

# Inspiration, Preservation, and New Testament Textual Criticism<sup>1</sup>

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The Bible has always been of central importance to evangelicals. It not only defines what we are to believe; it also tells us how we are to behave. A clear and faithful exposition of the scriptures has, historically, been at the heart of any relevant pastoral ministry. Now in order for a particular passage to be applied legitimately, it must first be understood accurately. Before we ask, “How does this text apply to me?” we must ask “What does this text mean?” And even before we ask “What does this text mean?” we must first ask, “What does this text say?” Determining what a text says is what textual criticism is all about. In other words, textual criticism, as its prime objective, seeks to ascertain the very wording of the original. This is necessary to do with the books of the Bible—as with all literary documents of the ancient world—because the originals are no longer extant. Not only this, but of the more than five thousand manuscript copies of the Greek New Testament no two of them agree completely. It is essential, therefore, that anyone who expounds the Word of God be acquainted to some degree with the science of textual criticism, if he or she is to expound that Word faithfully.

The relevance of textual criticism, however, is not shut up only to those who have acquaintance with Greek, nor only to those in explicitly expository ministries. Textual criticism is relevant to every Christian, precisely because many of the textual differences in Greek can be translated into another language. Thus the differences between the New Testament of the King James Version, for example, and that of the New American Standard Version are not just differences in the English; there are also differences in the Greek text behind the English—in fact, over 5,000 differences! And with the publication of the New King James New Testament in 1979<sup>2</sup> (in which the KJV was rendered in modern English), the translational differences are diminished while the textual differences are heightened. The average modern American Christian who lacks the requisite educational background to read Elizabethan English now has no excuse for not reading the (new) King James Version. In light of the heavy promotion by Thomas Nelson Publishers,<sup>3</sup> that oft-asked question, “What is the most accurate New Testament?,” is increasingly a question about a version’s textual basis as much as it is of the translational philosophy behind it.

What is the textual difference, then, between the (new) KJV NT and other modern translations? In a nutshell, most modern translations are based on a few ancient manuscripts, while the (new) KJV NT is based on a printed edition of the Greek New Testament (called the *Textus Receptus* or TR) which, in turn, was derived from the majority of medieval manuscripts (known collectively as the majority text [MT] or Byzantine text). In one respect, then, the answer to the question “What is the most accurate New Testament?” turns on the question, “Which manuscripts are closest to the original—the few early ones or the many late ones?”

In this paper it is not my objective to answer that question.<sup>4</sup> Rather, I wish to address an argument that has been used by TR/MT advocates—an argument which is especially persuasive among laymen. The argument is unashamedly theological in nature: inspiration and preservation are intrinsically linked to one another and both are intrinsically linked to the TR/MT. That is to say, the doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration necessitates the doctrine of

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<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Bible, New Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> One of the promotional means of the publisher is the sponsoring of concerts. On July 18, 1988, I attended one of these concerts at Reunion Arena in Dallas, Texas, where approximately 18,000 people were in attendance. At the end of the concert Dr. Arthur L. Farstad, editor of the NKJV, promoted this Bible. His chief “sales pitch” was text-critical in which he argued that Mark 16:9–20 was authentic and that modern translations, by deleting it (or at least by casting doubts on its authenticity), delete Christ’s resurrection from Mark’s gospel. His statement, however, was not altogether accurate, for although there is no resurrection appearance by Christ if the gospel ends at v. 8, there is still a resurrection! Whether intentional or not, the impression left on the audience was that the NKJV is a more orthodox translation than other modern versions.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this, see my article, “The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April–June 1991) 151–69.

providential preservation of the text, and the doctrine of providential preservation necessarily implies that the majority text (or the TR)<sup>5</sup> is *the* faithful replica of the autographs. Inspiration (and inerrancy) is also used for the Byzantine text's correctness in two other ways: (1) only in the Byzantine text do we have an inerrant New Testament; (2) if any portion of the New Testament is lost (no matter how small, even if only one word), then verbal-plenary inspiration is thereby falsified.

If inspiration and preservation can legitimately be linked to the text of the New Testament in this way, then the (new) KJV NT is the most accurate translation and those who engage in an expository ministry should use this text alone and encourage their audiences to do the same. But if this theological argument is not legitimate, then New Testament textual criticism needs to be approached on other than a theological *a priori* basis. And if so, then perhaps most modern translations do indeed have a more accurate textual basis after all.

Our approach will be to deal first with the arguments from preservation, then to deal with the arguments related more directly to inspiration and inerrancy.<sup>6</sup>

## I. PRESERVATION

### A. The Statement

On a popular level, the TR-advocating and "King James only" fundamentalist pamphleteers have waged a holy war on all who would use any modern version of the New Testament, or any Greek text based on the few ancient manuscripts rather than on the many late ones.<sup>7</sup> Jasper James Ray is a highly influential representative of this approach.<sup>8</sup> In his book, *God Wrote Only One Bible*,<sup>9</sup> Ray says that no modern version may properly be called the Bible,<sup>10</sup> that salvation and spiritual growth can only come through versions based on the TR,<sup>11</sup> and that Satan is the

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<sup>5</sup> This statement is not meant to imply that MT=TR, but that within this school of thought are two divisions—those who hold that the printed edition of Erasmus (TR) is the original and those who hold that the reading of the majority of extant Greek witnesses is the original.

<sup>6</sup> This breakdown is somewhat artificial, since the arguments from inspiration and inerrancy are closely tied to preservation as well. However, our organization is due chiefly to the fact that the arguments from preservation are more traditional and universal among TR/MT advocates, while the arguments from inspiration/inerrancy are of more recent vintage and are more idiosyncratic.

<sup>7</sup> In passing, Peter Ruckman could be mentioned as the most extreme "King James only" advocate, going so far as to argue that even the Greek and Hebrew text need to be corrected by the KJV! Cf. his *The Christian's Handbook of Manuscript Evidence* (Pensacola: Pensacola Bible Institute, 1970) 115–38; *Problem Texts* (Pensacola: Pensacola Bible Institute, 1980) 46–48.

<sup>8</sup> Not only has he influenced many laymen, but David Otis Fuller dedicated the book, *Counterfeit or Genuine[:] Mark 16? John 8?*, of which he was the editor (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1978), to "Jasper James Ray, Missionary Scholar of Junction City, Oregon, whose book, *God Wrote Only One Bible*, moved me to begin this fascinating faith-inspiring study" (p. v). Further, even Zane C. Hodges, formerly professor of NT at Dallas Theological Seminary, and arguably the prime mover in the modern revival of the "Traditional Text," "admits that it was the reading of Ray which began his investigation of textual criticism" (David D. Shields, "Recent Attempts to Defend the Byzantine Text of the Greek New Testament" [Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas; December, 1985] 26. This is based on an interview Shields had with Hodges on January 15, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Junction City, OR: Eye Opener Publishers, 1955.

<sup>10</sup> "A multiplicity of differing Bible versions are in circulation today, resulting in a state of bewildering confusion. Some versions omit words, verses, phrases, and even chapter portions ... Among these [versions] you'll not find the Bible God gave when holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit ..." (ibid., 1).

<sup>11</sup> The following are representative statements: "... the TEXTUS RECEPTUS ... is God's sure foundation on which to rest our eternal salvation" (32). "It is impossible to be saved without 'FAITH,' and perfect-saving-faith can only be produced by the 'ONE' Bible God wrote, and that we find only in translations which agree with the Greek Textus Receptus refused by Westcott and Hort" (122). "Put

prime mover behind all versions based on the more ancient manuscripts.<sup>12</sup> If Ray's view is correct, then those who use modern translations or a Greek New Testament based on the few ancient manuscripts are, at best, dupes of the devil and, at worst, in danger of forfeiting their immortal souls.

Ray's chief argument on behalf of the TR is based on preservation. In the following statements, notice how closely inspiration and preservation are linked—and how both are linked to the Textus Receptus. Ray says, for example, that “the Textus Receptus ... was given by the inspiration of God, and has been providentially preserved for us today.”<sup>13</sup> He further adds that “the writing of the Word of God by inspiration is no greater miracle than the miracle of its preservation in the Textus Receptus.”<sup>14</sup> Preservation, then, for Jasper James Ray, takes place on the same level as inspiration—i.e., extending to the very words.<sup>15</sup>

Even in the works which are dressed in more scholarly garb, this theological presupposition (along with the witch-hunting invectives<sup>16</sup>) is still present. David Otis Fuller, for example, has edited several volumes in which professors poison anywhere in the blood stream and the whole becomes poisoned. Just so with the Word of God. When words are added or subtracted, Bible inspiration is destroyed, and the spiritual blood stream is poisoned. In this respect the revised Bibles in our day seem to have become spiritual guinea pigs, with multiple hypodermic shots-in-the-arm by so called Doctors of Divinity, who have used the serum of scholasticism well mixed with modern free-thinking textual criticism. When the Bible words are tampered with, and substitution is made, the Bible becomes a dead thing with neither power to give or sustain life. Of course, even under these conditions, it is possible to build up church membership, and report many professions. But what about regeneration? Are they born again? No person can be born again without the Holy Spirit, and it is evident the Holy Spirit is not going to use a poisoned blood stream to produce healthy Christians. Therefore, beware, beware, lest your faith become marred through the reading of corrupted Revised Versions of the Bible” (9).

