

How We Got the NEW TESTAMENT

Text, Transmission, Translation

STANLEY E. PORTER



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*To Lionel Pye, Burt Hamilton, Nina Thomas,
and all of my other colleagues at McMaster Divinity College
who kept the college running smoothly
while I was temporarily medically incapacitated.*

Thank you.

God is good.

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Preface

I was honored to have been invited to offer these lectures on October 20–22, 2008, at Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, as the Hayward Lecturer for that year. I wish to thank those responsible for this invitation, especially my good friend Dr. Craig Evans, along with the rest of the faculty at Acadia Divinity College. I was honored not only to give these lectures but also to be invited to preach in the morning worship service in Manning Memorial Chapel on October 22 on the campus of Acadia University. Danny Zacharias was also a great help in managing the technical logistics. I enjoyed the opportunity to talk less formally with a number of students.

I have previously been a part of the Hayward Lectures at Acadia Divinity College, the first time in 2002 responding to the major set of lectures by Professor I. Howard Marshall, and the second time in 2006 as a contributor to a volume on the origins of the Bible. The first was published as “Hermeneutics, Biblical Interpretation, and Theology: Hunch, Holy Spirit, or Hard Work?” in *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology*, by I. Howard Marshall, with essays by Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Stanley E. Porter, Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 97–127. The second was published as “Paul and the Process of Canonization,” in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, edited by Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov, Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids:

Baker Academic, 2008), 173–202. I have made some use of this second paper in another form in chapter 2 on the transmission of the New Testament in this volume.

Those two occasions were very profitable times, as I was fortunate to engage in interesting discussion of these topics and to enjoy tremendous hospitality in the company of both colleagues and students. I wish to thank several of the students of Acadia Divinity College with whom I spoke after delivering my paper in 2006 for prompting me to think further about the topic of formation of the Pauline canon. It is largely because of their prompting, as well as the encouragement of Craig Evans, that I chose this set of topics for my lectures in 2008. I was pleased to be able to return to Wolfville to offer these lectures on particular issues arising within the broader topic of how we got the New Testament. I have broken the topic down into three subfields to bring together several areas that are not always considered in concert in treatment of this broad topic. Matters of textual criticism have been brought once more to the fore on the basis of some recent work by those who have raised doubts about the nature and reliability of the text of the New Testament, including questioning the viability of an original or autograph text. The question of how the New Testament has been transmitted continues to be a subject of widespread and intense debate, as there are so many different theories of the dark or tunnel period before the assembling of our major codexes. The subject of translation may seem the most far-fetched in relation to the other two topics. However, from almost the advent of Christianity the New Testament has been translated into other languages, and so translation itself is a part of the transmission process of the New Testament text. Most of us who use the Bible use it in a translated form, so I thought it wise to say some things about the nature of the translation process and how it affects the New Testament that we use.

All of my Hayward experiences have been rewarding, as they have offered me opportunities to pursue a number of different areas of research. This latest experience provided the occasion for me to further pursue a topic of abiding personal interest and to make a number of proposals that I have not seen in print before. The audiences at all of these events were gracious in their responses and probing in their questions. The manuscript that I prepared in advance of the lectures was too long for delivery in its entirety, so I needed to abridge the

individual presentations. This volume includes the complete lectures, essentially as they were prepared, but corrected and enhanced as they benefited from constructive comments and suggestions by those who heard and responded to them, and as I have had further occasion to think more about these important topics. My hope is that they will be as rewarding to read as they have been to research, deliver, and write.

I wish to thank Dr. Craig Evans for his suggestions on making the lectures into a book; Nathan Hui for reading the manuscript and making some suggestions; Hughson Ong for helping to correct and revise the manuscript; and my friends at Baker, Jim Kinney and James Ernest, for their patience and steadfast encouragement.

Abbreviations

General

ad loc.	at the place discussed	ibid.	in the same source
c.	circa	i.e.	that is
cf.	compare	n(n).	note(s)
chap(s).	chapter(s)	n.s.	new series
e.g.	for example	p(p).	page(s)
esp.	especially	pl.	plural
ET	English translation	repr.	reprint
etc.	and the rest	rev.	revised
fasc(s).	fascicles	v(v).	verse(s)

Ancient Texts, Text Types, and Versions

LXX Septuagint

Modern Editions

NA²⁵ *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, and Kurt Aland. 25th revised edition. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1963

NA²⁶ *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by [E. Nestle and E. Nestle], Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger,

- and Allen Wikgren. 26th revised edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979
- NA²⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by [E. Nestle and E. Nestle], Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. 27th revised edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993
- NA²⁸ *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by [E. Nestle and E. Nestle], Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. 28th edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012
- UBS⁴ *The Greek New Testament*. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. 4th revised edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1993

Modern Versions

ESV	English Standard Version	NKJV	New King James Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NLT	New Living Translation
NASB	New American Standard Bible	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NET	New English Translation	RSV	Revised Standard Version
NIV	New International Version	TNIV	Today's New International Version

Papyri

P.Aberd.	Aberdeen Papyri	P.Lond.Christ.	British Museum Papyri
P.Amh.	Amherst Papyri	P.Merton	Merton Papyri
P.Barcelona	Barcelona Papyrus	P.Oxy.	Oxyrhynchus Papyri
P.Berl.	Berlin Papyri	P.Ryl.	John Rylands Library Papyri
P.Bodmer	Bodmer Papyri	PSI	Papyri of the Società Italiana
P.Chester Beatty	Chester Beatty Papyri	P.Vindob.	National Library Papyrus Collection
P.Egerton	Egerton Papyri		
P.Köln	Kölner Papyri		

Apostolic Fathers

1–2 Clem. 1–2 Clement

Greek and Latin Works

Cicero

Att. *Epistulae ad Atticum*
Fam. *Epistulae ad familiares*

Josephus

Ag. Ap. *Against Apion*
Ant. *Jewish Antiquities*

Eusebius

Hist. eccl. *Historia ecclesiastica*
(*Ecclesiastical History*)
Praep. ev. *Praeparatio evangelica*
(*Preparation for the Gospel*)

Justin

1 Apol. *Apologia i (First Apology)*

Philo

Moses *On the Life of Moses (De vita Mosis)*

Vit. Const. *Vita Constantini (Life of Constantine)*

Tertullian

Marc. *Adversus Marcionem (Against Marcion)*
Praescr. *De praescriptione haereticorum (Prescription against Heretics)*

Irenaeus

Haer. *Adversus haereses (Against Heresies)*

Secondary Sources

AB Anchor Bible
AcOr *Acta orientalia*
ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers*
AngJT *Anglican Journal of Theology*
ANRW *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, Edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase. Berlin, 1972–
ANTF *Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung*
APVG *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete*
ASBT *Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology*

ASP	American Studies in Papyrology
BASP	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BBC	<i>Bulletin of the Bezan Club</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BLUW	Beiträge zur Leipziger Universitäts- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte
BSNA	Biblical Scholarship in North America
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Theology and Exegesis
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea neotestamentica or Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium. Edited by I. B. Chabot et al. Paris, 1903–
CTL	Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics
<i>CurBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>DBCi</i>	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation</i> . Edited by S. E. Porter. London, 2007
<i>DNTB</i>	<i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> . Edited by C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter. Downers Grove, 2000
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> . Edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin. Downers Grove, 1993
GRM	Graeco-Roman Memoirs
HBT	History of Bible Translation
HSCL	Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature
HTB	Histoire du texte biblique
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ITL	International Theological Library
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JGRChJ</i>	<i>Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism</i>
<i>JÖB</i>	<i>Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series

