifying the Original Wording of the Text". In II, Chapter 7's argument was based mostly upon Dean Burgon's seven "Notes of Truth". But, in IV, Pickering bases his new Chapter 7 on the works of H. von Soden, H. C. Hoskier, and F. Wisse.
3. In IV, "Appendix A. Inspiration and Preservation" has been removed and replaced by a new "Appendix A. The Objective Authority of the Sacred Text".
4. In IV, "Appendix B. 7Q5" has been moved down to Appendix G and, in its place, is a new "Appendix B. Family 35 Profile for the Complete New Testament".
5. In IV, "Appendix E. Text Determination in the 'Plucking Grain on the Sabbath' Pericope" has been removed and "Appendix F. Mark 16:9-20 and the

Doctrine of Inspiration” from II has been moved up and relabeled “Appendix E”.

6. In IV, in the relabeled “Appendix E”, between “The External Evidence” section and “The Internal ‘Evidence’” section, Pickering has added a new “Parenthesis – Down With Forgery!” section.

7. In IV, “Appendix G. What Difference Does it Make” has been moved up and relabeled “Appendix F”.

8. As noted in Item 4 above, in IV, “Appendix B. 7Q5” has been moved down and relabeled “Appendix G”.

9. In IV, Pickering has added a new “Appendix H. How Often did Jesus say Peter Would Deny Him?”.

10. In IV, Pickering has added a new “Appendix I. Is NT Textual Criticism a Science?”.

11. In addition, various comparatively minor additions and revisions to bits and pieces of II now appear in IV.

It is also apparent that IV is decidedly longer than II. I used Adobe Acrobat to convert the two files (II and IV) to plain text files, and then used TextPad 4.7.0 to obtain statistics for the two documents. II contains 702,476 characters in 119,069 words. IV, on the other hand, contains 956,179 characters in 165,863 words. IV is thus 36% larger than II (by characters) and 39% larger (by words).

Now, the charge for this assignment is to “write 30 pages interacting with the author’s ideas and giving your analysis.”

Therefore, this paper deals specifically with *The Identity of the New Testament Text II* which, based upon the above, is assumed to have been published sometime between 1981 and 2003, i.e., sometime between *The Identity of the New Testament Text Revised Edition*, and *The Identity of the New Testament Text II Third Edition*; II was most likely published in 1997.

For the purposes of this paper then, *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV* will simply be considered as an additional reference to which I will refer during my analysis of *The Identity of the New Testament Text II*. Since IV is the latest version available, I will simply ignore the other versions. To do otherwise would be to expand the scope of this paper to unwieldy proportions which would not materially affect the ultimate analysis.

In addition to IV, Dr. Pickering’s website (<http://www.prunch.org/>) also includes numerous other related documents.

2. Eclecticism

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (Soanes & Stevenson) defines “eclectic” as:

1 deriving ideas or style from a broad and diverse range of sources.

2 (Eclectic) denoting or belonging to a class of ancient philosophers who selected doctrines from various schools of thought.

And, the Merriam-Webster (2003) defines it as:

1: selecting what appears to be best in various doctrines, methods, or styles

2: composed of elements drawn from various sources

Pickering (II, p. 9) defines eclecticism as follows:

Wherein does "eclecticism" consist? Metzger explains that an eclectic editor "follows now one and now another set of witnesses in accord with what is deemed to be the author's style or the exigencies of transcriptional hazards."

E. C. Colwell spells it out:

Today textual criticism turns for its final validation to the appraisal of individual readings, in a way that involves subjective judgment. The trend has been to emphasize fewer and fewer canons of criticism. Many moderns emphasize only two. These are: 1) that reading is to be preferred which best suits the context, and 2) that reading is to be preferred which best explains the origin of all others.

These two rules are nothing less than concentrated formulas of all that the textual critic must know and bring to bear upon the solution of his problem. The first rule about choosing what suits the context exhorts the student to know the document he is working on so thoroughly that its idioms are his idioms, its ideas as well known as a familiar room. The second rule about choosing what could have caused the other readings requires that the student know everything in Christian history which could lead to the creation of a variant reading. This involves knowledge of institutions, doctrines, and events. . . . This is knowledge of complicated and often conflicting forces and movements.

Pickering's discussion of Eclecticism dates back to his Master of Theology Thesis in 1968. (Fuller, 1983, p. 216). A more recent analysis of Eclecticism is presented by Epp and Fee (1993, pp. 15-16):

With the rejection of Hort's genealogical method, by which the reading of the Egyptian witnesses was adopted except where internal evidence proved it secondary, there has emerged a method that may properly be called "eclectic." Essentially, this means that the "original" text of the NT is to be chosen variant by variant, using all the principles of critical judgment without regarding one MS or text-type as necessarily preserving that "original."

Despite a few notable exceptions, most of the differences that remain among critical texts result from a varying degree of weight given the external evidence.

On the one hand, there is a kind of eclecticism that, when all other criteria are equal, tends to follow Hort and to adopt the readings of the Egyptian witnesses. This may be observed to a greater degree in the UBS edition and to a somewhat lesser degree in the Greek texts behind the RSV and NEB, where early Western witnesses are given a little more consideration.

Another kind of textual theory was advocated by M.-E. Boismard and was used in D. Mollat's translation of John in the Jerusalem Bible. This is a kind of "eclectic Western" method in which great emphasis is placed on preference for the shorter readings as they are found in various Western witnesses, especially early versions and citations from certain Fathers. The difficulty with this method seems to lie in the preference for the versions and Fathers over against the whole Greek tradition, especially since many shorter readings may be shown to be translational paraphrases or untrustworthy citations apparently made from memory.