<sup>12</sup> In his introduction, Ray states that he “knows that the teaching of this book, regarding Textual Criticism, goes contrary to what is being taught in almost every college, seminary, and Bible school... . The reader may say, ‘How can so many good, sincere educated people be wrong?’ Herein lies the ‘mystery of iniquity’ (2 Thess. 2:7)” (ii). Later he argues: “*Many of these men [who use modern versions] are true servants of the Lord, and we should, with patience and love, try to reveal the truth to them. They have been ‘brain-washed’ by their teachers; who were ‘brain-washed’ by other teachers in a ‘chain-reaction’ on back to Westcott and Hort who, in 1881, ‘switched’ most of our seminaries and Bible schools from the dependable TEXTUS RECEPTUS to inferior manuscripts, such as codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. Of course this ‘chain-reaction’ could be traced on back to its beginning in Genesis 3:1, where (Satan) the serpent said unto the woman, ‘Yea, hath God said?’ In the humanistic theology of today we would hear something like this: ‘These words are not in the best manuscripts’*” (101).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>15</sup> Further, inspiration and preservation are linked to tradition—especially the tradition of the English Bible, for Ray argues: “The Bible God wrote has been providentially preserved for us in the Greek Textus Receptus, from which the King James Bible was translated in 1611. Any version of the Bible that does not agree with this text, is certainly founded upon corrupted manuscripts” (ibid., 106).

<sup>16</sup> David Otis Fuller, for example, in *Counterfeit or Genuine*, speaks of “bastard Bibles” (10) and echoes J. J. Ray in condemning virtually all evangelical institutes of higher learning for using other than the *Textus Receptus* or the King James Version: “This is a David and Goliath battle with practically all of the evangelical seminaries and colleges, Bible institutes, and Bible schools slavishly following essentially the Westcott and Hort Greek Text and the Westcott and Hort theory, both of which are fallacious in every particular” (12). He adds further, as did Ray, that Satan is the mastermind behind this defection from the King James and TR: “born-again Christians in this twentieth century are facing the most malicious and vicious attack upon God’s inspired Holy Word since the Garden of Eden. And this attack began in its modern form in the publication of the Revised Version of the Scriptures in 1881 in England” (9).

Donald A. Waite, a Dallas Seminary graduate, argues in his *The Theological Heresies of Westcott and Hort* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today, 1979), that the two Cambridge dons were unregenerate, unsaved, apostate, and heretical (39–42). David D. Shields in his dissertation on “Recent Attempts to Defend the Byzantine Text of the Greek New Testament,” points out that “the evidence on which [Waite] bases these conclusions often would indict most evangelical Christians. Even in the

and Bible scholars have contributed—all for the purpose of proving that the TR or MT is the best Greek New Testament. In *Which Bible?* he declares:

Naturalistic New Testament critics seem to last to have reached the end of the trail. Westcott and Hort's broad highway, which appeared to lead so quickly and smoothly to the original New Testament text, has dwindled down to a narrow foot path and terminated finally in a thicket of trees. For those who have followed it, there is only one thing to do, and that is to go back and begin the journey all over again from the consistently Christian starting point; namely, the divine inspiration and providential preservation of Scripture.<sup>17</sup>

The sequel to *Which Bible?*, entitled *True or False?*, is “DEDICATED TO All lovers of the Book; who believe in the Verbal, Plenary Inspiration of the Scriptures; and who, of necessity [,] *must believe* in the Providential Preservation of the Scriptures through the centuries; and who hold that the Textus Receptus (Traditional Text) is nearest to the Original Manuscripts.”<sup>18</sup>

This theological refrain—the linking of inspiration to preservation, and both to the majority text—got its major impetus from John William Burgon. Burgon, a high Church Anglican, Dean of Chichester, toward the end of the nineteenth century was both prolific and vituperative in his attacks against Westcott and Hort (the Cambridge scholars who produced the Greek text which stands, more or less, behind all modern translations). There is no question that Burgon is the most influential writer on behalf of the TR—indeed, that he is the father of the majority text movement—for he is quoted with extreme approbation by virtually every TR/MT advocate.<sup>19</sup> He argued that “there exists no reason

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author's perspective, Westcott and Hort have theological problems, but the extreme severity of Waite's approach would declare anyone apostate and heretical who does not hold to his line” (55).

Wilbur Pickering, another alumnus of Dallas Seminary, and the president of the Majority Text Society, although normally not as prone as many others to such language, does sometimes imbibe in vitriolic speech. For example, in his master's thesis, “An Evaluation of the Contribution of John William Burgon to New Testament Textual Criticism” (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968), he declares that the most ancient manuscripts came from a “sewer pipe” (93). In his book, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977)—a book which has become the standard text in support of the majority text—Pickering states, for example, that “Aleph and B have lied” and that “Aleph is clearly a bigger liar than B” (126), and that all the ancient manuscripts on which modern critical text are based are “convicted liars all” (135). Pickering has toned down his language in his second edition (1980), perhaps due to book reviews such as R. A. Taylor's in *JETS* 20 (1977) 377–81, in which such “emotionally-loaded language” is seen as clouding the issue (379). (In this second edition he says that “Aleph and B have ... mistakes, ... Aleph is clearly worse than B” [135], and the ancient manuscripts are “blind guides all” [145].)

Theodore P. Letis, editor of *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate* (Fort Wayne, IN: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), seems to use fulminatory language against everybody, for he is in something of a theological no man's land: his volleys are directed not only at modern textual criticism, but also at *majority text* advocates (since he advocates the TR)—and even against inerrantists! He speaks, for example, of “the idolatrous affair that evangelicals are having with the red herring of inerrancy” (22); those who advocate using modern-language Bibles (including the translators of the New King James Version) are “in pragmatic league with the goddess of modernity—Her Majesty, Vicissitude” (81); virtually all modern translations imbibe in Arianism (203); *ad hominem* arguments are everywhere to be found in his book.

<sup>17</sup> *Which Bible?*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975) 8–9.

<sup>18</sup> *True or False? The Westcott-Hort Textual Theory Examined*, ed. D. O. Fuller (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1973) 5. This linking of inspiration and preservation is also seen most clearly in Fuller's statement that “The Scriptures make it quite clear that He [God] is also well able to insure the providential preservation of His own Word through the ages, and that He is the Author and Preserver of the Divine Revelation. The Bible cannot be accounted for in any other way. It claims to be ‘Theopneustos,’ ‘God-breathed’ (2 Timothy 3:16)” (*Which Bible?*, 5). It is significant that Fuller gives no proof-text for preservation here, for to him if the Bible is inspired it must be providentially preserved.

<sup>19</sup> In Shields' dissertation (“Recent Attempts”), the first three chapters are entitled “The Popular Defenders of the Textus Receptus,” “The Scholarly Defenders of the Textus Receptus,” and “The

for supposing that the Divine Agent, who in the first instance thus gave to mankind the Scriptures of Truth, straightway abdicated His office; took no further care of His work; abandoned those precious writings to their fate."<sup>20</sup>

Wilbur Pickering, former president of the Majority Text Society, has continued this type of argument into the present debate. In his 1968 master's thesis done at Dallas Seminary ("An Evaluation of the Contribution of John William Burgon to New Testament Textual Criticism") he argued that this doctrine is "most important" and "what one believes does make a difference."<sup>21</sup> Further, he linked the two together in such a way that a denial of one necessarily entails a denial of the other: "the doctrine of Divine Preservation of the New Testament Text depends upon the interpretation of the evidence which recognizes the Traditional Text to be the continuation of the autographa."<sup>22</sup> In other words, Pickering seems to be saying: "if we reject the majority text view, we reject the doctrine of preservation."<sup>23</sup>

E. F. Hills, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on NT textual criticism at Harvard Divinity School, argued:

If the doctrine of the Divine inspiration of the Old and New Testament scriptures is a true doctrine of providential preservation of the scriptures must also be a true doctrine. It must be that down through the centuries God has exercised a special providential control over the copying of the scriptures and the preservation and use of the copies, so that trustworthy representatives of the original text have been available to God's people in every age.<sup>24</sup>

Hills adds that "all orthodox Christians, all Christians who show due regard for the Divine inspiration and providential preservation of Scripture, must agree with Burgon on this matter."<sup>25</sup>

These writers are just the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, so universal is the doctrinal underpinning of preservation found among MT/TR advocates that Bart Ehrman could say.

One cannot read the literature produced by the various advocates of the Majority text without being impressed by a remarkable theological concurrence. To one degree or another, they all (to my knowledge, without exception) affirm that God's inspiration of an inerrant Bible required His preservation of its text.<sup>26</sup>

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Defenders of the Majority Text." In each chapter there is a section (or two) on Burgon and the impetus he provided for the various groups (there is even a Dean Burgon Society which quite explicitly promotes his views). One may, with some justification, feel that very little new has been said by MT/TR advocates after Burgon.

<sup>20</sup> J. W. Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* (arranged, completed, and edited by E. Miller; London: George Bell and sons, 1896) 12.

<sup>21</sup> Wilbur N. Pickering, "An Evaluation of the Contribution of John William Burgon to New Testament Textual Criticism: (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968) 86.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>23</sup> More recently, Pickering has linked inspiration and preservation so closely that he argued that a denial of one was a denial of the other: "Are we to say that God was unable to protect the text of Mark or that He just couldn't be bothered? I see no other alternative—either He didn't care or He was helpless. And either option is fatal to the claim that Mark's Gospel is 'God-breathed'" ("Mark 16:9–20 and the Doctrine of Inspiration" [a paper circulated to members of the Majority Text Society, September, 1988] 1).

<sup>24</sup> E. F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (4th ed.; Des Moines: Christian Research, 1984) 2.