<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAV	Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible and Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LTCH	Literature of Theology and Church History
<i>MJTM</i>	<i>McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry</i>
MNTS	McMaster New Testament Studies
MPÖN	Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek (Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer)
MTS	Marburger theologische Studien
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NTGF	New Testament in the Greek Fathers
NTM	New Testament Monographs
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
NTTSD	New Testament Tools, Studies, and Documents
OPIAC	Occasional Papers of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
OTS	Old Testament Studies
PL	Patrologia latina [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864
PSt	Pauline Studies
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
SBG	Studies in Biblical Greek
SBLAB	Studies in Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLTCS	Society of Biblical Literature Text-Critical Studies
SD	Studies and Documents
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPap	Université de Paris IV Paris-Sorbonne série “Papyrologie”
SPP	Studien zur Palaeographie und Papyruskunde
ST	Studies in Theology
STR	Studies in Theology and Religion
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
TS	Texts and Studies
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UBSMS	United Bible Societies Monograph Series

VCSup	Vigiliae christianae Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Introduction

It may seem more than a little presumptuous to address the question “How did we get the New Testament?” in a book that comes out of a conference held at Acadia Divinity College. Suggesting this topic sounds something like the proverbial taking of coals to Newcastle. After all, what more can possibly be said about where the New Testament came from than has been said at Acadia by Acadians and related people? Even previous Hayward Lectures at Acadia have addressed topics related to the question of how we got the New Testament. I myself was a participant in one of these previous discussions.¹ In spite of these warning signs, I must confess that I have been interested in the origins of the New Testament for a considerable length of time, including (at least) the dimensions of its text, its transmission, and its translation. Thus, the selection of these topics is not foreign to me, but rather is a further extension and consolidation of work begun earlier, and in some ways brought to fruition first in these lectures and now in this book.

I became intensely interested in the text of the New Testament through research in papyrology and epigraphy. For further exploration of the topic and as a potential resource for readers, I include a list

1. Stanley E. Porter, “Paul and the Process of Canonization,” in *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov, ASBT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 173–202.

of works in this area that I have published, alone and with others, as an indication of the kind of work that stands behind this book.² As I began to examine documents and edit and comment upon manuscripts, I became increasingly aware of the need for New Testament scholars to have greater firsthand acquaintance with the primary artifacts of our profession. Each manuscript has its own characteristics, features, and contribution to make to our understanding of the New Testament text. New Testament textual artifacts, whether papyrus or parchment manuscripts, are the realia of our discipline and must be examined for the contribution that each makes as an artifact in its own right, not simply as a repository of variant readings.³ As a result of my interest in manuscripts—a highlight of which has been the opportunity to identify and first publish (along with my wife, Wendy) a sixth-century New Testament papyrus of the book of Acts and a

2. See esp. Stanley E. Porter and Wendy J. Porter, *New Testament Greek Papyri and Parchments: New Editions*, 2 vols., MPÖN n.s. 29, 30 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); see also Stanley E. Porter, “Is ἀβιτεύειν Really ἐμβάτεύειν (P. Oxy. XVII 2110.15)?” *BASP* 27 (1990): 45–47; “The Argument of Romans 5: Can a Rhetorical Question Make a Difference?” *JBL* 110 (1991): 655–77; “P.Oxy. 744.4 and Colossians 3:9,” *Bib* 73 (1992): 565–67; “Artemis Medeia Inscription Again,” *ZPE* 93 (1992): 219–21; “The Greek Papyri of the Judaean Desert and the World of the Roman East,” in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (JSPSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 293–316; “The Rhetorical Scribe: Textual Variants in Romans and Their Possible Rhetorical Purpose,” in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps, JSNTSup 195 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 403–19; “Textual Criticism in the Light of Diverse Textual Evidence for the Greek New Testament: An Expanded Proposal,” in *New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas, TENTS 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 305–37; Stanley E. Porter and Matthew Brook O’Donnell, “The Implications of Textual Variants for Authenticating the Words of Jesus,” in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, NTTs, vol. 28, no. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 97–133; “The Implications of Textual Variants for Authenticating the Activities of Jesus,” in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, NTTs, vol. 28, no. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 121–51; Stanley E. Porter, “Manuscripts, Greek New Testament” and “Textual Criticism,” *DNTB* 670–78, 1210–14; Stanley E. Porter and Wendy J. Porter, “Acts of the Apostles 1, 1–5 and 1, 7–11 (P.Harrauer 2),” in *Wiener Papyri: Als Festgabe zum 60. Geburtstag von Hermann Harrauer (P. Harrauer)*, ed. Bernhard Palme (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2001), 7–14, with plate; Stanley E. Porter, “Textual Criticism and Oldest Gospel Manuscripts,” in *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Craig A. Evans (London: Routledge, 2008), 640–44.

3. A recent work that makes this point acutely well is Thomas J. Kraus, *Ad fontes: Original Manuscripts and Their Significance for Studying Early Christianity; Selected Essays*, TENTS 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

sixth-century papyrus of the Christian poet Romanos Melodus⁴—I also developed an intense interest in the transmission of the text. I became interested not only in the texts important for Christianity but also in how were they transmitted to us. Again, I provide a list of studies that stand behind my work here and helped to generate my interest in the subject.⁵ Dealing with manuscripts, some older and

4. Porter and Porter, “Acts of the Apostles,” reprinted and amended in Porter and Porter, *Papyri and Parchments*, no. 8, 1:28–32; Stanley E. Porter and Wendy J. Porter, “P.Vindob. G 26225: A New Romanos Melodus Papyrus in the Vienna Collection,” *JÖB* 52 (2002): 135–48, with plate. The edition that my wife and I published of Austrian National Library Suppl. Gr. 106 was also apparently the first edition of this manuscript to be published (see Porter and Porter, *Papyri and Parchments*, no. 24, 1:94–102).

5. See esp. Stanley E. Porter, *The Grammarian’s Rebirth: Dead Languages and Live Issues in Current Biblical Study* (London: Roehampton Institute, 1996); “The Greek Apocryphal Gospels Papyri: The Need for a Critical Edition,” in *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin, 13.–19.8.1995*, ed. Bärbel Kramer et al., APVG 3 (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1997), 2:795–803; Richard J. Bauckham and Stanley E. Porter, “Apocryphal Gospels,” *DNTB* 71–78; Stanley E. Porter, “POxy II 210 as an Apocryphal Gospel and the Development of Egyptian Christianity,” in *Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia, Firenze, 23–29 agosto 1998*, ed. Isabella Andorlini et al. (Florence: Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli,” 2001), 2:1095–108 (now recognized as the standard critical edition of this manuscript in Andrew Bernhard, *Other Early Christian Gospels: A Critical Edition of the Surviving Greek Manuscripts*, LNTS 315 [London: T&T Clark, 2006], 100); “Developments in the Text of Acts before the Major Codices,” in *The Book of Acts as Church History: Text, Textual Traditions and Ancient Interpretations* [= *Apostelgeschichte als Kirchengeschichte: Text, Texttraditionen und antike Auslegungen*], ed. Tobias Nicklas and Michael Tilly, BZNW 120 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 31–67 (abstract, 423–24); “Why So Many Holes in the Papyrological Evidence for the Greek New Testament?” in *The Bible as Book: The Transmission of the Greek Text*, ed. Scot McKendrick and Orlaith A. O’Sullivan (London: British Library Publications and Oak Knoll Press, 2003), 167–86; “Apocryphal Gospels and the Text of the New Testament before AD 200,” in *The New Testament Text in Early Christianity: Proceedings of the Lille Colloquium, July 2000* [= *Le texte du Nouveau Testament au début du christianisme: Actes du colloque de Lille, juillet 2000*], ed. C.-B. Amphoux and J. K. Elliott, HTB 6 (Lausanne: Éditions du Zèbre, 2003), 235–58; “When and How Was the Pauline Canon Compiled? An Assessment of Theories,” in *The Pauline Canon*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, PSt 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 95–127; “Pericope Markers in Some Early Greek New Testament Manuscripts,” in *Layout Markers in Biblical Manuscripts and Ugaritic Tablets*, ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch, Pericope 5 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005), 161–76; “Textual Criticism in the Light of Diverse Textual Evidence for the Greek New Testament: An Expanded Proposal,” in Kraus and Tobias, *New Testament Manuscripts*, 305–37; “The Use of Hermeneia and Johannine Manuscripts,” in *Akten des 23. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Wien, 22.–28. Juli 2001*, ed. Bernhard Palme, Papyrologica Vindobonensia 1 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 573–80; “The Influence of Unit Delimitation on Reading and Use of Greek

