

## **Bible Translations: Has the Word of God Been Changed?**

by  
Jason Dulle  
[JasonDulle@aol.com](mailto:JasonDulle@aol.com)

In this article I do not intend to defend any one translation of the Scripture or any one Greek text-type, but rather critically evaluate the arguments being used in favor of preferring the Byzantine Text and Textus Receptus/KJV over the Critical Text/modern translations, demonstrating their weaknesses. Such an evaluation is a prerequisite for the formation of any well-informed position on such an important issue as this.

### **Terminology**

When delving into an issue such as this there are many technical terms to which most believers are not well acquainted. In order to avoid confusion I will define these terms and describe how they are being used.

There are two terms used to refer to the Greek manuscripts which reflect readings contained in the majority of all extant manuscripts: Byzantine Text, Majority Text. I will use the former term in reference to the corpus of all individual manuscripts reflecting a majority of all readings (the corpus of which is referred to as a 'family' or 'text-type'), and the latter term when speaking of the published text reflecting an eclectic (choosing the most likely original readings from among all existing variants contained in the manuscripts) reading of all individual Byzantine Text-type manuscripts.

This published text is called *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, published in 1982 by Thomas Nelson Publishers (Nashville). The text was edited by Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad, with the help of Wilbur Pickering. Until that time there was no official published Greek text which contained the readings found in the majority of all manuscripts. This text is the only modern attempt to accumulate the majority of readings from all existing manuscripts, and collate them into one document.

There are also two terms used to refer to the Greek manuscripts which reflect certain readings contained in a minority of all extant manuscripts: Critical Text, Minority Text. I will only use the former term in reference to both the corpus of all individual manuscripts reflecting non-Byzantine readings, and the two primary published texts reflecting an eclectic and critical reading of all manuscripts. These two texts are United Bible Societies 4th edition (UBS) and Nestle-Aland 27th edition (NA).

There is a distinction between a "reading" and a "text/text-type." While the distinction will be elaborated upon later, let it suffice to say here that a text/text-type is a whole document (manuscript) or collection of documents (manuscripts) reflecting certain characteristics. A reading is a particular portion of a whole document.

One more issue needs to be noted for those readers who are somewhat familiar with the terminology employed in these kinds of discussions. The Byzantine Text is often referred

to by others as the "Majority Text," the two terms being used virtually synonymously. Such an exchange of terminology can confuse the reader to believe that the "Majority Text" means that all manuscripts classified by this name always contain the majority of readings found among all existing Greek manuscripts. Such is not the case. This is just one reason why I choose to refer to these same manuscripts by the term "Byzantine Texts."

The label of "Majority Text" can also be confused with the published text of Hodges/Farstad referred to as the Majority Text. Because of the confusion that can result it seems better to refer to the manuscript text-type as "Byzantine," and the published, eclectic text of this same corpus of manuscripts as the "Majority Text."

Now, with the above distinctions of text/reading we can distinguish between an individual Byzantine manuscript as a text-type, and the majority of all readings. The former is a document which most often contains readings found in the majority of all existing manuscripts, while the latter is the way the majority of all manuscripts record a particular section of Scripture. The Byzantine Text-type consists of readings which usually manifest conformity to the majority of all extant manuscripts. The fact remains that every reading in each Byzantine manuscript does not always contain the reading found in the majority of all extant manuscripts regardless of text-type. There are places in every individual manuscript of the "Majority Text-type" wherein are contained readings found in the minority of all extant Greek manuscripts. So each "Majority Text-type" manuscript (as it is referred to by others) does contain minority readings. The Majority Text published by Hodges/Farstad extracted the majority readings found by comparison of all Greek manuscripts, and collated them into one Greek text.

#### **What Constitutes the Word of God?**

It is being noted today that the new translations of the Bible do more than modernize the language of the KJV, but change other vital aspects as well. The changes are often associated with Satan and his desire to pervert the Word of God. While it is true that there are more differences in the translations than language style, to say that the differences have been a perversion or change to the Word of God is a judgment call based on certain presuppositions. To say that something has been changed assumes a standard by which all else is to be judged for variation. It appears to have been assumed that the KJV is the unperverted Word of God because it is based on the Byzantine Text-type, and therefore is the standard by which all other versions are to be judged for accuracy.

The real question is, What constitutes the Word of God? The simple fact of the matter is that all translations, including the KJV, are based on Greek manuscripts discovered over the centuries, which are copies of the original autographs penned by the apostles. It is those original autographs that are the true Word of God. Any translation to be considered the Word of God must accurately reflect the originals..