<sup>25</sup> "The Magnificent Burgon," in *Which Bible?*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, "New Testament Textual Criticism: Quest for Methodology" (M.Div. thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1981) 40. Shields echoes the same viewpoint in his dissertation ("Recent Attempts") where in each of his first three chapters in which he interacts with various proponents of MT/TR, there is extensive material on "theological perspective," including inspiration and providential preservation. He summarizes that "the strong theological basis from which all advocates for primacy [of the Byzantine text-type] argue is a poor starting-point for determining the text of the New Testament and creates a history of the text which contradicts known facts" (p. 3 of abstract). Since Ehrman wrote his thesis and Shields his dissertation, Theo Letis has altered this picture to some degree:



And even Theo Letis, a TR advocate himself, flatly states, “The only reason that the Majority Text proponents even argue for the Byzantine text is because theologically they have both a verbal view of inspiration—and as a hidden agenda an unexpressed (at least as part of their present method) belief in providential preservation.”<sup>27</sup>

To sum up: on a lay level, as well as on a pseudo-scholarly level, and even on a scholarly level, inspiration, preservation and the TR/MT are linked intrinsically. According to Byzantine text advocates, you cannot have one without the other.

## B. The Critique

There are a number of serious problems with the theological premise of Byzantine text advocates. Generally speaking, however, they all fall into one of three groups: (1) a question-begging approach, (2) faulty assumptions, and (3) a non-biblical doctrinal basis. As will be readily seen, there is a great deal of overlap between these three areas.

### 1. Question-Begging Approach

Majority text proponents beg the question for their view on at least three fronts.

a. *What do you count?* First, they only count Greek manuscripts. Yet, there are almost twice as many Latin NT manuscripts as there are Greek (over 10,000 to approximately 5,500). If the Latin manuscripts were to be counted, then modern translations would be vindicated rather than the King James, because the early Greek manuscripts

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he is the first member of the MT/TR school (as far as I am aware) who, though affirming providential preservation, denies inerrancy (see n. 16).

<sup>27</sup> Letis, *Continuing Debate*, 9. One might argue that Zane Hodges does not have such an agenda and that therefore he is an exception to the rule. At one point, in fact, Hodges himself seems to say this. In his interaction with Gordon Fee over this issue Hodges states: “To speak of ‘all modern advocates of the TR’ as having a ‘hidden agenda’ is an impermissible *argumentum ad hominem*. It also is not true. I, for one, would be quite happy to accept the Westcott-Hort text as it stands if I thought that the grounds on which it rested were adequate... . My agenda at least—and I speak here only for myself—is precisely what I have expressed it to be—namely, a call to re-examine the claims of the majority text in the light of increasingly perceived deficiencies of the theory that underlies today’s editions. I happen to think that a man’s theology *can* affect his textual theories, but I am perfectly willing to entertain sensible arguments from any quarter no matter what theology they may be associated with” (“Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Response,” *JETS* 21 [1978] 145–46).

As Ehrman points out, however, there are two objections to Hodges’ alleged neutral stance: (1) “While Hodges is right that some theological presuppositions may have no effect on one’s approach toward textual criticism, it is equally clear that others certainly will. If one affirms as a theological ‘given’ that God would not allow a corrupted form of the New Testament text to be widely accepted, then, despite disclaimers, any argument to the contrary must be rejected out of hand. For the sake of personal integrity an individual such as Hodges may adduce strictly historical arguments for his position; but if one assumes this doctrine to be true and refuses to reconsider, then any textual method that does violence to it will be automatically rejected. For this reason, Hodges cannot ‘entertain sensible arguments from any quarter no matter what theology they may be associated with’” (49–50). (2) “The other problem with Hodges’s position is that he himself does not hold to it consistently. In another work [“A Defense of the Majority Text,” Dallas Seminary, n.d., p. 18], Hodges openly states that his historical (note, historical, not theological) arguments for the superiority of the Majority text will appeal only to those of similar theological conviction... .” (50). Not only this, but elsewhere Hodges rejects Hort’s views because of their rationalistic presuppositions, arguing that the “New Testament text is not like any other ancient text” and that “the logic of faith demands that documents so unique cannot have had a history wholly like that of secular writings” (Hodges, “Rationalism and Contemporary New Testament Textual Criticism,” *BSac* 128 [1971] 29–30). Ehrman concludes from this that “apart from the fact this amounts to little more than rhetoric, a paradigmatic *argumentum ad hominem*, it is clear that Hodges chooses to reject the principles of Wes[t]cott and Hort simply because they do not accept his doctrine of revelation and preservation. Under such circumstances, to turn around and say that all arguments for the contrary position will be given rational consideration is nothing short of misleading” (51).

which stand behind the vast bulk of Latin manuscripts and behind modern translations are quite similar.<sup>28</sup> At one point, E. F. Hills argued that “God must preserve this text, not secretly, not hidden away in a box for hundreds of years or smoldering unnoticed on some library shelf, but openly before the eyes of all men through the continuous usage of His Church.”<sup>29</sup> Preservation is therefore linked to public accessibility. It is precisely at this point that the argument for counting only Greek manuscripts begs the question. As Ehrman points out:

[According to Hills,] the subsequent preservation of the New Testament text did not extend to guaranteeing the accuracy of its translation into other languages, but only to protecting the relative purity of the Greek text itself. Here, of course, his prior argument that God preserved the text for the sake of His church becomes irrelevant—since only a select minority in the church has ever known Greek.<sup>30</sup>

*b. When do you count?* Majority text advocates tacitly assume that since most Greek manuscripts extant today belong to the Byzantine text, most Greek manuscripts throughout church history have belonged to the Byzantine text. But this assumption begs the question in the extreme, since there is not one solid shred of evidence that the Byzantine text even existed in the first three centuries of the Christian era.<sup>31</sup> Not only this, but as far as our extant witnesses reveal, the Byzantine text did not become the majority text until the ninth century. Furthermore, for the letters of Paul, there is no majority text manuscript before the ninth century. To embrace the MT/TR text for the *corpus Paulinum*, then, requires an 800-year leap of faith. Not only is this a severe instance of *petitio principii*, but it also is a cavalier treatment of historical evidence unbecoming of those who boast a faith which cannot be divorced from history. No majority text advocate would tolerate such a fideistic leap regarding the person and work of Christ;<sup>32</sup> how then can they employ it when it comes to the text?

*c. Where do you count?* Suppose we were to assume that only Greek manuscripts should be counted. And suppose further that public accessibility is a legitimate divine motive for preservation. Given these two assumptions, one would expect the Byzantine text-type to be readily accessible in all pockets of the ancient Greek-speaking world. But that is demonstrably not true. For example, it was not readily available to Christians in Egypt in the first four centuries. After carefully investigating the Gospel quotations of Didymus, a fourth-century Egyptian writer, Ehrman concludes, “These findings indicate that no ‘proto-Byzantine’ text existed in Alexandria in Didymus’ day or, at least if it did, it made no impact on the *mainstream* of the textual tradition there.”<sup>33</sup> What confirms this further is that in several places Origen, the great Christian textual scholar, speaks of textual variants that were in a majority of manuscripts in his day, yet today are in a minority, and vice versa.<sup>34</sup> Granting every gratuitous concession to majority text advocates, in the least this shows that no majority text was readily available to Christians in Egypt. And if that is the case, then how can they argue for a majority on the basis of public accessibility?

## 2. Faulty Assumptions

More serious than a question-begging approach are several decidedly faulty assumptions made by MT/TR advocates. These assumptions are shown to be faulty either by the force of logic or empirical evidence.

*a. Preservation is a necessary corollary of inspiration.* E. F. Hills argued:

If the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Old and New Testament Scriptures is a true doctrine the doctrine of the providential preservation of these Scriptures must also be a true doctrine. It

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<sup>28</sup> B. M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977) 359.

<sup>29</sup> E. F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended!*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Ehrman, “Quest for Methodology,” 43.

<sup>31</sup> See Wallace, “The Majority Text and the Original Text,” 159–66.

<sup>32</sup> Ironically, in this instance majority text advocates—all of whom are theologically conservative—share by analogy some similarities with Bultmann’s separation of the Christ of history and the Christ preached by the early church (i.e., the Christ of faith or kerygmatic Christ).

<sup>33</sup> B. Ehrman, *Didymus the Blind and the Text of the Gospels* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 260 (italics added).

<sup>34</sup> See Wallace, “The Majority Text and the Original Text,” 166.

must be that down through the centuries God has exercised a special providential control... . God must have done this ...<sup>35</sup>

In other words, preservation proceeds from and is a necessary consequence of inspiration. Or, in the words of Jasper James Ray, “the writing of the Word of God by inspiration is no greater miracle than the miracle of its preservation ...”<sup>36</sup> Ehrman has ably pointed out the logical consequences of such linkage:

Any claim that God preserved the New Testament text intact, giving His church actual, not theoretical, possession of it, must mean one of three things—either 1) God preserved it in all the extant manuscripts so that none of them contain any textual corruptions, or 2) He preserved it in a group of manuscripts, none of which contain any corruptions, or 3) He preserved it in a solitary manuscript which alone contains no corruptions.<sup>37</sup>

The problem with these first and second possibilities is that neither one of them is true: no two NT manuscripts agree completely—in fact, there are between six and ten variations per chapter for the closest two manuscripts.

Is it possible that the NT text was preserved intact in a single manuscript? No one argues this particular point, because it is easily demonstrable that every manuscript has scribal errors in it. However, one group does argue that a particular printed edition of the NT has been providentially preserved. Proponents of the Textus Receptus (as opposed to those who argue for the majority text<sup>38</sup>) believe that the TR satisfies this third requirement. There are numerous problems with such a view,<sup>39</sup> but it should be noted that TR advocates are at least consistent in putting preservation on the same level with inspiration.