some younger, makes one aware of the passing on of the tradition and the means by which this was done. In dealing with individual biblical manuscripts, therefore, I have tried to be attentive to their place within the larger tradition. This tradition includes not only the other New Testament manuscripts but also apocryphal texts and other documents that may inform our understanding, even though they are not part of the New Testament itself. A natural result of such interest in text and transmission is interest in translation of the New Testament. These two disciplines are not usually linked together in study of contemporary translations.⁶ My interest in the process of

Manuscripts,” in *Method in Unit Delimitation*, ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel, Josef M. Oesch, and Stanley E. Porter, *Pericope 6* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 44–60; “Pericope Markers and the Paragraph: Textual and Linguistic Considerations,” in *The Impact of Unit Delimitation on Exegesis*, ed. Raymond de Hoop, Marjo C. A. Korpel, and Stanley E. Porter, *Pericope 7* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 175–95; “Fragmente unbekannter Evangelien auf Papyrus” (with Thomas J. Kraus), “Der Papyrus Egerton 2 (P.Egerton 2/P.Lond. Christ 1),” “Der Papyrus Köln VI 255 (P.Köln VI 255),” “Der Papyrus Berolinensis 11710 (P.Berl. 11710),” “Rylands Apokryphes Evangelium (?) (P.Ryl. III 464)” (with Wendy J. Porter), “Der Papyrus Oxyrhynchus II 210 (P.Oxy. II 210),” all in *Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, vol. 1, part 1, *Evangelien und Verwandtes*, ed. Christoph Marksches and Jens Schröter, 7th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 353–56, 360–65, 366–67, 368–69, 377–78, 387–89; “Early Apocryphal Gospels and the New Testament Text,” in *The Early Text of the New Testament*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 350–69; “Early Apocryphal Non-Gospel Literature and the New Testament,” *JGRChJ* 8 (2011–2012): 192–98; “What Do We Know and How Do We Know It? Reconstructing Christianity from Its Earliest Manuscripts” and “Recent Efforts to Reconstruct Early Christianity on the Basis of Its Papyrological Evidence,” in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, *TENTS* 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 41–70, 71–84.

6. Stanley E. Porter, “The Contemporary English Version and the Ideology of Translation,” in *Translating the Bible: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Richard S. Hess, *JSNTSup* 173 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 18–45; “Mark 1.4, Baptism and Translation,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, *JSNTSup* 171 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 81–98; “New Testament Versions, Ancient,” *DNTB* 745–48; “Modern Translations,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Bible*, ed. John Rogerson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 134–61; “Eugene Nida and Translation,” *BT* 56, no. 1 (2005): 8–19; “Language and Translation of the New Testament,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. John W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 184–210; “Translations of the Bible (Since the KJV),” in *DBCI*, 362–69; “Assessing Translation Theory: Beyond Literal and Dynamic Equivalence,” in *Translating the New Testament: Text, Translation, Theology*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Mark J. Boda, *MNTS* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 117–45; Stanley E.

translation and the resulting numerous translations has developed along two lines, one concerned with translations of the New Testament into English and the other concerned with early bilingual manuscripts, usually with Coptic as the other language. I have come to appreciate that translation is one of the most important tools for textual transmission that we have had in the history and development of the New Testament, along with its being a primary avenue for the fulfillment of the mission of the church. Despite my interest, however, I am still wary of the fact that many others have said something about all of these topics before me.

These previous attempts might constitute a good-enough reason to avoid this broader subject and choose another, one that perhaps has had less recent exposure or has had its paths less well trodden. However, the topic of the origins of the New Testament continues to attract preternatural and, I would even say, unmerited and unfair attention in diverse quarters. The Jesus Seminar, along with some others, has raised the question of whether the church in fact has the correct canon of authoritative Scriptures. Some connected with the Jesus Seminar believe that there are other books not included in the New Testament that should be incorporated instead. One prime example, labeled by those of the Jesus Seminar as the “Fifth Gospel,” is the *Gospel of Thomas*.⁷ The question for them is not only which books belong in the canon, but also what the very nature of the canon is and whether it should be revisited and even reopened. Without directly addressing these claims here, I indirectly address the question through tracing the early transmission of the New Testament. One of the major issues in Dan Brown’s novel *The Da Vinci Code* revolves around the origin of the New Testament.⁸ He claims that, essentially, the Roman emperor Constantine brought the New Testament into being in the fourth century when, by sheer capricious assertion, he

Porter and Matthew Brook O’Donnell, “Comparative Discourse Analysis as a Tool in Assessing Translations Using Luke 16:19–31 as a Test Case,” in Porter and Boda, *Translating the New Testament*, 185–99; “Translation, Exegesis, and 1 Thessalonians 2.14–15,” *BT* 64, no. 1 (2013): 82–98.

7. See Robert W. Funk, Robert Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say? The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 1996). The study of the *Gospel of Thomas* has become an industry of its own. Very little will be said about it below.

8. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

selected among a host of possible works, especially numerous gospels, the ones that should be included in our Bible.⁹ In a distinctly Canadian contribution, Tom Harpur's *The Pagan Christ*¹⁰ wants to go even further and question not only the nature of the documents of the New Testament but also the events that lie behind them. Harpur claims that Jesus never existed and that the major theological ideas of Christianity, and Judaism as well, came from Egyptian religion.¹¹ I am sure that there are even more far-fetched and sensational claims being made, although this is somewhat hard to imagine, and even harder to fathom.

The more circumscribed question of how we got the New Testament is the topic that I want to address here. Even the more specific question of how we got the New Testament is more problematic than it at first appears. By the title of this book, *How We Got the New Testament*, do I mean to address how we got the New Testament that we use today? Do I mean the English or some other translation that most of us use in our everyday reading of the Bible, or do I mean the Greek New Testament that we (unfortunately, sometimes too occasionally) refer to if we are students of the text? Do I mean to ask how we got the New Testament when it was first assembled in ancient times, or do I mean to ask how the documents that went into that New Testament came about? These are a lot of questions, and I hope to say at least something about each of them, as well as some others, over the course of the following three substantive chapters.