On the opposite side is the method of "rigorous eclecticism" practiced by G. D. Kilpatrick and his student J. K. Elliott. They advocate placing no weight on the MSS at all, but making every choice solely on the basis of internal principles. The difficulty with this method is that the results depend on the scholar's preference of internal criteria, which in the case of Kilpatrick and Elliott seems to be for variants in an author's style as over against the questions of transcriptional probability.

While, as has already been said, we may grant that not all of the principles of textual criticism are applicable to each variant, contemporary critics generally

agree that questions of internal evidence should usually be asked first and that the weight of the manuscript evidence should be applied secondarily. What becomes obvious, however, is that on the grounds of internal evidence certain MSS tend to support the “original” text more often than others and that those MSS are the early Egyptian. Therefore, when internal evidence cannot decide, the safest guide is to go with the “best” MSS.

It is my assessment that eclecticism, as currently practiced, relies too heavily upon the opinions and talents of its individual practitioners. Nonetheless, the concept of eclecticism would seem to be a necessary approach to getting as close as possible to the original autographs. Given that any particular word in any particular manuscript could well be either original or erroneous, the only viable course of action today is to trace the descent of manuscripts (or better, the text forms contained in the manuscripts) in order to, as closely as possible, arrive at the wording of the presumed autograph.

That an eclectic text, i.e. one that does not completely match any known manuscript, should be the result of such investigation should be no surprise. We are, after all, searching for the truth in the middle of a forest of alternatives. At any point in the discovery process we’re likely to encounter eclectic texts as intermediates between extant manuscript texts, including, therefore, at a point between known texts and the autograph text for which we’re searching.

Thus, I believe our best approach would be to accept the occurrence of eclectic texts, but to do whatever is in our power to reduce the influence of personal preconceptions in the development of such texts (a goal which, of course, it will be impossible to perfectly attain).

3. The Westcott-Hort Critical Theory

Pickering (II, p. 14) opens his discussion of the Westcott-Hort theory by relating the oft-referenced statement of Fenton John Anthony Hort, in an 1851 letter to a friend, “I had no idea till the last few weeks of the importance of texts, having read so little Greek Testament, and dragged on with the villainous Textus Receptus. . . . Think of that vile Textus Receptus leaning entirely on late MSS.; it is a blessing there are such early ones.”

Pickering then concludes, “Hort conceived a personal animosity for the Textus Receptus, and only because it was based entirely, so he thought, on late manuscripts. It appears that Hort did not arrive at his theory through unprejudiced intercourse with the facts. Rather, he deliberately set out to construct a theory that would vindicate his preconceived animosity for the Received Text.”

I double-checked Hort’s statement in its original document (Hort, 1896, vol. I, p. 211). He did indeed refer to the Textus Receptus as villainous and vile at that one location. I have found no other such statements elsewhere in his work.

And, I also do not find any evidence to support Pickering’s conclusion that Hort allowed his prejudice to overcome the facts, or that “he deliberately set out to construct a theory that would vindicate his preconceived animosity for the Received Text.” To support that conclusion, Pickering states “Hort started by taking the position that the New Testament is to be treated like any other book.” (II, p. 15), and cites Hort’s 1896 Life and Letters, vol. I, pp. 419-421 as well as Westcott and Hort’s Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek, pp. 280-281.

However, if we go to Hort (1896, p. 420), we find that he has written to Lightfoot:

If you make a decided conviction of the absolute infallibility of the N. T. practically a sine qua non for co-operation, I fear I could not join you, even if you were willing to forget your fears about the origin of the Gospels. I am most anxious to find the N. T. infallible, and have a strong sense of the Divine purpose guiding all its parts; but I cannot see how the exact limits of such guidance can be ascertained except by unbiassed (sic) a posteriori criticism. Westcott—and, I suppose, you—would say that any apparent errors discovered by criticism are only apparent, and that owing to the imperfection of our knowledge. I fully believe that this is true of a large proportion of what the rasher critics peremptorily pronounce to be errors; and I think it possible that it may be true of all, but, as far as my present knowledge goes, hardly probable. And if, as I expect, there are cases where there appears to be just a thin loophole for the possibility of admitting imperfect knowledge as the sole cause of an apparent error, but where the circumstances are such as to suggest a natural explanation of the origin of a real error, such as would be at once accepted in any other book, I should feel bound to state both facts, expressing at the same time my own feeling that it is more reasonable to suppose an error. I do not think there is a real difference of principle between (at least) Westcott and myself, but only a (perhaps hypothetical) difference of opinion as to facts. But you must judge whether the difference is such as to disqualify me for your commentary.

This does not impress me as being the words of one who has not only elevated his personal opinion above the facts, but who is also adamant in the position that the Bible is no

different than any other book. Instead, what I see here is a man who wants to hold to the infallibility of the Bible, but who is struggling with doubts.

Going on to Westcott and Hort's Introduction (pp. 280-281), we find, "Little is gained by speculating as to the precise point at which such corruptions came in. They may be due to the original writer, or to his amanuensis if he wrote from dictation, or they may be due to one of the earliest transcribers." Again, this seems to show a struggling uncertainty rather than a cast-in-stone settled position.