Nevertheless, there seems to be one major flaw in their approach, from a biblical standpoint: If the TR equals the original text, then the editor must have been just as inspired as the original writers, for he not only selected what readings were to go in this first published edition, but he also created some of the readings. To be specific, the last leaf of Erasmus' copy of Revelation was missing, so he “back-translated” from Latin into Greek and thereby created numerous readings which have never been found in any Greek manuscript. This should cause some pause to those conservative Protestants who hail Erasmus' text as identical with the original, for such a view implies that revelation continued into at least the sixteenth century. Not only this, but Erasmus was a Roman Catholic who battled papists and Protestants alike—the very man against whom Martin Luther wrote his famous *Bondage of the Will*. Are conservative Protestants willing to say that this man was just as inspired as the apostle Paul or John? What is especially ironic about this is that most TR advocates reject the text of Westcott and Hort because (in part), as high church Anglicans, they had Roman Catholic leanings!<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hills, *King James Version Defended!*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Ray, *God Wrote Only One Bible*, 104.

<sup>37</sup> Ehrman, “Quest for Methodology,” 44.

<sup>38</sup> These two text deposits are not identical: there are almost 2,000 differences between them.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., which TR? One of the editions of Erasmus, or Beza, or the Elzevirs? The TR has gone through numerous changes, not the least because Erasmus did a rather poor job of editing the text. Further, once one argues for the infallibility of the TR, any arguments drawn from public accessibility must be limited to the time of the Reformation and beyond, since the TR has scores of readings which not only were not in the majority beforehand, but were also nonexistent.

<sup>40</sup> Not infrequently MT/TR advocates quote from the *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1896). A favorite passage is where Hort writes to Westcott on October 17, 1865: “I have been persuaded for many years that Mary-worship and ‘Jesus’-worship have very much in common in their causes and their results” (2:50). Cf. B. C. Wilkinson, “Our Authorized Bible Vindicated,” in *Which Bible?*, 279; D. A. Waite, *The Theological Heresies of Westcott and Hort*, 39–42.

In passing, it could, with equal justification, be mentioned that not only was Erasmus more Catholic than either Westcott or Hort, but even Burgon had a hidden agenda in his vigorous defense of the longer ending of Mark: he held to baptismal regeneration and Mark 16:16 seemed to him to be the strongest proof-text of this doctrine. E. F. Hills writes that he was “strenuously upholding the doctrine of baptismal regeneration” (“The Magnificent Burgon,” in *Which Bible?*, 87). That this is not an *argumentum ad hominem* is evident by the fact that his personal beliefs directly affected his text-critical approach. (It is perhaps not insignificant that when Hills' essay was reproduced in *True or False?* [in Fuller's introduction], this line about Burgon's beliefs was dropped.)



b. *Preservation must be through "majority rule."* To be sure, most scholars who employ the doctrine of preservation as a test-critical argument do not embrace the TR as equal to the original text. In this, they are not as consistent about the corollary between inspiration and preservation, but they are certainly more rational in other ways. Nevertheless, there are four serious objections to the argument that preservation must be through "majority rule." First, no where does the Bible state how God would preserve the NT text. Thus their argument is based squarely on silence.

Second, as Sturz points out,

... the Bible itself reveals that there have been occasions when there has been a famine or dearth of the Word of God. One thinks, for example, of the days of Josiah (2 Kings 22:8ff.) when apparently the Scriptures were reduced to one copy. Nevertheless, it still could be said that God's Word was preserved.<sup>41</sup>

Third, in light of this biblical precedent of how God preserved a portion of the Old Testament, can we not see the hand of God guiding a man such as Constantin von Tischendorf to St. Catherine's Monastery at the base of Mount Sinai, only to discover codex Sinaiticus—the oldest complete NT known to exist—shortly before it would have met an untimely demise as kindling for the furnace?<sup>42</sup> There are, in fact, countless stories of manuscript discoveries which seem to speak quite eloquently for God's providential preservation of the text.<sup>43</sup> A more biblically based view of God's providential ways would not argue that God's hand is only seen or always seen in "majority rule."

Fourth, theologically one may wish to argue against the majority: usually it is the remnant, not the majority, that is right. If the history of Christianity teaches us anything, it teaches us that the majority is rarely right. Taylor points out a particularly cogent analogy:

... Hills' understanding of God's providential dealings in history fails to account for greater problems than the comparatively minor differences between the Textus Receptus and its modern rival. For example, God in His providence allowed in the medieval ages the doctrine of justification by faith to be almost eclipsed from public understanding until the Reformation leaders again called attention to that doctrine. Would Hills have God concerned that an exact form of the New Testament text be available but unconcerned about serious and widespread soteriological misunderstandings?<sup>44</sup>

The weight of this argument is especially felt when one considers that the variations between the majority text and modern critical texts are qualitatively very minor; most would say that no doctrine is affected by such differences.<sup>45</sup> If God did not protect a major doctrine like justification, on what basis can we argue that he would protect one form of the text over another when no doctrinal issues are at stake?<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> H. A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984) 41–42.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 2d ed. (Oxford: University Press, 1968) 42–45. Recent evidence has come to light that suggests that the monks at St. Catherine's were not burning leaves of ancient manuscripts at all and that Tischendorf's account may indeed have been told so that what was in reality a theft would look like a rescue mission. I am currently investigating this version of how Codex Sinaiticus made its way from Egypt to Russia.

<sup>43</sup> One thinks, for example, of C. H. Roberts rummaging through the basement of the John Rylands Library of Manchester University in 1935, only to chance upon a small scrap of papyrus which included portions of five verses from John's gospel (18:31–33, 37–38), and was dated in the first half of the second century. In light of the radical German view of the date of John as C. A.D. 170 (harking back to F. C. Baur a century earlier), this small fragmentary copy of John's gospel, as one scholar put it, "sent two tons of German scholarship to the flames."

<sup>44</sup> R. A. Taylor, "The Modern Debate Concerning the Greek Textus Receptus: A Critical Examination of the Textual Views of Edward F. Hills" (Ph.D. dissertation, Bob Jones University, 1973) 156.

<sup>45</sup> Cf., e.g., D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 56.

c. *Public accessibility of a pure text is a theological necessity.* We have touched on this to some degree already—at least by way of analogy. But the argument is also contradicted by direct evidence. Pickering believes that “God has preserved the text of the New Testament in a very pure form and it has been readily available to His followers in every age throughout 1900 years.”<sup>47</sup> There are two fundamental problems with this view.

First, assuming that the majority text (as opposed to the TR) is the original, then this pure form of text has become available only since 1982.<sup>48</sup> The *Textus Receptus* differs from it in almost 2,000 places—and in fact has several readings which have “never been found in any known Greek manuscript,” and scores, perhaps hundreds, of readings which depend on only a handful of very late manuscripts.<sup>49</sup> Many of these passages are theologically significant texts.<sup>50</sup> Yet virtually no one had access to any other text from 1516 to 1881, a period of over 350 years. In light of this, it is difficult to understand what Pickering means when he says that this pure text “has been readily available to [God’s] followers in every age throughout 1900 years.”<sup>51</sup> Purity, it seems, has to be a relative term—and, if so, it certainly cannot be marshaled as a theological argument.

Second, again, assuming that the majority text is the original, and that it has been readily available to Christians for 1900 years, then it must have been readily available to Christians in Egypt in the first four centuries. But this is demonstrably not true, as we have already shown.<sup>52</sup> Pickering speaks of our early Alexandrian witnesses as “polluted” and as coming from a “sewer pipe.”<sup>53</sup> Now if these manuscripts are really that defective, and if this is all Egypt had in the first three or four centuries, then this peculiar doctrine of preservation is in serious jeopardy, for those ancient Egyptian Christians had no access to the pure stream of the majority text. Therefore, if one were to define preservation in terms of the majority text, he would end up with a view which speaks very poorly of God’s sovereign care of the text in ancient Egypt.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Sturz gives some further helpful analogies (*Byzantine Text-Type*, 38): “Preservation of the Word of God is promised in Scripture, and inspiration and preservation are related doctrines, but they are distinct from each other, and there is a danger in making one the necessary corollary of the other. The Scriptures do not do this. God, having given the perfect revelation by verbal inspiration, was under no special or logical obligation to see that man did not corrupt it. He created the first man perfect, but He was under no obligation to keep him perfect. Or to use another illustration, having created all things perfect, God was not obligated to see that the pristine perfection of the world was maintained. In His providence the world was allowed to suffer the Fall and to endure a defacement of its original condition.”

<sup>47</sup> Pickering, “Burgon,” 90.

<sup>48</sup> Pickering states, “In terms of closeness to the original, the King James Version and the *Textus Receptus* have been the best available up to now. In 1982 Thomas Nelson Publishers brought out a critical edition of the Traditional Text (Majority, “Byzantine”) under the editorship of Zane C. Hodges, Arthur L. Farstad, and others which while not definitive will prove to be very close to the final product, I believe. In it we have an excellent interim Greek Text to use until the full and final story can be told” (*Identity*, 150).

<sup>49</sup> Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 100.

<sup>50</sup> Cf., in particular, 1 John 5:7–8 and Rev. 22:19.

<sup>51</sup> To be sure, Pickering was unaware that there would be that many differences between the TR and *Majority Text* when he wrote this note. Originally, his estimate was between 500 and 1,000 differences (“Burgon,” 120). But in light of the 2,000 differences, “purity” becomes such an elastic term that, in the least, it is removed from being a doctrinal consideration.

<sup>52</sup> Literally scores of studies have been done to prove this, none of which Pickering seems to be aware. Gordon Fee speaks of Pickering’s “neglect of literally scores of scholarly studies that contravene his assertions” and “The overlooked bibliography here is so large that it can hardly be given in a footnote. For example, I know eleven different studies on Origen alone that contradict all of Pickering’s discussion, and not one of them is even recognized to have existed” (A Critique of W. N. Pickering’s *The Identity of the New Testament Text: A Review Article*, *WTJ* 41 [1978–79] 415).