#### **Why Are there Differences Among Translations?**

The ~5400 manuscripts of the New Testament which we currently possess do differ in several places, as is to be expected with the written transmission of any historical document.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that we have no certainty as to the original wording of the New Testament. Textual critics have ascertained the certainty of 98.33 % of the text.<sup>2</sup>

Less than two percent of the text is subject to question, making the New Testament the best preserved ancient text known to man. It is the remaining 1.67 %, however, which affects the different translations of the New Testament available today.

The two broadest categories/families of texts (although there are more) are known as the Byzantine Text (a.k.a. Majority Text) and Critical Text (a.k.a. Minority Text). The smaller, less significant families of text are called the Western Text and Caesarean Text. The Critical Text dates older than the Byzantine, but is also more limited in count. The real issue is not which English translation is best per se, but rather which Greek text underlying the various translations most accurately reflects the original autographs.

#### **Byzantine vs. Minority?**

The various discrepancies in the ~5400 Greek manuscripts are not always cut along Byzantine vs. Critical Text lines. Not all non-Byzantine Texts read one way, and all Majority Texts another. To set up the issue as a Majority Text or Minority Text is to ignore a very crucial fact: the variants in the manuscripts are not cut along text-family lines, and therefore cannot be determined merely on this basis. The readings found in the Byzantine or Critical Text are not uniform. Each text-family has variant readings within its own corpus of manuscripts. The Critical Text-type, for example, may have four or five different readings at the same juncture among the various manuscripts. It is not a Byzantine vs. Critical issue. Each variant must be examined individually among all the manuscript evidence (both Byzantine and Critical Texts combined) to determine the original reading. If each text-family evidences variation even among itself, we must conclude that all existing manuscripts, whether they be of the Byzantine or Critical Text-family, corrupt the original words of the apostles in some places, and preserve them in others. What must be determined is which of the variant readings found in both the Byzantine and Critical Texts preserves the inspired text. It is a matter of *weighing* each variant, not *counting* manuscripts.

When it comes to translations, then, it is not a matter of one translation changing the Word of God. It is a matter of the different translation committees making different choices among all the variants as to the original wording of the text, and then translating their choices as to the original wording into English.<sup>3</sup> The newer translations are translating accurately from the manuscript copies of the Greek text they believe best preserve the original Word of God penned by the apostles. Many of these manuscripts are much closer in time to the original autographs of the apostles than those used by Erasmus to formulate his Greek text (from which the KJV was translated), and therefore could be more accurate than the later texts. Whether or not they are more accurate, or more corrupt is an entirely other question which is too detailed to pursue here.

#### **Erasmus and the Textus Receptus**

Erasmus compiled a text of the Greek New Testament in AD 1516 (which came to be known as the Textus Receptus, or *Received Text*), which, after subsequent minor changes by two other men, was used as the basis for the translation of the 1611 KJV. Concerning whether or not the text used by the KJV translators is the best choice as to the original wording is open to question. Erasmus had a mere six Greek manuscripts at his disposal to form his version of the Greek New Testament, the earliest of which dated back

to the tenth-century.<sup>4</sup> Determining the original reading on such a small selection of manuscripts, so separated in time from the originals, should cause us to take a second look at this text.

It may be argued that although Erasmus only had six Greek texts to base his text off of at the time, the thousands of manuscripts discovered since then confirm that his Greek version did reflect the Byzantine Text/majority of all readings. It should be pointed out in response that Erasmus' Greek text is not identical to the Byzantine Text. Although the two texts are more similar than are the Critical Text and the Textus Receptus (TR),<sup>5</sup> the Byzantine Text differs from the TR in over 1,838 places, thus the reading of the KJV does not always reflect the reading of the Byzantine Text.<sup>6</sup> In fact, there are some places in the TR where Erasmus' rendition of the Greek was not found in any of his manuscripts, and which have yet to be found in any Greek manuscript. One such example is Acts 9:6 where it is said of Paul, "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what will thou have me to do?" This reading was interpolated from the Latin Vulgate into Erasmus' text, without any textual evidence for its inclusion. Sadly, this reading made it into the KJV.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Does the Majority Win?**

In the argument over the Byzantine/Critical Text, many assume that the Critical Text is incorrect simply because it is in the minority count of all existing manuscripts. Such a philosophy of evaluating the evidence assumes that majority determines truth. This is not a logical evaluation of the evidence. If the majority determines truth, we must also conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity is truth. The majority of believers are Trinitarian, and the doctrine has been the prevailing teaching for the longest period of Christian history, but upon evaluation of the evidence, we as Oneness Pentecostals have concluded that the doctrine of the Trinity is not the truth.

Likewise, determining the correct reading of the text does not come by counting manuscripts, but by evaluating the different readings to determine how they came to be, and work backwards to determine the actual reading from which all the variant readings came from.