I have divided the topic into three manageable parts. The first chapter is concerned with the text of the New Testament. Here I begin with the question of what we are trying to do in talking about the text of the New Testament. I will then examine briefly the history of development of the printed Greek text that we do have. Then I will consider a couple of proposals regarding this text, including Bart

9. Stanley E. Porter, "The Da Vinci Code, Conspiracy Theory, and the Biblical Canon," *MJTM* 6 (2003–2005): 49–80. *The Da Vinci Code* also became its own minor industry, which generated numerous responses, the occasional one even making a substantive contribution to the discussion.

10. Tom Harpur, *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2004). Since then, Harpur has continued his theme in *Water into Wine: An Empowering Vision of the Gospels* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2007).

11. See Stanley E. Porter and Stephen J. Bedard, *Unmasking the Pagan Christ: An Evangelical Response to the Cosmic Christ Idea* (Toronto: Clements, 2006).

Ehrman's contentions in his book *Misquoting Jesus*¹² and a proposal regarding the merits of using a manuscript text rather than an eclectic text of the New Testament.

The subject of textual transmission is the topic of the second chapter. In many ways this topic is directly related to the larger and more diffuse issue of canonical formation, although I will try not to get too directly involved in this debate,¹³ but will instead confine myself to the issues of transmission of the Greek New Testament. A few of the topics that I will touch upon in this area include factors related to where the various New Testament documents originated and how they were gathered together and where, and how they then became part of what we would now recognize as the Greek New Testament.

My third chapter concerns the translation of the New Testament. Early Christians were well familiar with a translated Bible, as they (along with most Jews of the first century) used the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is not surprising that early on the New Testament was translated into other languages, a process that continues to this very day.¹⁴ The vast majority of those who read the New Testament do so in translation, and so translation of the New Testament is part of its transmission, and it is appropriate to address the question of how translation relates to the text and transmission of the Greek New Testament. Bible translation theory involves a number of approaches that are worth articulating. These approaches constitute the major focus of the third chapter, as I explore their different points of engagement with the text, the varying purposes for which they might be made, and their potential use and applicability in future translational work.

At the end of this summary of the book's contents, let me make clear who my intended audience is. I hope that some things in this

12. Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005). In chapter 1 I will say more about such claims as this title implies, but in the meantime I must say that publishers who issue books with such sensational titles should be ashamed of themselves. Unfortunately, more and more publishers are solely focusing upon the bottom line—profit from sales. The quality and academic rigor of publications are clearly falling.

13. For my take on these larger issues, see Stanley E. Porter, "Canon: New Testament," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*, vol. 1, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 109–20.

14. See M. Paul Lewis, ed., *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2009), which recounts the state of the languages of the world.

book will challenge my fellow scholars, and I think that I do present some ideas worth consideration by them. These include my perspective on the use of a single-manuscript text of the New Testament, the early formation of the bulk of the New Testament, and how the constraints of translation theory can be broadened—among possibly several others. Nevertheless, I conceive of my audience for this book as being similar to the audience that originally heard these lectures—an inquisitive and generally well-educated and thinking Christian audience, ideally though not necessarily with some formal theological education, that wishes to learn more about the New Testament and where it came from. I do not deny that portions of this book may require the reader to pay close attention—especially in chapter 1, where a number of people are mentioned and make short appearances in the discussion—but my hope is that the topic will be sufficiently engaging to propel the reader forward. While many of these individual topics could well constitute the material for a full set of lectures or a monograph in their own right, I attempt to bring them all together into a whole, so that at the conclusion we can appreciate more fully the means by which we got the New Testament.

The Text of the New Testament

Introduction

A. T. Robertson, the great Greek grammarian as well as textual critic and general student of the New Testament,¹ tells the following story about John Brown of Haddington, Scotland. Born in 1722, John Brown was the son of common and ordinary parents, although they had an interest in learning. His father, a weaver by winter and a salmon fisherman during the summer, taught himself to read so that he could read Christian books. In the area where John grew up, local schooling was not always available, so he accumulated only a few months of formal education. Nevertheless, these rare experiences excited his interest in learning, and he read whatever he could, even starting to learn Latin. Unfortunately, John's father died when the boy was eleven, as did his mother not long after. The orphaned John, however, was soon adopted by a Christian family. A sickly child, he was converted to Christian faith when he was twelve years old, and he became a shepherd. His

1. Among his many works, see esp. (for this volume) A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Broadman, 1934); *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925). He also wrote thirty other volumes on a range of topics in New Testament studies.

adoptive father could not read, so John spent many days reading to his new parent. John also borrowed Latin books and spent time improving his Latin, and during his two-hour lunch break he often visited his local minister, who gave him Latin exercises. John graduated to Greek next. Greek was not as well known as Latin, and so he tackled this language on his own. He borrowed a Greek New Testament and, using his Latin grammar book and a copy of the works of the Roman poet Ovid, figured out the Greek alphabet and its sounds. John then started to learn Greek vocabulary by comparing short words to those in his English Bible. He began learning Greek grammar by comparing the Greek endings with those in Latin.

One day, at the age of sixteen, John Brown heard that a bookstore in St. Andrews, Scotland, twenty-four miles away, had a copy of the Greek New Testament for sale. He very much wanted to have one of his own. He left his sheep with a friend and made the trek by foot to the city, walking throughout the entire night, so that he arrived the next morning in St. Andrews, where he found the bookstore of one Alexander McCulloch. He entered the shop, likely with some trepidation, and asked the no-doubt surprised shopkeeper for a Greek New Testament. Here was this slight, roughly clothed, barefoot young man asking for a Greek New Testament. “What would *you* do wi’ that book? You’ll no can read it,” the bookstore owner said. “I’ll try to read it,” John humbly replied. There happened to be some professors who had entered the shop, and they heard this short conversation. One of the professors, probably Francis Pringle, professor of Greek at the university, asked the bookstore owner to fetch the Greek New Testament. Tossing it on the counter, he said, “Boy, if you can read that book, you shall have it for nothing.”

No doubt there was a lightness in John Brown’s step as he walked all the way back from St. Andrews that day, new Greek New Testament tucked under his arm. He had eagerly taken up the book, read out a passage to the amazement of everyone there, including Pringle, and turned and walked out the door, his prize firmly in his grasp. By the afternoon of the same day, John was back tending his flock while reading from his Greek New Testament. However, the story does not end there.

Some other young men became jealous of this shepherd who was becoming an accomplished scholar. These young men were studying for the ministry in the area, and one of them accused John of having

gotten his knowledge from the devil. John treated such accusations as a joke because, after all, he knew what hard work had gone into gaining such knowledge. Not only did he know Latin and Greek, but he also taught himself Hebrew. His increased knowledge led to increased suspicion, with even his own pastor agreeing that witchcraft explained John's knowledge. After five years of such unfounded accusations, the elders of his church unanimously voted a certificate of full membership for John, although his pastor refused to sign it. John continued to learn while supporting himself as a peddler, soldier, schoolmaster, and then preacher and divinity student, and eventually as a pastor, professor of theology, and scholar. John Brown published in 1769 *A Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, only the second Bible dictionary ever published, and one that stayed in print until 1868. Brown's *The Self-Interpreting Bible*, first published in 1778, was last published in 1919.²

As Robertson states in his mammoth grammar of the Greek New Testament,

There is nothing like the Greek New Testament to rejuvenate the world, which came out of the Dark Ages with the Greek Testament in its hand. Erasmus wrote in the Preface to his Greek Testament about his own thrill of delight: "These holy pages will summon up the living image of His mind. They will give you Christ Himself, talking, healing, dying, rising, the whole Christ in a word; they will give Him to you in an intimacy so close that He would be less visible to you if He stood before your eyes." The Greek New Testament is the New Testament. All else is translation.³

Robertson eloquently expresses the centrality of the Greek New Testament for all New Testament study and appreciation. This centrality comprises the first consideration of this series of studies on the topic of how we got the Greek New Testament. In the course of these three chapters I will deal with three specific subtopics: the text, its transmission, and its translation. I begin with the text of the Greek New Testament. But which Greek New Testament is Robertson talking about? In the course of this chapter I will consider this question,

2. The above story is taken from A. T. Robertson, *The Minister and His Greek New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), 103–8, with supplements from the Wikipedia entry on John Brown.

3. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, xix.

along with tracing the history of the development of our modern text of the Greek New Testament. I will also examine in some detail one recent challenge to the integrity of our Greek New Testament and will, finally, make my own suggestion regarding which Greek New Testament we should consider using today.

Is There a Text of the Greek New Testament? Or, What Is the Goal of Textual Criticism?

There has been much recent discussion about the original text of the Greek New Testament. After a number of years in which textual studies have been relatively quiet, there is renewed interest in the text of the New Testament and whether we indeed can come close to identifying or reconstructing the original. As a result, some recent scholarship has attempted to question the traditional opinion regarding the original text and its recoverability. In this section I will examine the traditional opinion, scrutinize some recent counterproposals, and then offer some opinion on this recent debate.⁴

Traditional Opinion

The traditional opinion of the purpose of textual criticism of the Greek New Testament is, ideally, to find the original autograph that

4. Throughout this book I employ standard abbreviations and terminology used to identify various manuscripts and their characteristics. Lists and descriptions of these terms can be found in most books on textual criticism and similar books. For ease of reference, I use \mathfrak{P} with a number for papyrus manuscripts (manuscripts written on prepared papyrus strips, an early form of paper), as in \mathfrak{P}^{56} ; a number starting with 0 and/or letter for codex majuscule manuscripts (manuscripts written on parchment in majuscule, or uppercase, letters in an early book form), often with a name attached, as in Codex Vaticanus (03 B); a number for minuscules (manuscripts written in lowercase ligatured, or connected, handwriting), as in 1079; and numbers for lectionaries. See Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 280. For recent surveys of textual criticism, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Textual Criticism: Recent Developments," in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 59–75; Scott D. Charlesworth, "The Gospel Manuscript Tradition," in *The Content and Setting of the Gospel Tradition*, ed. Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 28–61.

the author wrote. Failing that, the purpose is to work back through the manuscript evidence to arrive at the earliest form of the text and then, through principles of textual criticism, to posit or reconstruct what the original text must have been. This has been the motivating principle of textual criticism from earliest times to the present. In somewhat of a whirlwind tour through the work of textual critics of the last five hundred years, I will cite a number of significant voices on this topic because I will be returning to some of their work in subsequent discussion.⁵

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), the Renaissance humanist and the first to publish a Greek New Testament, appends at the end of his Greek New Testament the statement that it was “with regard to the Greek truth” (*ad Graecam veritatem*), believing, apparently, that he had published as close to the original Greek text as he could.⁶

The nineteenth century was an age of textual criticism, and the opinion of the major critics of the day is unanimous. Samuel Tregelles (1813–1875), a “common man” like John Brown, writing in 1844, defines textual criticism as the means “by which we know, on grounds of ascertained certainty, the actual words and sentences of that charter [the Bible] in the true statement of its privileges, and in the terms in which the Holy Ghost gave it.”⁷ J. Scott Porter (1801–1880 [no relation, so far as I know]), the then well-known biblical scholar,

5. I cite these scholars roughly in chronological order according to their major works that I cite on the topic of textual criticism. I do not attempt to cite all textual critics, and, because of the nature of this work, I confine myself to those whose works are in English, either originally or through translation. A relatively complete listing of introductions to textual criticism is provided in Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 345–48.

6. Robertson, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism*, 18–19. We know now, of course, that Erasmus could have done better, on the basis of what we know about the manuscripts available even then (such as Codex Vaticanus [03 B]); nevertheless, he did the best he could within the confines of knowledge at the time. Erasmus apparently did know of Vaticanus, and through intermediaries he consulted the manuscript on a few isolated points, but he did not use it in any thorough or systematic way. See Stephen Pisano, “The Text of the New Testament,” in *Prolegomena*, accompanying volume to *Bibliorum sacrorum Graecorum Codex Vaticanus B: Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Codex Vaticanus Graecus 1209* (Vatican: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1999), 29.

7. Samuel P. Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament, with Remarks on Its Revision upon Critical Principles* (London: Samuel Bagster,

writing in 1848 in one of the first books on textual criticism, states that textual criticism is that area of learning that treats ancient writings, especially the Bible, “of the means which may be applied for ascertaining the true text.”⁸ Constantin Tischendorf (1815–1874), the man who discovered and published the now famous Codex Sinaiticus (01 Ⲙ [about which I will say more in what follows]) as well as numerous other manuscripts, and whose eighth edition of the Greek New Testament still constitutes one of the most important sources of text-critical information in its textual apparatus,⁹ says that he determined to devote himself “to the textual study of the New Testament, and attempted, by making use of all the acquisitions of the last three centuries, to reconstruct, if possible, the exact text, as it came from the pen of the sacred writers.”¹⁰ B. F. Westcott (1825–1901) and F. J. A. Hort (1828–1892), who published the most important hand edition of the Greek New Testament for the English-speaking world, write of their first Greek edition of 1881, “This edition is an attempt to present exactly the original words of the New Testament, so far as they can now be determined from surviving documents.”¹¹ Frederick Scrivener (1813–1891), one of Westcott and Hort’s most intelligent critics and editor of the fifth-century Codex Bezae (05 D), says of textual criticism that “it aims at bringing back that text, so far as may be, to the condition in which it stood in the sacred autographs; at removing all spurious additions, if such be found in our present printed copies; at restoring whatsoever may have been lost or corrupted or accidentally changed in the lapse of eighteen hundred years.”¹² The theologian Benjamin Warfield (1851–1921) says that textual criticism involves a

1854), viii. Tregelles spent his career as an ironworker, but he devoted his “spare” time to textual criticism.

8. J. Scott Porter, *Principles of Textual Criticism, with Their Application to the Old and New Testaments* (London: Simms & M’Intyre, 1848), 9.

9. Constantin Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 8th ed., 2 vols. (Leipzig: Giesecke & Devrient, 1869–1872). The third volume, *Prolegomena*, was written by Caspar René Gregory and published after Tischendorf’s death (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1894).

10. Constantin Tischendorf, *When Were Our Gospels Written? An Argument, with a Narrative of the Discovery of the Sinaitic Manuscript* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1896), 15.

11. Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1882), 2:1.