<sup>53</sup> “Burgon,” 93.

<sup>54</sup> We could add here an argument concerning the early versions. None of the versions produced in the first three centuries A.D. was based on the Byzantine text. But if the majority text view is right, then each one of these versions was based on polluted Greek manuscripts—a suggestion that does not augur well for God’s providential care of the NT text, as that care is understood by the majority text

d. *Certainty is identical with truth.* It seems that the underlying motive behind MT/TR advocacy is the equation of certainty with truth. For TR advocates, certainty is to be found in a printed edition of the New Testament. Hills' despair of finding absolute textual certainty through the standard means of textual criticism ultimately led him to abandon textual criticism altogether and replace it with a settled text, the Textus Receptus. Theo Letis, the self-proclaimed heir of Hills' mantle, argues that "without a methodology that has for its agenda the determination of a continuous, obviously providentially preserved text ... we are, in principle, left with maximum uncertainty, as Edward Hills characterizes it, versus the maximum certainty afforded by the methodology that seeks a providentially preserved text."<sup>55</sup>

For MT advocates, certainty is found in the majority of manuscripts. Pickering argues, for example, that "If the Scriptures have *not* been preserved then the doctrine of Inspiration is a purely academic matter with no relevance for us today. If we do not have the inspired Words or do not *know* precisely which they be, then the doctrine of Inspiration is inapplicable."<sup>56</sup> At one point Pickering even states that uncertainty over the text also makes inspiration untrue.<sup>57</sup>

In response, several things can be mentioned. First, it should be noted that in one respect TR advocates are much more consistent than MT advocates: not only do they put preservation on exactly the same level as inspiration, but they also can be more certain about the text, since they advocate a printed edition. But their argumentation is so palpably weak on other fronts that we will only make two observations here: (a) since the TR itself went through several different editions by Erasmus and others, TR advocates need to clarify which edition is the inspired one; (b) one simply cannot argue for the theological necessity of public accessibility throughout church history and for the TR in the same breath—for the TR did not exist during the first 1500 years of the Christian era. (Rather inconsistent, for example, is the logic of Theo Letis when he, on the one hand, argues that God must have preserved the pure text in an open, public, and accessible manner for Christians in every generation<sup>58</sup> and, on the other hand, he argues that "the Latin and non-majority readings [of the TR] were indeed restorations of ancient readings that fell out of the medieval Greek tradition!"<sup>59</sup>)

Second, regarding MT proponents, several criticisms can be leveled, two of which are as follows. (a) Pragmatically, there is in reality less certainty in their approach than there is among reasoned eclectics. In the Byzantine text, there are hundreds of splits where no clear majority emerges. One scholar recently found 52 variants within the majority text in the spaces of two verses.<sup>60</sup> In such places how are majority text advocates to decide what is original? Since their method is in essence purely external (i.e., counting manuscripts), in those places the majority text view has no solution, and no certainty. At one point, Pickering recognized this lack of certainty: "Not only are we presently unable to specify the precise wording of the original text, but it will require considerable time and effort before we can be in a position to do so."<sup>61</sup> Ironically, therefore, according to Pickering's own theological construct,

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view. But if these versions were based on polluted manuscripts, one would expect them to have come from (and be used in) only one isolated region (for if only *some* Christians did not have access to the pure text, God's sovereignty might be supposed still to be left intact). This, however, is not the case: the Coptic, Ethiopic, Latin, and Syriac versions came from all over the Mediterranean region. In none of these locales was the Byzantine text apparently used. (For further discussion and documentation, see Wallace, "The Majority Text and the Original Text," 161–62.)

<sup>55</sup> Letis, *Continuing Debate*, 200.

<sup>56</sup> Pickering, "Burgon," 88.

<sup>57</sup> W. N. Pickering, "Mark 16:9–20 and the Doctrine of Inspiration" (unpublished paper distributed to members of the Majority Text Society, September, 1988) 1.

<sup>58</sup> Letis, *Continuing Debate*, 192–94.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>60</sup> K. Aland, "The Text of the Church?" (*TrinJ* 8 [1987] 136–37), commenting on 2 Cor. 1:6–7a. To be fair, Aland does not state whether there is no clear majority 52 times or whether the Byzantine manuscripts have a few defectors 52 times. Nevertheless, his point is that an assumption as to what really constitutes a majority is based on faulty and partial evidence (e.g., von Soden's apparatus), not on an actual examination of the majority of manuscripts. Until that is done, it is impossible to speak definitively about what the majority of manuscripts actually read.

<sup>61</sup> *Identity of the New Testament Text*, 150. In Pickering's theological construct, then, the doctrine of inspiration has no significance, for elsewhere he argued "If we do not have the inspired Words or do not *know* precisely which they be, then the doctrine of Inspiration is inapplicable"

inspiration for him must be neither relevant nor true. (b) Logically/theologically, the equation of inspiration with man's recognition of what is inspired (in all its particulars) virtually puts God at the mercy of man and requires omniscience of man. The burden is so great that a text critical method of merely counting noses seems to be the only way in which human beings can be "relatively omniscient." In what other area of Christian teaching is man's recognition required for a doctrine to be true?

Finally, a general criticism against both the MT and TR positions: the quest for certainty is not the same as a quest for truth. There is a subtle but important distinction between the two. Truth is objective reality; certainty is the level of subjective apprehension of something perceived to be true. But in the recognition that truth is objective reality, it is easy to confuse the fact of this reality with how one knows what it is. Frequently the most black-and-white, dogmatic method of arriving at truth is perceived to be truth itself. Indeed, people with deep religious convictions are very often quite certain about an untruth. For example, cultists often hold to their positions quite dogmatically and with a fideistic fervor that shames evangelicals; first-year Greek students want to speak of the aorist tense as meaning "once-and-for-all" action; and almost everyone wants simple answers to the complex questions of life. At bottom this quest for certainty, though often masquerading as a legitimate epistemological inquiry, is really a presuppositional stance, rooted in a psychological insecurity.<sup>62</sup>

To sum up so far: The TR/MT advocates get entangled in numerous question-begging approaches and faulty—even contradictory—assumptions in their arguments concerning the providential preservation of the text. That is not the worst of it, however. Their view also is non-biblical.

### 3. Non-Biblical Doctrinal Basis

We are often told that the consistently Christian view, or the only orthodox view of the text is one which embraces the Byzantine text-type, and that to embrace a different form of the text is to imbibe in heresy. Although this charge is vigorously denied by non-MT/TR evangelicals, the tables are rarely turned. It is our contention, however, that to use the doctrine of preservation in support of the MT/TR is to have a non-biblical view which cannot consistently be applied to both testaments. The majority text-preservation connection is biblically unfounded in four ways, two of which have already been touched on.

*a. Biblical silence.* As we have argued concerning the faulty assumption that preservation must be through "majority rule," the scriptures nowhere tell us how God would preserve the NT text. What is ironic is that as much ink as MT/TR advocates spill on pressing the point that theirs is the only biblical view, when it comes to the preserved text being found in the majority of witnesses, they never quote one verse. Although they accuse other textual critics of rationalism, their argument for preservation via the majority has only a rational basis, not a biblical one. "God must have done this"<sup>63</sup>—not because the Bible says so, but because logic dictates that this must be the case.

*b. Old Testament examples of preservation.* Again, as we have already pointed out, the few OT examples of preservation of scripture do not herald the majority, but only the mere existence of a written witness. This fact leads to our third point—that the argument from preservation actually involves bibliological contradictions.

*c. A Marcionite view of the text.* Marcion was a second century heretic whose literary remains are found only in essays written against him. Metzger points out that

The main points of Marcion's teaching were the rejection of the Old Testament and a distinction between the Supreme God of goodness and an inferior God of justice, who was the Creator and the God of the Jews. He regarded Christ as the messenger of the Supreme God. The Old and New Testaments, Marcion argued, cannot be reconciled to each other.<sup>64</sup>

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("Burgon," 88).

<sup>62</sup> Along this line is a significant corollary: those Christians who must have certainty in nonessential theological areas have a linear, or "domino," view of doctrine: if one falls, all fall. A more mature Christian, in our view, has a concentric view of doctrine: the more essential a doctrine is for salvation (e.g., the person of Christ), the closer it is to the center of his theological grid; the less essential a doctrine is (e.g., what he believes about eschatology), the more peripheral it is.

<sup>63</sup> Hills, *King James Version Defended!*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> B. M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 91–92.

It is our contention that majority text advocates follow in Marcion's train when it comes to their doctrine of preservation because their theological argument does not work for the Old Testament. If our contention is true, then the dogmatic basis for the majority text is bibliologically schizophrenic. The evidence is of two kinds.

First, the argument that the divine motive for preservation is public availability—as poor an argument as it is for the Greek text—is even worse for the Hebrew. Not only is it alleged that “God must do more than merely preserve the inspired original New Testament text. He must preserve it in a public way ... through the continuous usage of His Church,”<sup>65</sup> but that “down through the ages God’s providential preservation of the New Testament has operated only through believers ...”<sup>66</sup> But the Hebrew scriptures were neither preserved publicly—on display through the church as it were—nor only through Christians. In light of this, how can majority text advocates escape the charge of Marcionism? In what way can they argue that a bibliological doctrine is true for the NT but is not true for the OT?