#### **The Byzantine Text Was Once in the Minority**

The labels of "Majority Text" and "Minority Text" also need evaluation. These labels are modern labels attached to the various textual families based on the perspective of our own era. Looking at all ~5400 manuscripts in our day, the majority of all readings reflect what we call the Byzantine or Majority Text. But the readings found in the Critical Text at one time constituted the majority of all Greek texts. The readings found in the Critical Text-type predominated the early centuries of the church, while the readings of the Byzantine Text-type were virtually unknown.<sup>8</sup> The earliest manuscript reflecting the Byzantine Text-type readings comes from the late fourth century.<sup>9</sup> In the thousands of Scripture quotations from the church fathers before the fourth-century, not one quote is distinctly of the Byzantine Text-type.<sup>10</sup> The early translations also bear the same evidence. There are nearly 8,000 manuscript translations of the Scripture in the early Latin Vulgate, all of which more clearly reflect the Critical Text rather than the Byzantine.<sup>11</sup>

The readings of the Byzantine Text were at one time in the minority. They did not actually

become the majority until the tenth-century when these readings finally began to multiply in copies. From that time the readings found in the text-family we now call the Byzantine/Majority Text began to predominate over the "Minority Text" readings. What is actually the minority and the majority depends upon which century one is viewing the evidence from. A fourth-century believer would have concluded that the "Majority Text" was indeed the minority reading. At one time the Byzantine Text-type was in fact the minority of all texts!

How did the minority of readings become the majority?-time. The readings of the Byzantine Text continued to be copied in the regions of Byzantium long after the copying of the Greek manuscripts had practically ceased in the West and South. In these regions the spoken and written language shifted from Greek to Latin, and thus the Scriptures were predominately translated into Latin and copied in Latin. It is not difficult to see how multiplication had much to do with the fact that the readings of the Byzantine Text-type (which were the minority until around the tenth-century) became the majority of all manuscripts.

To demonstrate how this could be let us use the example of a penny. If one takes a penny and doubles it for thirty days, they would end up with \$10,737,418.24. If one takes another penny and doubles it for ten days they would have a mere \$10.24. There is a big difference in the final figures because of the extra time the one penny was allowed to be copied over the other. This does not prove that the Byzantine Text does not contain the most accurate readings of the original autographs, but does argue against the idea that the majority of all readings *must* be the most accurate. If the text which was copied over and over to form the majority of all manuscripts during the Middle Ages was not as accurate as earlier manuscripts, then all those texts which flowed from it would also be inaccurate (the Byzantine Text). The task is not over number counting, but on reconstructing the most reasonable original reading based on the variant readings we possess today. Determining this has much to do with one's philosophy of textual criticism (the science of determining the original reading), not the number of the texts supporting such and such a reading.

To further demonstrate the above point, let us imagine that we have two documents (A & B) which have some discrepancies between them, but both were copied from one common document. Over a period of four days document A is copied in a copier-machine 20 times; document B is copied 400 times over a period of two weeks. After twenty years, 6 documents of A are lost, and 49 documents of B are lost. Now we have 14 documents which read like A, and 351 which read like B. When trying to establish the original reading we do not say that 351 is greater than 14, so the reading of document B must be correct. There are two readings based off of two original copies, each of which has been copied in various quantities during a certain period of time. The question is which of these two types of readings most likely reflects the original, not which reading has more manuscripts supporting it.

A second reason the Byzantine Text readings outweigh the Critical Text readings is due to the age and places of the respective texts. The Critical Text readings of Greek manuscripts are found mainly in the West and in Egypt, and were only copied in Greek in

early history (because of the language change from Greek to Latin). The Byzantine Text readings are mainly found in the Eastern regions of Byzantium, where the capital of the Roman empire continued, as did the use of the Greek language. Because they continued to copy the manuscripts in Greek until the invention of the printing press, while the East ceased copying the manuscripts in Greek centuries before, it is to be expected that fewer of the Eastern/Southern manuscripts (Critical Text manuscripts between 1100-1900 years old) would survive the journey of history than would manuscripts copied in the East some 400-1000 years ago.

#### **Evidence Against the Authenticity of the Byzantine Text as the Original Text**

If the Byzantine Text is the best text, and most accurately reflects the original autographs, why do we have no evidence for its existence as a distinct text-type before the fourth-century? For Paul's letters we have no evidence of its existence before the ninth-century.<sup>12</sup> This has serious consequences for the particular view of preservation of God's Word that Byzantine Text advocates propose. Are we to believe that in 800 years of church history the orthodox were only able to preserve one true manuscript containing Paul's letters, but hundreds of corrupt manuscripts were allowed to remain in existence, and were preserved nonetheless? This is quite a leap of faith. Would it not be easier to believe that the Majority Text-type for Paul's letters did not exist until around the ninth-century?