12. Frederick Henry Ambrose Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, 1883), 5.

process of examining documents “with a view to discovering from them whether and wherein it has become corrupted, and of proving them to preserve it or else restoring it from their corruptions to its originally intended form.”¹³ Finally, although others could be cited, Eberhard Nestle (1851–1913), a German scholar and developer of the Nestle Greek New Testament, which is still the basis of the standard critical edition (the so-called Nestle-Aland), writes, “The task [of textual criticism] is to exhibit what the original writer intended to communicate to his readers, and the method is simply that of tracing the history of the document in question back to its beginning, if, and in so far as, we have the means to do so at our command.”¹⁴

If the nineteenth century reflects a common critical opinion of the task of textual criticism, most of the twentieth century is not much different. Frederic Kenyon (1863–1952), editor of many papyri, including \mathfrak{P}^{45} ,¹⁵ and director and principal librarian of the British Museum and Library, writing in 1901, states, “The province of Textual Criticism is the ascertainment of the true form of a literary work, as originally composed and written down by its author.”¹⁶ Alexander Souter (1873–1949), editor of the Oxford Classical Texts Greek New Testament,¹⁷ writes, “Textual criticism seeks, by the exercise of knowledge and trained judgment, to restore the very words of some original document which has perished, and survives only in copies complete or incomplete, accurate or inaccurate, ancient or modern. If we possessed the twenty-seven documents now composing the New Testament exactly in the form in which they were dictated or written by their original authors, there would be no textual criticism of the New Testament.”¹⁸ Kirsopp Lake (1872–1946), textual critic and coeditor of the original photographs of Codex Sinaiticus (01 \aleph), writes, “The

13. Benjamin B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1893), 4.

14. Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament*, trans. William Edie (London: Williams & Norgate, 1901), 156.

15. I will treat this papyrus manuscript in chapter 2.

16. Frederic G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1912; 1st ed., 1901), 1.

17. Alexander Souter, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910; 2nd ed., 1947).

18. Alexander Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1912), 3.

object of all textual criticism is to recover so far as possible the actual words written by the writer.”¹⁹ Leo Vaganay (1882–1969), one of the leading French textual critics, writes, “By textual criticism we mean every kind of scientific research in quest of the original, or at least, of the most nearly original text of some document.”²⁰ J. Harold Greenlee (1918–), well-known Greek scholar and textual critic, writing in 1964, states, “Textual criticism is the study of copies of any written work of which the autograph (the original) is unknown, with the purpose of ascertaining the original text.”²¹ Bruce Metzger (1914–2007), one of the editors of the United Bible Societies *Greek New Testament*, also writing in 1964, notes, “The textual critic seeks to ascertain from the divergent copies which form of the text should be regarded as most nearly conforming to the original.”²² Kurt Aland (1915–1994) and Barbara Aland (1937–), subsequent editors of the Nestle Greek New Testament, write, “Only one reading can be original, however many variant readings there may be. . . . Only the reading which best satisfies the requirements of both external and internal criteria can be original.”²³ J. Neville Birdsall (1928–2005), writing in 1992, states, “The objective of textual criticism in any field is to establish the original text of the work which is the object of study.”²⁴ Finally, and not insignificantly, J. K. Elliott and Ian Moir, contemporary British textual critics, state, “Textual criticism is, primarily, the study of *any* written work, the original of which no longer survives, with the purpose of recovering that original text from those copies which have chanced to survive.”²⁵

19. Kirsopp Lake, *The Text of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1911), 1.

20. Leo Vaganay, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, trans. B. V. Miller (London: Sands, 1937), 9.

21. J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 11 (italics removed).

22. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968; 1st ed., 1964), v. The fourth edition (2005), done in collaboration with Bart Ehrman, retains the preface of the first edition, in which this statement appears (p. xv).

23. Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 280.

24. J. Neville Birdsall, “The Recent History of New Testament Textual Criticism (from Westcott and Hort, 1881, to the Present),” ANRW II.26.1 (1992): 138.

25. Keith Elliott and Ian Moir, *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament: An Introduction for English Readers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 1.

This whirlwind tour of textual critics is over, and the resulting catalogue of opinion, from Erasmus to the recent, seems overwhelming. The traditional task and goal of textual criticism of the Greek New Testament, within the confines of the recognition that we no longer have the autograph manuscripts, is to devise a method by which the original text, or the text that is as close as possible to the original, can be ascertained.

Recent Proposals

Recent scholarship has not been as content as previous scholarship was with the traditional goal of textual criticism. As a result, two major developments that are worth noting have occurred with regard to the notion of an original text. One concerns appreciation of the kinds of contexts in which variations occur, and the second raises more-serious questions about finding an original text altogether. Both of these merit further consideration.

- THEOLOGICAL AND OTHER CONTEXTS OF VARIATION

The first of these two major developments is the recently expressed appreciation for the cultural, social, and even theological contexts in which later textual variation occurred, as a reflection of early church developments. This is not a new concern, however. Almost since the advent of modern textual criticism and efforts to establish the Greek text of the New Testament—that is, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present—there has been recognition of the possibility of changes to manuscripts that would indicate the theological and other contexts in which these texts were being copied. Thus, although Westcott and Hort, who published the first eclectic text based on early majuscule (capital letter) manuscripts from the fourth century, especially Codex Sinaiticus (01 **Σ**),²⁶ asserted that “there are no signs of deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes,”²⁷ a claim

26. Later in this chapter, in the section “The History of the Printed Greek Text of the New Testament,” I will consider this Greek text, the basis of its development, and the types of manuscripts used.

27. Westcott and Hort, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2:282–83. They were followed in the main thrust of this statement by a number of scholars, including Caspar René Gregory, *Canon and Text of the New Testament*, I^{TL} (New York:

that they subsequently attempted to defend,²⁸ this claim was scrutinized by a succession of textual scholars.

This scrutiny came from at least two quarters. Westcott and Hort's opponents who defended the Textus Receptus, a text based on the Greek text published first by Erasmus in the sixteenth century on the basis of several late minuscule (lowercase writing) manuscripts,²⁹ accused the transcribers of the early majuscule manuscripts, for example, of deleting the two longer endings of Mark's Gospel (e.g., Mark 16:9–20, the longest, but usually referred to as the long ending) and of questioning the authenticity of the pericope of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11).³⁰ Those who defended the kind of text advocated by Westcott and Hort also registered concern for due recognition of later theological and other textual changes. J. Rendel Harris, after citing a number of significant textual variants, noted, "These instances may suffice to show how the religious movements of any time or country affect the text of that time or country. Nor can such changes be considered as unimportant or insignificant."³¹ Kirsopp Lake, right after making his positive statement quoted above regarding the object of textual criticism, stated, "But in order to do

Scribner, 1907), 485 (but Gregory [p. 504] cites John 7:8 as an example of a change made for "dogmatical or even apologetical" reasons); Robertson, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism*, 158–60.

28. In a prefatory note to the second edition of *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (1896), Westcott wrote, "No arguments have been advanced against the general principles maintained in the Introduction and illustrated in the Notes, since the publication of the first Edition, which were not fully considered by Dr. Hort and myself in the long course of our work and in our judgment dealt with adequately" (p. v).

29. This text edition and its development and subsequent history and influence are discussed below in the section "The History of the Printed Greek Text of the New Testament."

30. For example, John W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised: Three Articles Reprinted from the "Quarterly Review"* (1883; repr., Fort Worth: Hobbs, 1983); cf. John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel according to S. Mark* (1871; repr., Ann Arbor, MI: Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1959), 83–96 (Burgon accuses earlier scholars, such as J. J. Griesbach, Constantin Tischendorf, Samuel Tregelles, and Henry Alford, of something along these lines); David Otis Fuller, introduction to *Counterfeit or Genuine: Mark 16? John 8?* ed. David Otis Fuller (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1978), 9–10; Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Nelson, 1977), 31–32.