Second, it is demonstrable that the OT text does not meet the criteria of preservation by majority rule. Although the Masoretic textual tradition (which represents almost the entirety of the extant Hebrew manuscripts) is highly regarded among most OT textual critics, none (to my knowledge) claim that it is errorless.<sup>67</sup> Most OT scholars today would agree with Klein that “Samuel MT is a poor text, marked by extensive haplography and corruption—only the MT of Hosea and Ezekiel is in worse condition.”<sup>68</sup> In fact, a number of readings which only occur in versions (i.e., not in the extant Hebrew manuscripts at all), or are found only in one or two early Qumran manuscripts, have indisputable claim to authenticity in the face of the errant majority.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, in many places, all the extant Hebrew manuscripts (as well as versions) are so corrupt that scholars have been forced to emend the text on the basis of mere conjecture.<sup>70</sup> Significantly, many such conjectures (but not all) have been vindicated by the discovery of the

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<sup>65</sup> Hills, *King James Version Defended!*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>67</sup> E. Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), for example, argues that “an arbitrary procedure which hastily and unnecessarily dismisses the traditional text ... can lead only to a subjective form of the text which is uncertain historically and without any claim to theological relevance” (111). He further argues that the Masoretic text “has repeatedly been demonstrated to be the best witness to the text. Any deviation from it therefore requires justification” (113). Yet, as conservative as he is, he hastens to add, “But this does not mean that we should cling to [the Masoretic text] under all circumstances, because it also has its undeniable faults ...” (*ibid.*). For similar statements regarding the value, but not inerrancy, of the Masoretic textual tradition, see F. E. Deist, *Toward the Text of the Old Testament* (Pretoria: Kerkboekhandel Transvaal, 1978) 247–49; R. W. Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: The Septuagint after Qumran* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974) 62–63; F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 61–69.

<sup>68</sup> Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament*, 70. Cf. also F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958) 179–81; E. Tov, “The State of the Question: Problems and Proposed Solutions,” in *1972 Proceedings: IOSCS and Pseudepigrapha*, ed. R. A. Kraft (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1972) 3; and especially E. C. Ulrich, *The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978) 193–221.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. the discussions (and demonstrations) to this effect in D. Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle de l’Ancien Testament: 2. Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986) 361–62 (Isa. 49:12), 403–7 (Isa. 53:11); Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 106–10 (on 108 he argues that Qumran MS 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> at Isa. 2:20 is superior to MT); J. A. Sanders, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967) 17; E. Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1981) 70–72, 288–306; W. H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls for the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) 216–35; G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 203–9; Cross, *Ancient Library*, 169, 189, 191; Bruce, *Second Thoughts*, 61–62, 66–69; Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament*, 62, 71, 74–76; C. E. Pfeiffer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969) 101–9.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. especially J. Kennedy, *An Aid to the Textual Amendment of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928). In the editorial note N. Levison comments that “Dr. Kennedy was very conservative theologically... . [yet] he was possessed with an intense passion for the correction of the Massoretic Text, and, as will be seen from the contents of this book, it was no mere speculation but considered and conscientious study that led him to his conclusions” (p. vii). But note also Brownlee, *Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls*, 231 (where he accepts an emendation by C. C. Torrey for Isa. 53:11,



Dead Sea scrolls.<sup>71</sup> Majority text advocates simply do not grapple with these OT textual phenomena. And if they were to do so and were even to prove many minority text readings or conjectures false, our point would still stand. Only if they could demonstrate that all minority text readings and all conjectures were inferior (or at least probably so), could their argument hold water. The indisputable fact is that OT textual criticism simply cannot be conducted on the basis of counting noses. Since this is the case, either majority text advocates must abandon their theological premise altogether, or else be subject to the charge of a bibliological double standard.

*d. The biblical doctrine of preservation* In light of the occasional necessity of conjectural emendation for the OT text, it is our contention that not only is the majority text argument for preservation entirely wrong-headed, but so is any doctrine of preservation which requires that the exact wording of the text be preserved at all. In spite of the fact that even opponents of the MT/TR view embrace such a doctrine,<sup>72</sup> it simply does not square with the evidence. Only three brief points will be made here, in hopes of stimulating a dialogue on this issue.

First, the doctrine of preservation was not a doctrine of the ancient church. In fact, it was not stated in any creed until the seventeenth century (in the Westminster Confession of 1646). The recent arrival of such a doctrine, of course, does not necessarily argue against it—but neither does its youthfulness argue for it. Perhaps what needs to be explored more fully is precisely what the framers of the Westminster Confession and the Helvetic Consensus Formula (in 1675) really meant by providential preservation.

Second, the major scriptural texts alleged to support the doctrine of preservation need to be reexamined in a new light. I am aware of only one substantial articulation of the biblical basis for this doctrine by a majority text advocate. In Donald Brake's essay, "The Preservation of the Scriptures," five major passages are adduced as proof that preservation refers to the written Word of God: Ps. 119:89, Isa. 40:8, Matt. 5:17–18, John 10:35, and 1 Pet. 1:23–25.<sup>73</sup> One of the fundamental problems with the use of these passages is that merely because "God's Word" is mentioned in them it is assumed that the written, canonical, revelation of God is meant.<sup>74</sup> But 1 Pet. 1:23–25, for example, in quoting Isa. 40:8, uses *rJh'ma* (not *lovgo*)—a term which typically refers to the spoken word.<sup>75</sup> Brake's interpretation of Ps. 119:89 ("For ever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven") is, to put it mildly, improbable: "The

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since "if the verse is to be scanned as poetry at all, some such alteration is necessary"); Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament*, 76 (on 1 Sam. 14:47); Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 108 (on Jer. 2:21); Bruce *Second Thoughts*, 69 (on Isa. 21:8; 53:11; and Deut. 32:8); Deist, *Towards the Text of the Old Testament*, 247–49, 260; D. M. Fouts, "A Suggestion for Isaiah XXVI 16," forthcoming in *Vetus Testamentum* (prepublication draft courtesy of the author).

<sup>71</sup> Ulrich notes that Josephus preserved "at least four genuine Samuel readings which were preserved by no other witness until 4QSam<sup>a</sup> was recovered" (*Samuel and Josephus*, 2). Cf. also Cross, *Ancient Library*, 189 ("4QSam<sup>a</sup> and 1 Chron. 21:16 preserve a verse [2 Sam. 24:16b] which has dropped out of MT by haplography ..."); Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 142 (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> confirms conjectures at Isa. 40:6 and 40:17); Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle*, 361–62 (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> at Isa. 49:12) 403–7 (Isa. 53:11); Brownlee, *Meaning of the Qumran Scrolls*, 218–19 (Isa. 11:6; 21:8) 225–26 (Isa. 49:12) 226–33 (Isa. 53:11).

<sup>72</sup> Taylor's comments in "Modern Debate" are representative: "It is essential, then, that this distinction be maintained between the concepts of inspiration, which insures the reliability of the divine revelation, and preservation, which insures the availability of the divine revelation" (148); "It is certain that if God took such pains to insure by inspiration the accuracy of the original manuscripts, He would not leave to an undetermined fate the future of those writings" (154); "Nothing of the inspired writings has been lost as a result of the transmission of the text. This, too, is in keeping with God's preservation of the Scripture" (163). Cf. also Sturz, *Byzantine Text-Type*, 39–49, *et al.*

<sup>73</sup> Donald L. Brake, "The Preservation of the Scriptures," in *Counterfeit or Genuine?*, 175–218. This essay is a modification of Brake's Th.M. thesis (Dallas Seminary, 1970). "The Doctrine of the Preservation of the Scriptures."

<sup>74</sup> In passing, it should be noted that all these proof-texts, if they refer to the written word at all, refer to the OT. The bibliological inconsistency is thus heightened, for MT/TR advocates apply this doctrine only to the NT.

<sup>75</sup> BAGD, 735 (1).

Word which is settled in heaven was placed there by a deliberate and purposeful act of God Himself.”<sup>76</sup> It seems that a better interpretation of all these texts is that they are statements concerning either divine ethical principles (i.e., moral laws which cannot be violated without some kind of consequences) or the promise of fulfilled prophecy.<sup>77</sup> The assumptions that most evangelicals make about the doctrine of preservation need to be scrutinized in light of this exegetical construct.

Third, if the doctrine of the preservation of scripture has neither ancient historical roots, nor any direct biblical basis, what can we legitimately say about the text of the New Testament? My own preference is to speak of God’s providential care of the text as can be seen throughout church history, without elevating such to the level of doctrine. If this makes us theologically uncomfortable, it should at the same time make us at ease historically, for the NT is the most remarkably preserved text of the ancient world—both in terms of the quantity of manuscripts and in their temporal proximity to the originals. Not only this, but the fact that no major doctrine is affected by any viable textual variant surely speaks of God’s providential care of the text. Just because there is no verse to prove this does not make it any less true.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Brake, “Preservation,” 181–82. Apparently Brake means by this that an exact written copy of the originals was brought to heaven. Not only is this difficult to believe, but it renders the “public accessibility” idea absolutely worthless.

<sup>77</sup> “The scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35), in its context, means “all will be fulfilled” or “all of it is true” rather than “we must have every word preserved.” “Not one jot or tittle from the law will pass away until all is fulfilled” (Matt. 5:18) plainly refers either to the ethical principles of the law or the fulfillment of prophecy, or both. (The validity of each of these options turns, to some degree, on how *plhrovw* is used elsewhere in Matthew and the weight given to those texts—e.g., are Matthew’s OT quotation introductory formulae [*i}{na plhrwqh’/* in 1:22; 2:15; 4:14, etc., connecting the term to eschatological fulfillment] more significant or is Jesus’ own use of *plhrovw* [in 3:15, connecting it to ethical fulfillment] more significant?) Either way, the idea of preservation of the written text is quite foreign to the context.

Occasionally Matt. 24:35 (“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”) is used in support of preservation. But once again, even though this text has the advantage of now referring to Jesus’ words (as opposed to the OT), the context is clearly eschatological; thus the words of Jesus have certainty of fulfillment. That the text does not here mean that his words will all be preserved in written form is absolutely certain because (1) this is not only foreign to the context, but implies that the written gospels were conceived at this stage in *Heilsgeschichte*—decades before a need for them was apparently felt; (2) we certainly do not have all of Jesus’ words recorded—either in scripture or elsewhere (cf. John 20:30 and 21:25).