But, if Pickering has been strong in his condemnation of Hort's efforts and results, others have been even stronger. David Fuller (1975, p. 138) wrote, "W & H investigated the subject as a merely literary problem". Elsewhere (1975, p.155) he wrote, "The Westcott-Hort method is certainly basically rationalistic, for it exalts the judgment of the individual critic.... Both Westcott and Hort seem to have been theistic evolutionists."

David Fuller (1975, p. 281) also wrote of Westcott and Hort, "Both rejected the atonement of the substitution of Christ for the sinner, or vicarious atonement; both denied that the death of Christ counted for anything as an atoning factor."

Even stronger yet are the statements of others such as the Bible Theology Ministries, "I always advise that all modern versions are based on the sinful theological practices of Westcott and Hort (W&H), unbelievers who hated the AV.... Westcott and Hort were heretics who hated scripture as God's word, and hated the 1611 KJV, because it is closest to the original scriptures."

And those of the Dean Burgan Society:

While Westcott and Hort praised evolutionists, socialists, and modernists, they were bitterly critical of evangelical soulwinners. Westcott criticized the work of William Booth and the Salvation Army. Hort criticized the crusades of D.L. Moody. Hort criticized the soulwinning Methodists

Both criticized evangelicals. Neither gave anyone any reason to believe that he had ever trusted Christ as his personal Saviour....

Westcott and Hort are not a sufficient basis to reject the Textus Receptus or the King James Bible. Their objectivity, scholarship and doctrine are all at best "suspect." There is no reason to believe that they were saved men. There is more reason to believe that they were influenced by the occult than there is to believe that they were influenced by the Holy Spirit.

And Historicist.com relates:

Westcott & Hort (W & H) despised the KJV and the Textus Receptus. They had their own agenda and decided to make a new version of the Greek New Testament. They derived it primarily from two manuscripts, the Vaticanus (designated as Codex B) and the Sinaiticus (designated as Codex Aleph); and of these two, they leaned much more heavily on Codex B. The Vaticanus had been squirreled away in the Vatican, evidently for centuries. Not surprisingly, its "readings" convey a Roman Catholic perspective and bias....

Did they hold to the foundational doctrines of Christianity such as the inspiration of Scripture and the blood atonement of Christ? We found they did not....

Westcott & Hort gave all the appearances of being pious and devout and devoted to finding the true and original words of the New Testament. But it's hard to spot a wolf when he looks like a sheep.

And the “Jesus Is Lord” website proclaims that “The new Bible versions are not based on Erasmus' Textus Receptus. They are based on the Greek New Testament compiled by a couple of heretick (sic) infidel blasphemers named Westcott and Hort.”

Now, I don't fully agree with Westcott and Hort's methodology, and I don't agree with their results. And, I know that Hort (one time) referred to the Textus Receptus as vile and villainous. But, Erasmus and Stephanus were the compilers of the Textus Receptus, and I don't find any evidence whatsoever that Hort ever referred to Erasmus or Stephanus as a heretic, or as an infidel, or as a blasphemer, or by any other similar derogatory label.

And, while Westcott and Hort's theology rather clearly doesn't match my own, I am strongly opposed to any ad hominem attack which would seek to claim that they were not Christians, or that they did not truly love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Westcott wrote commentaries on the Gospel of John, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Hebrews, and John's Epistles. Hort wrote commentaries on Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, James, 1st Peter, and Revelation.

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Westcott wrote (p. vii), “It is assumed as an axiom that The Scripture cannot be broken.” Later, in that same volume he wrote (p. xiii):

“*These things,*” he says, “*Jesus spake in the treasury, as he taught in the Temple*” (8:20). The mention of the exact spot carried with it to minds familiar with the Herodian Temple a clear revelation of what was in the Apostle's mind. For the treasury was in the court of the women where the great candelabra were

placed, looking to which Christ said, “*I am the light*”—not of one people, or of one city, but—“*of the world.*”

And also (p. xv), “St John had been enabled to see what Jesus of Nazareth was, ‘the Christ’ and ‘the Son of God:’ it remained for him to bring home his convictions to others (20:31).” And then (p. xxxiii), “Every page of the Apocalypse is inspired with the cry of the souls beneath the altar, ‘How long’ (Rev. 6:10); and nowhere is error as to the Person of Christ denounced more sternly than in his Epistles (2 John 10; 1 John 4:1 ff.).” And, further (p. xxxvi), “The knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ *is eternal life* (17:3); and this knowledge, the knowledge of the truth, conveys the freedom, of which the freedom of the children of Abraham was only a type (8:31 ff.).”

And, finally, (p. lxxxiv), “It is not His doctrine but Himself which is to redeem the world (Matt. 20:28).”

While nobody knows another’s heart, I find it difficult to countenance that the man who wrote all these words was not a Christian; a man leaning his whole weight on the Lord Jesus Christ.

During the Hulsean Lectures at Cambridge University in 1871, Hort said (1893, p. 10), “[T]he answer given to St Thomas in the first instance was not a personal expostulation but the statement of an universal and unchanging truth: ‘I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one cometh unto the Father save through me.’”

He also said (1893, pp. 20-21):

They are the practical and ethical expression of an all-embracing truth which we may perhaps apprehend best in the form of two separate doctrines; first, that the whole seeming maze of history in nature and man, the tumultuous movement of the world in progress, has running through it one supreme

dominating Way; and second, that He who on earth was called Jesus the Nazarene *is* that Way.

And also, (1893, p. 38), “Much may remain dark to us; but the purposes of life receive a clear and powerful direction the moment we believe that the one supreme Way of life is that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, our Lord, who has been made known to us from the first in the Creed.”