31. J. Rendel Harris, *Side-Lights on New Testament Research* (London: Kingsgate, James Clarke, 1909), 32. Some of the examples he cites are Marcion and the Lukan infancy narrative, Tatian and the account of John the Baptist, and Matt. 20:4.

this properly the critic has to explain how each successive deviation from the original came to be currently adopted, and frequently he finds the clue enabling him to do this in the history of some later period, which gives some reason for a textual variation. In these researches it sometimes happens that the discoveries of the textualist are of great value to the historian; for the corrupt reading of some important document often explains otherwise inexplicable phenomena in the history of ideas or the conduct of a controversy.³² Ernest Cadman Colwell went so far as to claim, “In the manuscripts of the New Testament most variations . . . were made deliberately,” and he believed that it was for doctrinal reasons that most changes were introduced.³³

A few individual passages are often the subject of such theologically based text-critical discussion, with the variant seeming to reflect later theological interpretation. These include John 5:3b–4, with an angel coming down and troubling the water, and the first person entering the pool receiving healing; Acts 8:37, where the Ethiopian eunuch makes a pronouncement regarding his faith; 1 Timothy 3:16, where the question is whether the two Greek letters are the relative pronoun *OC* (thus “who was manifested in flesh”) or the *nomen sacrum* (sacred name)³⁴ for God, *ΘC* (thus “God manifested in flesh”), with reference to Jesus Christ; and 1 John 5:7–8, the so-called *comma Johanneum* or Johannine Comma, with reference to the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, three in one, bearing witness. Much of the discussion of later theological changes to the text of the Greek New Testament, however, has revolved around the so-called Western text, represented by the majuscule Codex Bezae (05 D) of Acts. Rendel Harris found

32. Lake, *Text of the New Testament*, 1.

33. Ernest Cadman Colwell, *What Is the Best New Testament?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 52, with discussion of correct doctrine as the motivation for changes (52–60).

34. A *nomen sacrum* (pl. *nomina sacra*) is a term for reduced forms used in ancient Greek manuscripts to stand for theologically (and other) significant words. The original *nomina sacra* were used for a small number of important words, such as “Jesus,” “God,” and “Christ,” and later were increased in number to around fifteen. The *nomina sacra* often were written with a supralinear line (i.e., a stroke above the letters) to help distinguish the reduced form. For recent discussion, see Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 95–134; Philip Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography and Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 199–254.

Montanist and Marcionite influence on the Bezan version of Acts, while Eldon Epp found anti-Judaic tendencies.³⁵

Whereas discussion of Western theologizing has waned in more-recent scholarship, the discussion of the socioreligious context in which variants have been created has been taken up in other circles, in particular in Bart Ehrman's *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*. Continuing discussion that he began in earlier articles, Ehrman investigates what he calls "corruption" of the text.³⁶ He believes that orthodoxy was a slowly developing concept in the second and third centuries as various competing beliefs contended for primacy,³⁷ and as a result there were differing and competing theological positions represented in the various changes made to manuscripts. Ehrman identifies four major theological disputes, devoting a chapter to each in his book: anti-adoptionist, anti-separationist, anti-docetic, and anti-patristic corruption by the orthodox against their opponents.³⁸ Most of the examples that Ehrman treats in his later *Misquoting Jesus*, to which I will turn below, are treated in this earlier work as well. I note here some illustrative examples of potential theologizing.

35. J. Rendel Harris, *Codex Bezae: A Study of the So-Called Western Text of the New Testament*, TS, vol. 2, no. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891); Eldon J. Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts*, SNTSMS 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

36. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; updated ed., 2011).

37. This notion has been most widely attributed (at least in recent times) to Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. and ed. Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), originally published in 1934. The theory goes back much earlier, however, at least to the time of Ferdinand Christian Baur, and has been endorsed by many since. There have been many able responses to this notion, including most recently Stanley E. Porter and Gordon L. Heath, *The Lost Gospel of Judas: Separating Fact from Fiction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 96–114; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy: How Contemporary Culture's Fascination with Diversity Has Reshaped Our Understanding of Early Christianity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

38. "Anti-adoptionism" refers to those who opposed adoptionism, the belief that Jesus was at some time adopted by God the Father to become the divine Son; "anti-separationism" refers to those who opposed tendencies to divide the human and divine natures of Jesus; "anti-docetism" refers to those who opposed those who argued that Jesus Christ only appeared (or seemed) to be human; and "anti-patristic corruption" refers to those who opposed the belief that God the Father was the Christ in human form who suffered. See Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*.

In the chapter on anti-adoptionism, among other examples, Ehrman examines Luke 3:22, where he opts for the reading in Codex Bezae (05 D) as original—“You are my son, today I have begotten you”—over the supposedly anti-adoptionist (and orthodox) “You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” Even though the latter is found in earlier manuscripts, he contends that it is a later harmonization with Mark 1:11.³⁹ However, Ehrman fails to note that the words in Bezae match the words of Epiphanius of Salamis quoting the *Gospel of the Ebionites* and reflect (later) gnostic thought.⁴⁰ This makes it highly unlikely that the adoptionist reading is correct, but rather suggests that the so-called anti-adoptionist reading is to be preferred. In fact, if the anti-adoptionist reading is the original, it can hardly be called “anti-adoptionist,” a term that implies a reaction to something, when in reality it was not a reaction to anything. The language that Ehrman is using is potentially misleading.

In the chapter on anti-separationism, for 1 John 4:3 Ehrman prefers “does not confess” (μη̄ ὁμολογεῖ, *mē homologeī*) to “looses/separates” (λύει, *lueī*) (so “every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” rather than “every spirit that looses/separates Jesus is not from God”). The former is found in virtually all of the Greek manuscript evidence, despite the later opinion by some scholars in favor of the variant “loose.”⁴¹ Whether one attributes theological or other motives to the variant “loose,” which is found in the margin of one late Greek manuscript but in a number of translations or versions (which I will discuss in chap. 3), it clearly is not the original text but is probably, as Ehrman speculates, a later variant to combat gnostic thought that wished to “loose” or “separate” Jesus from his divinity. “Loose” may or may not be “antiseparationist,” but it is certainly late.

In the chapter on anti-docetism, Ehrman rightly rejects as inauthentic Luke 22:43–44, with Jesus’s sweating blood in the garden as

39. Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 62–67 (updated ed., 73–79).

40. See Hans Foerster, “The Celebration of the Baptism of Christ by the Basileans and the Origin of Epiphany: Is the Seemingly Obvious Correct?” *JGRChJ* 5 (2008): 114–15.

41. Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 125–35 (updated ed., 146–58). Ehrman notes the attractiveness of the variant “loose” because of its difficulty in understanding, but that the reading found in the manuscripts is even more “difficult” because of the use of the indicative verb with the negative μή, which normally is used with moods other than the indicative.

an attempt to show Jesus's physicality.⁴² However, the manuscript evidence for inclusion of Luke 22:43–44 is very limited, with many manuscripts themselves indicating that they realize this is a later variant.⁴³ Ehrman also treats examples of Westcott and Hort's "Western noninterpolations," where, especially in the final chapters of Luke's Gospel (chaps. 22–24), they believe that the Western tradition with its shorter readings preserved the original text over their Neutral text of Codex Sinaiticus (01 Ⲛ) and Codex Vaticanus (03 B).⁴⁴ Ehrman argues that each variant must be examined on its own merits.

In the chapter on anti-patristicism, Ehrman briefly treats a number of texts, including John 14:9; Mark 2:7; Mark 12:26; 2 Peter 1:1; and Philippians 2:9, where the evidence of the variant is slender or the variant is clearly seen to be a later modification.⁴⁵ Ehrman attempts by these and other examples to illustrate various contexts that gave rise to later textual variants. Whether or not he provides evidence of the corruption of Scripture (and I generally think that he has not, especially by the orthodox), Ehrman's book provides an inadvertent defense of the traditional agenda of textual criticism. He assumes—and he must assume in order for his argument to work—an original text intended by the author. As Moisés Silva states, "Indeed, Ehrman's book is unimaginable unless he can identify an initial form of the text that can be differentiated from a later alteration."⁴⁶

No doubt there is great merit in investigating the history of changes made to the text of the New Testament. Insights unquestionably can be gained into some of the theologically related controversies of the time and into the cultural milieu in which the copying of a document occurred. One need not, however, believe that these contexts

42. *Ibid.*, 187–94 (updated ed., 220–27).

43. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies, 1994), 151.

44. Besides individual passages, Ehrman discusses the notion in *Orthodox Corruption*, 223–27 (updated ed., 254–59). The so-called Western noninterpolations in Luke 22–24 include 22:14, 16, 19–20, 35–37, 43–44, 47, 49–51, 62; 23:1–5, 17; 23:32–24:1; 24:3, 6, 12, 36, 40, 43, 51, 52.

45. Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 264–69 (updated ed., 309–15). Ehrman's reliance on English translation of the article is misleading in at least one instance (Phil 2:9, p. 268; updated ed., 314). His contrast of "the" name with "a" name, based upon English understanding of the function of the definite and indefinite article, must clearly be abandoned.

46. Moisés Silva, "Response," in *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. David Alan Black (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 150.

“corrupted” the text to appreciate various local and even theological situations in which the manuscripts of the New Testament were copied. For example, taking an approach that focuses on location, rather than the documents themselves, Eldon Epp has recently undertaken to classify papyrus manuscripts of the Greek New Testament on the basis of their location. He notes that most of the papyri have been found in Egypt, with a few found in other regions (e.g., \mathfrak{P}^{59} , \mathfrak{P}^{60} , and \mathfrak{P}^{61} were found in the Negev at ‘Auja-el-Hafir [Nessana]; \mathfrak{P}^{11} , \mathfrak{P}^{14} , and \mathfrak{P}^{68} at Sinai; and \mathfrak{P}^{83} and \mathfrak{P}^{84} at Khirbet Mird near the Dead Sea). The vast majority of those from Egypt have been discovered at the ancient site of Oxyrhynchus: roughly 40 percent of the total number of New Testament papyri, and nearly 60 percent of those that date from before the third/fourth centuries. Epp wants to explore the scribal techniques of a place such as Oxyrhynchus, as well as the possible relations of Oxyrhynchus to other nearby sites, to see whether there might be theological influence indicated in the texts.⁴⁷

Despite potentially interesting insights from these recent efforts of Ehrman, Epp, and others, several points of further observation and reservation are to be noted. In other words, discussion of context must be put in its own proper context.

(1) The most important observation is that the number of variants being investigated by Ehrman and others with respect to their theological influences, when compared to the entirety of the New Testament, is fairly small, despite sometimes sensationalist claims to the contrary. We now have somewhere over 5,800 New Testament Greek manuscripts in part (mostly) and in whole, ranging from the second century to the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. Within those manuscripts, if one counts every possible type of variant, there are well over one hundred thousand variants (a number I will return to below). Nevertheless, despite all of this purported textual evidence of variance, calculations have indicated that, on the basis of the editions of the Greek New Testament produced by Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort,

47. Eldon J. Epp, “Issues in New Testament Textual Criticism: Moving from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First Century,” in Black, *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism*, 17–76, esp. 64. On papyri at Oxyrhynchus, see A. K. Bowman et al., *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts*, GRM 93 (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007); Peter Parsons, *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Lives in Roman Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007).

Hermann von Soden, Heinrich Joseph Vogels, Augustin Merk, and José Maria Bover, 62.9 percent of the verses of the Greek New Testament show no variants.⁴⁸ The individual books range from a low of 45.1 percent of verses with no variants (in Mark) to a high of 81.4 percent of verses with no variants (in 1 Timothy).⁴⁹ According to the estimates of Aland and Aland, when one compares the two major text-types for the Greek New Testament—the Byzantine and the Alexandrian⁵⁰—they “actually exhibit a remarkable degree of agreement, perhaps as much as 80 percent!”⁵¹ Other scholars have estimated this degree of agreement to be as high as 90 percent.⁵² Even this is perhaps not high enough, however. Most recently, Martin Heide has compared and calculated the stability of the New Testament manuscripts. Manuscripts vary in their textual stability from about 89 to 98 percent. As he states, “The stability of the New Testament text under consideration, from the early papyri to the Byzantine text, achieves an average of 92.6 percent.”⁵³

This means that the textual evidence confirms the existence of a stable text, with the lack of variation indicating that we probably have 80–90 percent, if not more, of the Greek text of the New Testament unquestionably established, so far as that can be determined from our existing manuscripts; and that is really all we have on which to base such a decision. The impression sometimes given in discussions of the text of the New Testament is that the text itself is entirely fluid and unstable, and that it was subject to so much variation and change through especially the first two centuries that its very stability is threatened. This simply is not true.

(2) With 90 percent of the text established in the two major text-types, one can reasonably work from the supposition that we have,

48. See below for information on the editions not yet mentioned.

49. Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 29.

50. I will address text-types and related matters in chapter 2.

51. Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 28.

52. Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform*, 2005 (Southborough, MA: Chilton, 2005), 584.

53. K. Martin Heide, “Assessing the Stability of the Transmitted Texts of the New Testament and the *Shepherd of Hermas*,” in *The Reliability of the New Testament: Bart D. Ehrman and Daniel B. Wallace in Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 138. Heide also compares the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a very popular early Christian text, which has a stability rate of only 86 percent, lower than the lowest of any individual manuscript of the New Testament (146).

for all intents and purposes, the earliest text that we can establish, at least for those portions where there is no textual variation. There is little point in disputing that we have the original text when the vast majority of the textual evidence points in the same direction—at least for 90 percent (or more) of the text. This does not mean that it is not pertinent to try to ascertain the original text of the rest of the (less than) 10 percent that is not established, but the amount that is established should provide us with a firm foundation and guidance for how to go about establishing the rest.

(3) The belief in an achievable original text is a necessity for deciding whether there are variations from that text. The fact that Ehrman speaks of the “corruption” of the text indicates that he works from a functional perspective of a stable and original text that has been changed or altered. Virtually all of the studies that have undertaken to examine the theological tendencies of passages in the New Testament begin from the standpoint that there is an original text (or at least that one of the texts they are using preserves the original) and that changes can be evaluated in terms of their relation to that original.

(4) If the above indicators are correct, the number of passages for theological dispute is relatively and proportionately small. There are three relatively major passages that recur in the discussion: the longer ending of Mark, the pericope of the woman caught in adultery, and the relation in Acts of the Western tradition, especially as found in Codex Bezae (05 D), to the Alexandrian tradition.⁵⁴ There are also a number of smaller passages, such as the so-called Western noninterpolations in Luke 22–24. Many of the same passages are treated by those who discuss this issue. In most of the discussions the text as found in the Alexandrian tradition is endorsed. Even when all of the possible passages that have been brought forward for discussion are taken into account—notwithstanding the considerable variation in the persuasiveness of these examples—there remain many other passages that were not changed, corrupted, or otherwise altered. Rather than seeing major theological tendencies in the various textual changes to manuscripts, we should at best probably see theological fine tuning in a few noteworthy passages.

54. Codex Bezae (05 D) is a fifth-century bilingual Greek and Latin majuscule manuscript that now contains a longer version of Acts than is found in earlier majuscule manuscripts that represent the Alexandrian tradition, such as Codex Sinaiticus (01 \aleph) and Codex Vaticanus (03 B). These manuscripts are discussed in more detail below.