<sup>78</sup> A possible objection to this statement might be that, on the one hand, we criticize MT advocates for their rational leap of linking preservation to the majority, while on the other hand, here we argue for providential care without having a biblical basis. Is this not the same thing? No. That preservation is to be seen in the majority is an *a priori* assumption turned into a doctrine; that the doctrinal content of the Bible is not affected by the variants is an *a posteriori* demonstration which stops short of dogma. Thus if a viable variant were to turn up that affected a major doctrine, our view of God’s providential care would not be in jeopardy, though it would be reworded. An analogy might be seen in two twentieth century wars: One could say that God’s hand was seen in the Allies’ defeat of the Axis in World War II, as well as the Coalition’s defeat of Iraq in the Persian Gulf War. But on occasion, a given battle in which the weather conditions had previously been reported as quite favorable to the Allies’/Coalition’s cause turned out to be unfavorable, this would not alter our overall picture of God’s sovereignty. Rather, we simply could not appeal to that battle in support of our view. Similarly, our view of God’s providential care of the text does not depend on the nonexistence of viable variants which teach heresy precisely because we are not affirming such on a doctrinal level. Our statement is made solely on the basis of the evidence. And just as historical investigation might uncover certain environmental conditions, or mechanical failures, etc., which were unfavorable to the Coalition forces for a given battle, still the outcome of the Persian Gulf War is not at all altered by such evidence—even so any new discoveries of manuscripts may cause us to reshape how we speak of God’s providential care of the text, but the overall fact derived from empirical evidence is still the same.

## C. Conclusion on the Arguments concerning Preservation

In conclusion, MT/TR advocates argue from a theological vantage point which begs the question historically and logically. More serious than *petitio principii*, they make several faulty assumptions which not only run aground on rational and empirical rocks, but ultimately backfire. The most telling assumption is that certainty equals truth. This is an evangelical disease: for most of us, at some point, the quest for certainty has replaced the quest for truth. But even for majority text advocates, this quest must, in the last analysis, remain unfulfilled. The worst feature of their agenda, however, is not the faulty assumptions. It is that their view of preservation not only is non-biblical, it is also bibliologically schizophrenic in that it cannot work for both testaments. And that, to a majority text or Textus Receptus advocate—as it would be to any conservative Christian—is the most damaging aspect of their theological agenda.

## II. INSPIRATION

Under the general topic of inspiration are two arguments: (1) if any portion of the NT is lost, then verbal-plenary inspiration is thereby falsified; and (2) only in the Byzantine text-type do we have an inerrant NT. This first argument is really the converse of the argument from preservation, while the second argument is a corollary of a corollary.

### A. Does Loss of Text Falsify Inspiration?

In his paper, “Mark 16:9–20 and the Doctrine of Inspiration,”<sup>79</sup> Wilbur Pickering argues that if any portion of the NT is lost, then inspiration is not only irrelevant—it also is not true:

Among those who wish to believe or claim that Mark’s Gospel was inspired by the Holy Spirit, that it is God’s Word, I am not aware of any who are prepared to believe that it could have been God’s intention to terminate the book with *efoubouto gar*.<sup>80</sup>

Are we to say that God was unable to protect the text of Mark or that He just couldn’t be bothered? I see no other alternative—either He didn’t care or He was helpless. And either option is fatal to the claim that Mark’s Gospel is “God-breathed.”<sup>81</sup> ... if God was powerless to protect His Word then He wouldn’t really be God and it wouldn’t make all that much difference what He said.<sup>82</sup> ... If God permitted the original ending of Mark to be lost then in fact we do not have an inspired text.<sup>83</sup>

Anyone who denies the authenticity of Mark 16:9–20 cannot consistently affirm the Divine Inspiration of Mark 1:1–16:8. I now submit the question to the reader: have I not demonstrated that to reject Mark 16:9–20 is to relinquish the doctrine of Divine Inspiration—for Mark, certainly, but by extension for the rest of the Bible?<sup>84</sup>

Majority text advocates, as we have seen, argue that if there is uncertainty over the wording of the text, inspiration becomes irrelevant. Pickering’s argument goes one step beyond: if part of the text is lost, then “we do not have an inspired text.”

This argument seems flawed on five fronts. First, it is special pleading. One has to accept Pickering’s (incomplete) syllogism for this to be true: if God was not able or did not care to protect the text, then inspiration is not true. Why is it not possible for the text to be originally inspired but now lost? Apparently, once again, inspiration necessitates preservation. Further, why is it necessary to impugn either God’s power or his goodness if part of the NT is lost? Analogously, would anyone argue that if Christians—who are born of God—sin, then God is either powerless or not good enough to prevent them from sinning?

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<sup>79</sup> A paper circulated to members of the Majority Text Society, September, 1988.

<sup>80</sup> Pickering, “Mark 16:9–20 and the Doctrine of Inspiration,” 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Second, as we have already mentioned in the first section of this paper, Pickering assumes that inspiration necessitates preservation. Yet, if our arguments against this supposition are correct, then this new argument (viz., lack of preservation implies non-inspiration) carries no weight.

Third, this approach is also Marcionite if there is ever a need for conjectural emendation for the Old Testament. Since that is the case, the loss of text (whether it be one word or a whole chapter) in principle cannot be used as a theological argument for a text critical viewpoint—otherwise proponents of such a view have to say that the OT is not inspired.

Fourth, there is a tacit assumption on the part of Pickering that everything a biblical author writes is inspired. But this is almost certainly not true, as can be seen by the lost epistles of Paul and the *agrapha* of Jesus. The argument is this: there seem to be a few, fairly well-attested (in patristic literature), authentic sayings of Jesus which are not found in the Gospels or the rest of the New Testament. Of course, evangelicals would claim that they are inerrant. But they would not be inspired because inspiration refers strictly to what is inscripturated within the canon. Further, Paul seems to have written three or four letters to the Corinthians, perhaps a now-lost letter to the Laodiceans,<sup>85</sup> and apparently more than a few letters before 2 Thessalonians.<sup>86</sup> If some NT epistles could be lost, and even some authentic sayings of Jesus could show up outside the NT, then either they were not inspired or else they were inspired but not preserved. Assuming the former to be true, then the question facing us in Mark's Gospel is whether an inspired writer can author non-inspired material within the same document—material which is now lost. Such a possibility admittedly opens up a Pandora's box for evangelicals, and certainly deserves critical thought and dialogue. Nevertheless, the analogies with the lost epistles of Paul and the authentic, non-canonical *agrapha* of Jesus seem to damage Pickering's contention that if the last portion of Mark's Gospel is lost, then inspiration is defeated.

Finally, although Pickering is unaware of any evangelical who thinks Mark ended his Gospel at verse 8, there does indeed seem to be an increasing number of scholars who believe this, evangelicals included among them.<sup>87</sup> Ernest Best states, for example, that "It is in keeping with other parts of his Gospel that Mark should not give an explicit account of a conclusion where this is already well known to his readers."<sup>88</sup> Further, he argues that "it is not a story which has been rounded off but an open story intended to draw us on further."<sup>89</sup> At one point he makes a rather intriguing suggestion:

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<sup>85</sup> Col. 4:15–16 speaks of a letter coming to the Colossians from the Laodiceans. This is either now lost (the known "Letter to the Laodiceans" is forged) or is the letter to the Ephesians which circulated counterclockwise through Asia Minor, going from Ephesus, to Laodicea, to Colossae.

<sup>86</sup> The statement in 3:17 ("this greeting is in my own hand, Paul's, which is a sign in every letter [of mine]") seems to imply a well-known practice. Yet, most NT scholars would date only Galatians and 1 Thessalonians as coming prior to this letter—i.e., among the known letters of Paul.

<sup>87</sup> So much so that W. R. Telford could argue, "While a number of scholars would still adhere to the view that the Gospel originally extended beyond 16:8, more and more are coming to the opinion that it was intended to end at 16:8, and that it does so indeed, in literary terms, with dramatic appositeness" ("Introduction: The Gospel of Mark," in *The Interpretation of Mark*, ed. W. R. Telford [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985] 26). Cf. also C. S. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Vol. 27 in the Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1986) 659 ("Mark did indeed finish his gospel at v. 8, and ... he had a specific and well-defined purpose in doing so"); R. P. Mezei, "Mark 16:8—The Ending of Mark's Gospel," *BibRes* 14 (1969) 33–43 ; H. Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, in the New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 351–54; H. Paulsen, "Mark xvi. 1–8," *NovT* 22 (1980) 138–70; N. R. Petersen, "When Is the End Not the End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark's Narrative," *Interp* 34 (1980) 151–66; T. E. Boomershine and G. L. Bartholomew, "The Narrative Technique of Mark 16:8," *JBL* 100 (1981) 213–23. Among those who are evangelicals (in the strictest sense of the word—i.e., inerrantists), a number of authors antedating Pickering's essay held to this view: cf., e.g., N. B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1944) 86–118; W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* in the New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 582–92; J. D. Grassmick also seems to lean toward this view (*Mark* in the Bible Knowledge Commentary [Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983] 193–94).