Moreover (1893, p. 71):

Jesus was the Truth of God and the Truth of the Creation by reason of His own primal relations to both. He was the Word become flesh, even the Word who was in the beginning, and who was with GOD, and was God. Again, through Him all things came into being. He was the Life in which all created life subsisted; and being the Life of all created things, He was moreover the Light of men, creatures whose prerogative it was to apprehend the light and know the truth.

And, in the *Village Sermons* (1897, p. 12), Hort said, “No, His words were but a small part of His gospel. His acts are a much mightier part. He has gone Himself that way before us. He has drained our cup of bitterness to the dregs. The full meaning of the good tidings could not be known till He had died and risen again for us.

In the *Cambridge and Other Sermons* (1898, p. 51, Hort said of the Apostle John, “The image stamped upon *his* soul is the clearest and most abiding assurance we have that God’s Holy One did indeed once walk upon this earth in our shape, died our death, and by rising again bestowed upon us the gift of His own life.”

Again, these do not impress me as the words of one who has rejected Jesus, or of one who has refused to acknowledge His Sovereignty. No, I would suspect that the author of these words was a born-again believer in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is one thing to take exception to one's theology; to label as error the details of one's position on a specific issue; even on the foundational issue of textual criticism. It is quite another to suggest that such a one is not a member of the Church universal; not a loving disciple of God's Son; not an acceptable person in the sight of others who name themselves as Christians.

“³⁴A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. ³⁵By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:34-35, KJV).

“Hatred stirreth up strifes: But love covereth all sins.” (Proverbs 10:12, KJV).

4. Evaluation of the Westcott-Hort Critical Theory

Pickering begins his evaluation by asking, “Should the New Testament be treated just like any other book? Will the procedures used on the works of Homer or Aristotle suffice? If both God and Satan had an intense interest in the fate of the New Testament text, presumably not... Hort said that ‘there are no signs of deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes.’” (II, p. 20).

Pickering’s first argument in this vein is that, contra-Hort, the early Church Fathers repeatedly indicated that there were indeed those who deliberately falsified the Biblical text for dogmatic purposes. Pickering quotes Origen concerning this, but just indicates that Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian also stated that there was falsification for dogmatic purposes. But, he didn’t provide any direct quotes from those fathers.

Pickering’s contention strikes at the very heart of Hort’s position and thus it warrants careful verification. Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.) wrote:

Inasmuch as certain men have set the truth aside, and bring in lying words and vain genealogies, which, as the apostle says, “minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith,” and by means of their craftily-constructed plausibilities draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive, [I have felt constrained, my dear friend, to compose the following treatise in order to expose and counteract their machinations.] These men falsify the oracles of God, and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation. (Irenaeus of Lyons, vol. 1, p. 315).

And, Clement of Alexandria wrote:

These people twist the Scriptures when they read them by their tone of voice, in order to serve their own preferences. They alter some of the accents and punctuation marks in order to force wise and constructive precepts to support their taste for luxury. STROMATA 3.39.2. (Bray, p. 83).

And, Tertullian (160-220 A.D.) wrote:

Now this heresy of yours does not receive certain Scriptures; and whichever of them it does receive, it perverts by means of additions and diminutions, for the accomplishment of its own purpose; and such as it does receive, it receives not in their entirety; but even when it does receive any up to a certain point as entire, it nevertheless perverts even these by the contrivance of diverse interpretations. Truth is just as much opposed by an adulteration of its meaning as it is by a corruption of its text. Their vain presumptions must needs refuse to acknowledge the (writings) whereby they are refuted. They rely on those which they have falsely put together, and which they have selected, because of their ambiguity. (Tertullian, vol. 3, p. 251).

And, Eusebius (263-339 A.D.) wrote:

Besides this, the same man [Hegesippus], when relating the events of these times, adds that until then the church had remained a pure and undefiled virgin, since those who attempted to corrupt the sound rule of the Savior's preaching, if any did exist, until then lurked somewhere in obscure darkness. But when the sacred band of the apostles had received an end of life in various ways,

and the generation of those who were deemed worthy to hear the divine wisdom with their own ears had passed away, then the league of godless error took its beginnings because of the deceit of heretical teachers who, since none of the apostles still remained, attempted henceforth barefacedly to proclaim in opposition to the preaching of truth “the knowledge falsely so-called.”
Ecclesiastical History 3.32. (Gorday, p. 228).

Eusebius also wrote:

They have tampered with the divine Scriptures without fear; they have set aside the rule of the primitive faith; they have not known Christ. For they seek not for what the divine Scriptures declare, but laboriously set themselves to find a form of syllogism which may support their godlessness.... Therefore they laid hands fearlessly on the divine Scriptures, saying that they had corrected them. And whosoever desires can find out that in saying this I do not falsely accuse them. For anyone who will collect their several copies together and compare them, one with another, will discover marked discrepancies.... Nor is it likely that they themselves are ignorant of the audacity of this offence. For either they do not believe that the divine Scriptures were spoken by the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, are unbelievers; or they consider themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and what is that but devil possession? (Sturz, pp. 118-119).

These quotations all support Pickering’s contention that there were indeed signs of early deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes. Rightly, therefore, Pickering concludes:

[This] is virtually fatal to the W-H theory, at least as formulated in their "Introduction." The W-H theory is much like a multistoried building—each level depends on the one below it. Thus, Hort's simplistic notion of "genealogy" absolutely depends upon the allegation that there was no deliberate alteration of the Text, and his notion of "text-types" absolutely depends upon "genealogy," and his arguments concerning "conflation" and "Syrian" readings before Chrysostom absolutely depend upon those "text-types." The foundation for the whole edifice is Hort's position that the New Testament was an ordinary book that enjoyed an ordinary transmission. With its foundation removed, the edifice collapses. (II, p. 22).

It would seem to me, however, that deliberate corrupting of the text for dogmatic purposes should not, of itself, be fatal to the general concept of a genealogy. The ability to trace one text to an earlier text (or texts) should not depend upon the motivation which led to the changes. If text "B" was derived from text "A", the ability to mechanically trace that parentage and descent should not be affected by scribal motivation. If I change "this" to "that" during copying, the ability to identify and trace that change should be independent of why I made the change.

Pickering's comment that such deliberate changes put "the recovery of the Original beyond reach of the genealogical method" (II, p. 21), while true, simply ignores the fact that recovery of the Original via the genealogical method is beyond reach regardless of the cause of the changes. The best that can be achieved with the genealogical method is an Initial Text approximation to the Original Text, where the "Initial Text" indicates as far into the past as we

can reach with the genealogical method. Our earliest extant manuscript is p⁵², dated between 110 and 125 A.D. (Comfort, p. 69). Thus, 110 to 125 A.D. is as far back as we can reach.

Pickering is correct, however, in noting that the “manuscripts” indicated by genealogically tracing back from existing real manuscripts, are actually only hypothetical manuscripts. (II, p. 23). But, this will be a fact no matter which method is used to determine the predecessors of our existing manuscripts. And the “Original Text” will always be hypothetical – even if the original actually appeared on our desk, how would we be able to recognize it as such?

Pickering also goes on to point-out that Westcott and Hort never actually put together a workable genealogy of the New Testament manuscripts: “mixture” (what others have termed “contamination”) has made the application of such a genealogical method a practical impossibility. (But, see more on this under “Conclusion” below.) Pickering says, “Although Hort claimed absolute certainty for the results of genealogical evidence as described by him, it is clear that the ‘results’ were a fabrication.... But when we have found that a particular manuscript would not fit into any of our nicely constructed schemes, we have thrown up our hands and said that it contained a mixed text”. (II, p. 25).

Elsewhere, he says, “It is still customary to divide manuscripts into the four well-known families: the Alexandrian, the Caesarean, the Western and the Byzantine. This classical division can no longer be maintained”. (II, p.26). (Again, see more on genealogy and text-types under “Conclusion” below).

Pickering then sums up:

[W]hereas, the NT manuscripts of the second and third centuries which have a "mixed text" clearly existed before recensions were made. . . . The simple

fact that all these papyri, with their various distinctive characteristics, did exist side by side, in the same ecclesiastical province, that is, in Egypt, where they were found, is the best argument against the existence of any text-types, including the Alexandrian and the Antiochian. (II, p. 29).

5. The History of the Text

Pickering writes:

The logical place to start is with the possibility that the process of transmission of the text was normal.

Under normal circumstances the older a text is than its rivals, the greater are its chances to survive in a plurality or a majority of the texts extant at any subsequent period. But the oldest text of all is the autograph. Thus it ought to be taken for granted that, barring some radical dislocation in the history of transmission, a majority of texts will be far more likely to represent correctly the character of the original than a small minority of texts. This is especially true when the ratio is an overwhelming 8:2. Under any reasonably normal transmissional conditions, it would be . . . quite impossible for a later text-form to secure so one-sided a preponderance of extant witnesses. (II, p.60).

Pickering then cites many of the early church fathers to support his contention that the New Testament text was, from the earliest times, considered to be scripture, and that its transmission was indeed mostly normal. Pickering wrote:

What factors would be important for guaranteeing, or at least facilitating, a faithful transmission of the text of the N.T. writings? I submit that there are four controlling factors: access to the Autographs, proficiency in the source language, the strength of the Church and an appropriate attitude toward the Text. (II, p. 66).

In sum, I believe that the evidence clearly favors that interpretation of the history of the text which sees the normal transmission of the text as centered in the Aegean region, the area that was best qualified, from every point of view, to transmit the text, from the very first. (II, p. 71).

In addition to the mostly normal transmission, Pickering contends that there was also a parallel, but less well populated, path of transmission which was not normal. He wrote:

Turning now to the abnormal transmission, it no doubt commenced right along with the normal. The apostolic writings themselves contain strong complaints and warning against heretical and malicious activity. As Christianity spread and began to make an impact on the world, not everyone accepted it as "good news". Opposition of various sorts arose. Also, there came to be divisions within the larger Christian community—in the N.T. itself notice is taken of the beginnings of some of these tangents. In some cases faithfulness to an ideological (theological) position evidently became more important than faithfulness to the N.T. Text. (II, p. 71).

On the whole, I find Pickering's arguments in this section on the History of the Text to be quite persuasive.

6. Some Possible Objections

Pickering cites Burgon (John William Burgon was an Anglican and he became the Dean of Chichester Cathedral in 1876) as agreeing that, in general, “The more ancient testimony is probably the better testimony”. (II, p. 84). Following Westcott and Hort, however, most modern textual critics have taken “earliest = best” as an almost religious certainty.

Therefore, the age of \aleph , B, and the early papyri make them, *ceteris paribus*, the best and closest manuscripts to the original autographs.