<sup>88</sup> E. Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) 73.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

Finally it is from the point of view of drama that we can appreciate most easily the conclusion to the Gospel. By its very nature the conclusion forces us to think out for ourselves the Gospel's challenge. It would have been easy to finish with Jesus' victorious appearances to comfort the disciples: they all lived happily ever after. Instead the end is difficult ... The readers or hearers of Mark know the disciples did see Jesus ... Listen to the story as a believer and work it out for yourself. It is like one of Jesus' own parables: the hearer is forced to go on thinking.<sup>90</sup>

Although one would not say that Ernest Best is an arch-conservative, his overall interpretation of the reason for the shorter ending should cause no offense to evangelicals, as is evident by the fact that a number of evangelicals do believe that the Gospel was intended to end at verse 8.<sup>91</sup>

The argument that loss of text invalidates inspiration is, therefore, seen to be logically fallacious, bibliologically inconsistent, and irrelevant for those evangelicals who believe that Mark intended to end his Gospel at the eighth verse of chapter sixteen.

## B. Does the Byzantine Text-type Have Sole Claim to Inerrancy?

Occasionally, MT/TR advocates appeal to inerrancy in support of the Byzantine text-type's superiority. The argument is not new,<sup>92</sup> but it has received a clear articulation recently by James A. Borland. In his article, "Re-examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy,"<sup>93</sup> Borland argues that the Alexandrian readings of 'Asavf in Matt. 1:7, jAmw" in 1:10, and tou' hJlivou ejkclipovnto" in Luke 23:45 are errors and must, for this reason, be rejected (for otherwise they impugn the character of the biblical authors and thereby falsify inerrancy). The reason such are errors, according to Borland, is that, with regard to the Matthean passage, Asaph and Amos were not kings (thus, spelling errors on the part of early Alexandrian scribes); and with regard to the Lukan passage, since "a solar eclipse is impossible astronomically during the full moon of the Passover when sun and moon are 180 degrees apart in relation to the earth"<sup>94</sup> and since the verb ejkleivpw, when used with h{lio", normally indicated an eclipse,<sup>95</sup> Luke would err if he had written this. In both the Matthean texts and the Lukan passage, the Byzantine text-type has readings which do not involve such errors (respectively, 'Asav, jAmw'n, kaiV ejskotivsqh oJ h{lio" ["and the sun was darkened"]). Borland's conclusion is that (1) only in the Byzantine text-type do we have an inerrant Bible and (2) we must pour our text-critical methodology through the doctrinal grid of inerrancy.<sup>96</sup>

Our critique of Borland's linking of inerrancy to the Byzantine text-type is fourfold. First, his argument seems to question either the intelligence or the doctrinal conviction of virtually all members of the Evangelical Theological Society as well as any other non-MT/TR inerrantists—stretching from B. B. Warfield to D. A. Carson. Carson goes so far as to say: "I cannot think of a single great theological writer who has given his energies to defend a high view of Scripture and who has adopted the TR, since the discovery of the great uncials and, later, the papyri and other finds."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>91</sup> See n. 87. Besides literary criticism, another argument could be used to support the view that the gospel ended here: only if Mark's Gospel were originally published in codex form (in which case the last leaf could have possibly fallen off) could one argue that the ending of Mark was lost. But if, as extrabiblical parallels are increasingly showing to be more likely, the Gospel was originally written on a scroll, then the last portion of the book, being at the center of the scroll, would be the least likely portion of the book to be lost.

<sup>92</sup> Cf., e.g., G. Salmon, *Some Thoughts on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: John Murray, 1897) 26; H. C. Hoskier, "Codex Vaticanus and Its Allies," in *Which Bible?*, 143.

<sup>93</sup> J. A. Borland, "Re-examining New Testament Textual-Critical Principles and Practices Used to Negate Inerrancy," *JETS* 25 (1982) 499–506; reprinted in Letis, *Continuing Debate*, 46–57. All references in this paper are to the original article in *JETS*.

<sup>94</sup> Borland, "Negate Inerrancy," 504.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 505, n. 22.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 506.

<sup>97</sup> D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 71.



Second, Borland's view suffers from historical myopia. That is to say, he is superimposing his modern-day, twentieth-century definition of inerrancy on the text. But should not our definition of inerrancy be shaped by both the biblical statements which imply this doctrine as well as the phenomena which indicate how the biblical authors understood it? One is reminded of a typical layman's understanding of inerrancy: the events of the Gospels must be in strict chronological sequence, the red letters in the Bible refer to the *ipsissima verba* (exact words) of Jesus, etc. Faced with the contrary evidence, would it be appropriate to change the text to suit one's doctrine? More analogous still is the Purist controversy in the seventh century.

The beginning of the seventeenth century was marked by the rise of the Purist controversy. The Purists maintained that to deny that God gave the New Testament in anything but pure classical Greek was to imperil the doctrine of inspiration. The Wittenberg Faculty, in 1638, decreed that to speak of barbarisms or solecisms in the New Testament was blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Hence, a correct conception of the peculiar idiom of the Apostles was impossible, and the estimate of different readings was seriously affected by this cause. Readings of existing editions were arbitrarily mingled, the manuscripts employed and the sources of variants adopted were not properly specified, and a full survey of the apparatus was impossible.<sup>98</sup>

In other words, in the seventeenth century many evangelicals argued that the Textus Receptus was not inspired and that many of its readings were even "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." They too had a myopic view of inerrancy, and they too poured their text-critical method through a dogmatic grid—but their conclusions were exactly the opposite of Borland's!

Third, in letting his doctrinal position dictate the outcome of his textual criticism, Borland proves his own position wrong. There are plenty of passages far more troublesome to inerrancy than Matt. 1:7 or Luke 23:45. In fact, these passages hardly constitute a serious difficulty.<sup>99</sup> To be consistent, Borland ought to advocate conjectural emendation wherever inerrancy seems to be in jeopardy. Who would not like a clean harmony between the two records of Judas' demise, uniform parallel accounts of Peter's threefold denial of Jesus, or an outright excision of the census by Quirinius? If Borland is unwilling to perform such radical surgery to the text under the guise of inerrancy, then why does he wave this doctrinal stick at significantly lesser problems? One can only suspect that inerrancy is not driving his decisions; rather, a preservation-majority connection is.<sup>100</sup>

Finally, we question whether it is an epistemologically sound principle to allow one's presuppositions to dictate his text-critical methodology. It is our conviction that this is neither honest to a historical investigation nor fair to one's evangelical heritage. If our faith cannot stand up to the scrutiny of rigorous investigation, then our beliefs need to be adjusted. But if we always jerk back the fideistic reins when the empirical horse goes too fast for us, then the charges of obscurantism, scholasticism, even pietistic dribble are well deserved. Borland believes that "unhappily our widely accepted textual-critical principles and practices may help to accommodate them in their jesting against the inerrancy of Scripture."<sup>101</sup> But surely the jesting will be louder and stronger if we change the rules of the game because the other team is winning!

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<sup>98</sup> M. R. Vincent, *A History of the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1899) 94. Timothy J. Ralston of Dallas Seminary is to be credited with pointing out this quotation to me.

<sup>99</sup> All that needs to be noted is that variant spellings of proper names were in existence in the first century, as well as in the LXX (thus, "Asaph" and "Amos," though unusual spellings, are hardly to be classified as errors); and, as Borland himself admits,  $\epsilon\kappa\lambda\epsilon\iota\upsilon\pi\omega$  with  $h\{\text{lio}$ ", though usually meaning "to eclipse," does not always have this technical nuance. Nevertheless, Borland is quite right that both passages strike one as a bit peculiar. But if they strike us a little odd, then surely they did the same for the ancient scribes—who would have changed the text out of their own pietistic motives. What Borland simply cannot explain is how the Alexandrian readings arose in the first place, rendering them more probably original.

<sup>100</sup> Throughout his article Borland speaks of "the vast numerical superiority" of his preferred reading ("Negate Inerrancy," 504). He concludes the article by saying, "In our quest for the true reading we must not confine ourselves to a few early MSS while forgetting the thousands of MSS that each bear an independent testimony to the text" (ibid., 506).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 506.

In many respects, the theological premise of the TR/MT proponents is commendable. Too many evangelicals have abandoned an aspect of the faith when the going gets tough. That certain students of the NT have held tenaciously to a theological argument concerning the text of the NT speaks highly of their piety and conviction. If their view were biblically founded, it would also speak highly of their orthodoxy. But, as we have seen, their theological *a priori* is neither biblically, nor logically, nor historically sound.

Concerning preservation, their underlying motive that the quest for certainty is identical with the quest for truth speaks volumes about their method. Their most self-defeating argument is that truth must be found in the majority—for not only does this contradict God's normal *modus operandi*, but it does not at all work for the Old Testament. Thus those who practice textual criticism by "majority rule" end up with a doctrine which promotes a bibliological double standard. At precisely this point they are out of step with orthodoxy, resembling more the ancient heretic Marcion in their view of the text.

Byzantine text advocates' arguments which are related more directly to inspiration and inerrancy also falter. Pickering's argument that loss of text falsifies inspiration is, once again, Marcionite (for there is loss of text in the OT), and his lone example—the longer ending of Mark—is irrelevant to anyone who thinks that the evangelist intentionally ended his Gospel at 16:8. Borland's argument is that the presuppositions of inerrancy must drive our text-critical methodology and that, consequently, only in the Byzantine text-type do we have an inerrant text. This view was found to be not only isolationist (in which inerrancy is defined only in twentieth century terms which are, moreover, not shared by the vast bulk of twentieth century inerrantists), not only inconsistent (otherwise he would have to appeal to conjectures wherever he felt the text erred), but also epistemologically, historically, and evangelically unsound.

In sum, there is no valid doctrinal argument for either the Textus Receptus or the majority text. A theological *a priori* has no place in textual criticism. That is not to say that the majority text is to be rejected outright. There may, in fact, be good arguments for the majority text which are not theologically motivated. But until TR/MT advocates make converts of those who do not share with them their peculiar views of preservation and inspiration, their theory must remain highly suspect.