Pickering ably argues against these objections, contending that they (as well as manuscripts A, C, and D) exhibit an extensive plethora of errors and disagreements among themselves. He reports:

Hort, also, had occasion to notice an instance of this *concordia discors*. Commenting on the four places in Mark's Gospel (14:30, 68, 72a,b) where the cock's crowing is mentioned he said: "The confusion of attestation introduced by these several cross currents of change is so great that of the seven principal MSS \aleph A B C D L Δ no two have the same text in all four places." He might also have said that in these four places the seven uncials present themselves in twelve different combinations (and only A and D agree together three times out of the four). If we add W and Θ the confusion remains the same except that now there are thirteen combinations. (II, p. 87).

Another objection is made to the effect that there is no evidence of Byzantine text in the Early Church Fathers. Pickering refutes that objection by extensively charting the statistics of the

agreements of the citations in the Early Church Fathers with the Egyptian texts, with the Majority text, and with “other” texts.

Yet another objection is that Witnesses should be weighed, rather than counted. But, Pickering asserts that such “weighing” is highly subjective and depends upon the pre-conceptions of the one doing the weighing:

One problem with this has been well stated by Colwell. "As a matter of fact these two standard criteria for the appraisal of the internal evidence of readings can easily cancel each other out and leave the scholar free to choose in terms of his own prejudgments." (II, p. 102).

7. Determining the Identity of the Text

In II, this section is based upon Burgon's seven "Notes of Truth", i.e. (p. 105):

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.

and treats several scriptural examples.

But, in IV (pp. 159-160), Pickering substitutes his own Original Text Theory (OTT) based upon the work of H. von Soden, H.C. Hoskier, and more recently F. Wisse:

- 1) First, OTT is concerned to identify the precise original wording of the N.T. writings.
- 2) Second, the criteria must be biblical, objective and reasonable.
- 3) Third, a 90% attestation will be considered unassailable, and 80% virtually so.

- 4) Fourth, Burgon's "notes of truth" will come into play, especially where the attestation falls below 80%.
- 5) Fifth, where collations exist, making possible an empirical grouping of the MSS on the basis of shared mosaics of readings, this must be done. Such groups must be evaluated on the basis of their performance and be assigned a credibility quotient. A putative history of the transmission of the Text needs to be developed on the basis of the interrelationships of such groups. **Demonstrated groupings and relationships supersede the counting of MSS.**
- 6) Sixth, it presupposes that the Creator exists and that He has spoken to our race. It accepts the implied divine purpose to preserve His revelation for the use of subsequent generations, including ours. It understands that both God and Satan have an ongoing active interest in the fate of the N.T. Text—to approach N.T. textual criticism without taking due account of that interest is to act irresponsibly.
- 7) Seventh, it insists that presuppositions and motives must always be addressed and evaluated.

Based upon this OTT, Pickering then determines that the f³⁵ (aka Von Soden's K^f) collection is the best representation of the Autographs available today, where f³⁵ includes:

Uncials: None

Minuscules: 18 35 47 55 56 58 59 66 83 128 141 147 149 155 167 170 189 201
204 205 214 225 246 285 290 328 361 363 386 387 394 402 415 422 432 471 479
480 486 510 511 512 516 520 521536 547 553 575 586 588 594 604 634 645 660
664 673 676 685 689 691 694 696 757 758 763 769781 786 789 797 801 802 806
824 825 830 845 864 867 897 928 932 936 938 940 952 953 955 958 959 960 961
962 966 986 1003 1010 1018 1020 1023 1025 1030 1040 1046 1058 1059 1062
1072 1075 1088 1092 1095 1100 1101 1111 1116 1117 1119 1131 1132
1133 1140 1145 1146 1147 1158 1165 1169 1176 1180 1185 1189 1190
1199 1224 1234 1236 1247 1248 1249 1250 1251 1293 1323 1328 1329
1330 1331 1334 1339 1348 1354 1362 1367 1384 1389 1400 1401 1409
1414 1427 1435 1444 1445 1453 1456 1461 1462 1465 1467 1471 1472
1474 1476 1477 1480 1482 1483 1487 1488 1489 1490 1492 1493 1494
1496 1497 1499 1501 1503 1508 1509 1543 1544 1548 1550 1551 1552
1559 1560 1570 1572 1576 1584 1585 1591 1596 1599 1600 1601 1609
1614 1617 1618 1619 1620 1621 1622 1625 1628 1630 1632 1633 1634
1636 1637 1638 1641 1648 1649 1650 1652 1653 1656 1658 1659 1664
1667 1671 1680 1686 1688 1694 1698 1700 1702 1703 1704 1705 1713
1723 1725 1726 1732 1733 1737 1740 1745 1746 1748 1749 1752 1754
1761 1763 1766 1767 1768 1771 1779 1785 1786 1789 1813 1855 1856
1858 1864 1865 1876 1892 1894 1897 1903 1957 1960 1966 2023 2035
2041 2061 2080 2095 2112 2122 2124 2131 2175 2178 2196 2204 2213
2218 2221 2231 2235 2251 2253 2255 2260 2261 2265 2273 2284 2289
2296 2303 2322 2323 2352 2355 2367 2375 2378 2382 2387 2399 2407

2418 2431 2434 2436 2452 2454 2460 2466 2479 2483 2496 2501 2503
2508 2510 2520 2554 2587 2598 2621 2626 2635 2649 2653 2658 2673 2669
2704 2723 2765 2767 2777 2806 2821

Total = 364

Note: List includes only continuous text manuscripts. (Anderson, p. 1).

Pickering then analyzes numerous passages and concludes:

K^r is independent of K^x and both are ancient, dating at least to the IV century. A few of the examples could be interpreted to mean that K^r is older than K^x, dating to the III and even the II century, (IV, p. 165).

noting that:

I am not referring to any attempt at reconstructing a genealogy of MSS—I agree with those scholars who have declared such an enterprise to be virtually impossible (there are altogether too many missing links). I am indeed referring to the reconstruction of a genealogy of **readings**, and thus of the history of the transmission of the Text. The last sentence has always been emphasized. Once all MSS have been collated and empirically grouped, we can dispense with counting them. (IV, p. 160).

Pickering thus directly challenges D. A. Carson's contention that there is no evidence for the existence of the Byzantine Text Form prior to the fourth century:

Repeatedly it is claimed that the reason why there are no exemplars of a Byzantine text-type before the mid-fourth century is that they all wore out from

much use. These were the manuscripts, it is argued, that were copied again and again, and therefore they quickly became tattered and had to be thrown out. The early manuscripts that we do possess, and that reflect non-Byzantine text-types, were, according to this theory, quickly rejected by the early church as inferior and therefore not handled so much. It is for this reason they they have been preserved.

This ingenious theory is quite untenable for at least the following reasons:

(1) Although it may explain why the autographs disappeared, it cannot explain why there are no extant copies of manuscripts with Byzantine text-type from before the fourth century. If such manuscripts were handled and copied so much that they wore out, then many copies must have been made. Why have none of them survived? (2) The ante-Nicene fathers unambiguously cited every text-type except the Byzantine. Therefore defenders of the “worn-out manuscripts” hypothesis must not only base this hypothesis on an argument from silence (there are no early manuscripts with Byzantine text-type), but also pit it against the hard data that the early fathers never unambiguously cited from it. Is it not eminently more reasonable to conclude that manuscripts with Byzantine text simply did not exist for the first 250–300 years of the church’s life? (3) If they did exist, who was wearing them out? If the fathers did not cite the Byzantine text-type, who then was handling these alleged manuscripts so frequently and thoughtlessly that they wore out? (Carson, p. 47).

But Carson really bites off too much here. When he states that the “ante-Nicene fathers unambiguously cited every text-type except the Byzantine”, he does not account for the known

propensities of the fathers when it came to citing the Scriptures. Epp & Fee (p. 201) provide a more reasoned critique:

Pickering regularly talks about Byzantine readings as being earlier than Chrysostom—and he is right. That is, readings that eventually became the text of the majority can often be shown to have existed as early as the second century. For example, the majority of harmonizations found in the Majority text vis-à-vis the text of Egypt et al. are already found in the OL (Old Latin) MSS in the West. But this was not Hort’s point, or mine, or that of others who have labored in this area.

P⁶⁶, for example, is said to have Byzantine readings. In a sense this is correct in that P⁶⁶—and even P⁷⁵ on rare occasions—is now the earliest evidence for a variant away from the Egyptian text-type that is later to be found in the Majority text. But in comparison with places where P⁶⁶ reads with the Egyptians against the Byzantines, these “Byzantine” readings are of little consequence; and above all else they do not render P⁶⁶ a Majority text MS.

But, even Epp & Fee’s analysis somewhat misses the point here. Vincent (p. 37) focuses on the exact problem with patristic “quotations”:

The habits of the Fathers in quotation were very loose. Having no concordances or indices, or anything resembling the modern apparatus for facilitating reference, and often no manuscript, they were frequently compelled to rely upon memory for their citations. Quoting from memory explains what we so often find,—combinations of different passages, transpositions, and sense-

renderings. Though a full summary of the whole gospel life could be composed from the quotations of Justin Martyr, his quotations are careless. He quotes the same passage differently on different occasions. Although he cites written documents, he often quotes from memory, and interweaves words which are given separately by the Synoptists. He condenses, combines, and transposes the language of the Lord as recorded in the Gospel records. Take, for example, Matt. 5:22, 39, 40, 41, and Luke 6:29. In Justin, 1 Apol. XVI, we read τῷ τυπτόντι σοῦ τὴν σιαγόνα παρέχε και τὴν ἄλλην, και τὸν αἶροντα σοῦ τὸν χιτῶνα ἢ τὸ ἱμάτιον μὴ κωλύσης. Ὅς δὲ ἂν ὀργισθῆ ἔνοχος ἐστὶν εἰς τὸ πῦρ, παντὶ σὲ ἀγγαρεύοντί σε μίλιον ἀκολούθησον. Here we have several verses massed, apparently from two Evangelists. Luke is literally followed in the first nine words. The order of the Gospel is not observed, and the sense is changed in the words about the coat and the cloke.

Perhaps the most significant thought that Pickering presents, however, is his position that constructing a genealogy of manuscripts is impossible and, therefore, developing a genealogy of **readings** instead will be a more productive endeavor. “Readings” are also sometimes referred to as “texts”.

Burton's Seven Rules were somewhat subjective and ad hoc. Pickering's OTT is significantly broader in concept, but is still subjective and ad hoc by nature. Westcott and Hort's Genealogical Method was more rigorous in concept, but unachievable in practice.

8. Assessment and Conclusion

Westcott and Hort never actually developed a genealogical method for textual criticism of the Bible because contamination (or mixture) made it impossible to accurately trace the ancestry of any given manuscript.

If “this” manuscript was copied from “that” manuscript, then the genealogical relationship is fairly clear. But, if “this” manuscript was instead copied from “that” manuscript, and “this other” manuscript, and “yet this different” manuscript, then the genealogical relationships quickly become obscure and confused.

A more formal statement of the problem has been outlined recently by Peter J. Gurry who is associated with the Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung (INTF) in Münster, Germany:

One of the most important methods is the stemmatic or genealogical method associated with the classical and German philologist, Karl Lachmann (1793-1851). Though once denigrated, especially in French scholarship of the twentieth century, the method has been undergoing a revival, due in no small part to the advent of the computer.

The genealogical method is sometimes referred to as the “common error method” because its fundamental principle is that agreement in error implies agreement in ancestry....

The method... has been used with enthusiasm by many textual scholars for generations, especially those working on classical, medieval, and modern

texts. But it has one fundamental requirement that has seriously restricted its application in certain textual traditions. In order for the common error principle to work, the textual tradition must be one in which each witness is copied from one and only one other witness. This ensures that each descendent transmits the significant errors from its ancestor and only from its ancestor. When, on the other hand, a descendent witness derives errors from multiple ancestors, the result is contamination. This causes serious problems for the common error principle. At its worst, it may reverse the actual relationships of some witnesses and thereby mislead the editor who follows the resulting stemma. It was Paul Maas – himself one of the sharpest proponents of the common error method – who famously concluded [in 1950] that when it comes to genealogy, “There is yet no remedy against contamination.” (Gurry, p. 676-677).

But, more recently, over the past thirty years, computer technology has made it possible to address the contamination in a more rigorous and structured manner:

More recently, however, a different sort of genealogy has been proposed, one that is specifically designed to work in contaminated textual traditions. This new method developed from work being done on what is arguably one of the most heavily contaminated textual traditions available, the Greek NT. The method is known as the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM) and it has been developed over the last three decades by Gerd Mink at the Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung (INTF) in Münster, Germany....

Despite the common goal of delineating genealogy, the CBGM has several important differences from genealogical methods based on the common error principle. The most important difference is the way in which genealogy is constructed. Where common error methods deduce ancestry, the CBGM aggregates it. The fundamental principle of the CBGM is that the relationship of witnesses can be derived from the relationships of their variants. Where witness A has readings prior to those of witness B, for example, this suggests that witness A may be an ancestor of witness B. To use the language of the CBGM, the text is said to “flow” from A to B. This is fundamentally different from the common error principle which, as Maas noted [in 1958], can never directly demonstrate the dependence of one witness upon another but can only do so indirectly by excluding the possibility of independence.

The use of the term “witness” hints at another important difference of the CBGM which is its consistent distinction between the text of a manuscript (referred to hereafter as a “witness”) and the manuscript as a physical artifact. In a contaminated tradition with many lost manuscripts, it may well be that a young manuscript contains a text antecedent to a much older manuscript. In this case, relating the two texts requires a distinction between the age of the text and the age of the ink and parchment. (Gurry, pp. 678-679).

And the application of this method to the Catholic Epistles (James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude) has had some interesting results with respect to reassessing the value of the Byzantine manuscripts to the text critical process:

The application of the CBGM resulted in 34 changes to the main text of the Catholic Epistles and a slight increase in the number of passages marked as uncertain. In most cases the changes are of minor significance for interpretation or translation, but in several cases the changes should not be ignored. At the difficult variation in Jude 5, for example, the text now reads that it was “Jesus” (Ἰησοῦς) who once saved a people from Egypt instead of “the Lord” (ὁ κύριος). In another important change, 2 Pet 3:10 now prints a reading that is not found in any known Greek witness. Where the previous edition read that the last days would mean that the earth and all that is in it “will be found” or perhaps “exposed” (εὐρεθήσεται), the text now reads the opposite: the earth and all that is in it “will not be found” (οὐχ εὐρεθήσεται). The latter reading sits much easier with the surrounding context, but is only attested in a few Coptic and Syriac manuscripts...

Along with these textual changes, the CBGM has ushered in several less obvious but more far-reaching changes. The most significant and, for that reason, controversial is that it has convinced the editors of NA28/UBS5 to abandon the longstanding notion of manuscript text-types. This shift alone could be momentous for the discipline. The reason is that, as Eldon Epp has observed, “to write the history of the NT text is to write the history of text types, and concomitantly to write also the history of the criteria for the priority of readings.” In place of text-types, the developers of the CBGM have, naturally enough, offered the CBGM’s detailed genealogies. They argue that these genealogies manage to avoid the arbitrary boundaries set up for the traditional text-types and at the same time they provide a far more discriminating view of textual

relationships. Whether NT textual critics will accept this replacement remains to be seen. But its significance should not be missed. (Gurry, pp. 684-685).

Nonetheless, these developments, though indeed more rigorous and structured, are attended by at least one major difficulty:

I have to admit that the CBGM looks like a mysterious black box whose inner workings seem inscrutable. Textual criticism already has the reputation of being esoteric, and there is a reasonable concern that the CBGM could create a priesthood within a priesthood, where only those behind the curtain are privy to its mysteries. (Carlson, p. 1).

and:

One of the most common reactions to the method is neither acceptance nor rejection but rather defeated resignation about ever understanding it. (Gurry, p. 675).

The developers of the CBGM have neglected to publish the internal working mechanisms (i.e. Systems Design, Database Development, Program Flow, Coding, etc.) of the method.

Therefore, I conclude that, while the CBGM seems to promise a step away from the ad hoc nature of the textual criticism of both Westcott and Hort as well as that of Pickering, much work remains to be done before there will be sufficient understanding of the method to justify its being hailed as the true holy grail of textual criticism.

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