If the Byzantine Text-type was the text used by the early church we would at least expect it to be the basis of one of the ancient translations, yet again we find no evidence validating the Byzantine Text's existence before the fourth-century. The Old Latin (translated in the second-century) evidence Western Text-type readings; the Coptic translations evidence Alexandrian Text-type readings; the earliest Syriac versions evidence Western and Alexandrian Text-type readings. None of these early translations evidence a Byzantine Text as its basis. It is not until the Gothic versions of the late fourth-century that we find evidence of the Byzantine text-type for a translation.

The implications of this historical fact are extremely important for the subject at hand. Daniel Wallace notes the death-blow the early translations deal to the supremacy of the Majority Text view:

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 New Testament text, as that care is understood by the majority text 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. This 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. This is strong evidence that the Byzantine text simply did not exist in the first three centuries--anywhere.<sup>13</sup>

Not only are there no extant manuscripts or translations reflecting the Byzantine Text-type before the fourth-century, but the Church Fathers also do not evidence any knowledge or possession of a Byzantine Text-type. This is very important because there are approximately 86,000 quotations of the NT in the writings of the Fathers, and many of these writings antedate any Greek manuscript reflecting the same corpus of verses in

question. There are so many quotations from the Fathers that most of the NT could be constructed from their quotations alone, without any Greek NT manuscripts. Arguably, our knowledge of the way in which the original autographs read is greatly expanded by these quotations which antedate many of the earliest extant Greek manuscripts.

If the Byzantine Text-type is the original Word of God, and has been readily available to the church for the past 1900 years, we would expect the Church Fathers' quotations to reflect the Byzantine Text readings, not the readings of other text-families. The exact opposite is true. There are no distinctly Byzantine readings found in the Fathers before the fourth-century, and thus no evidence for the existence of the Byzantine Text-type in first three hundred years of the church. The earliest witnesses as to the wording of the Scripture, which usually predate any existing Greek manuscript of the NT by decades or even hundreds of years, give witness against the existence of the Byzantine Text in the early church, not evidence for it. The first historical figure to utilize a clearly Byzantine Text was Asterius, a heretic from the fourth-century.<sup>14</sup>

Some Majority Text/KJV advocates will object to the above because there are hundreds of quotations in the Fathers which reflect a Byzantine reading. We must distinguish, however, between Byzantine readings quoted by the Fathers before the fourth-century, and the existence of the Byzantine Text-type before the fourth-century. There is evidence of Byzantine readings in the Fathers before the fourth-century, but no evidence of a distinctly Byzantine Text from which they were quoting. There is a vast difference between the two. An analogy offered by Daniel Wallace will be of great assistance to demonstrate this distinction. The KJV is a "text," as is the RSV. "In the beginning was the Word" is a particular "reading." The fact that this reading is found in both the KJV text and the RSV text does not mean that the RSV as a text existed in 1611.<sup>15</sup> There are many readings from the KJV which are also found in the RSV, but they are two entirely distinct texts, which came into existence at two entirely different times. If one was to read the passage, "In the beginning was the Word," quoted in one of John Wesley's writings, and declare that this is a quote from the RSV, others would quickly realize that this statement is absurd seeing that the RSV did not exist during Wesley's lifetime.

Although there are many readings of the Byzantine Text-types that appear in the Fathers before the fourth-century, none of these readings are distinctly Byzantine, and nearly every one of them can be found in other, earlier text-types. The simple fact of the matter is that the Fathers did not have, and did not quote from any fully Byzantine Text manuscripts. They quoted readings which are found in the later Byzantine manuscripts, but they also quoted from Alexandrian, Western, and Caesarean texts. If the Byzantine Text-type was the uncorrupted text-type which was used by Fathers, why do we find readings other than the Byzantine Text, and why would we find the "corrupted" readings of the non-Byzantine Text in their writings? Were the Fathers not the same individuals who were opposing the heretical tamperings with the Scriptures (as we shall see later)?

Considering the fact that the Byzantine Text-type is not found in the writings of the Church Fathers, the early translations, or the Greek manuscript evidence prior to the fourth-century strongly argues against the notion that the Byzantine Text is the Greek text which

has been available to the church for the past 1900 years, and strongly argues for the fact that the Byzantine Text-type was non-existent in the early church.

#### **From Whose Perspective?**

If indeed the Critical Text is the more accurate text (which is being assumed for the sake of argument), then all claims that the Critical Text adds to or takes away from the Word of God become meaningless, because the Critical Text would be the original Word of God given to the Apostles, and thus would be the standard to judge the Byzantine Text. From this perspective the Byzantine Text would be the text that often adds to or takes away from the Word of God. All claims that the Critical Text tampers with the Word of God are contingent upon being able to prove that the Byzantine Text alone preserves the original wording of the apostles—a conclusion which is not easy to demonstrate because of the lack of evidence.

#### **Common Objections to the Critical Text as Offered by Byzantine Text Advocates**

*The Critical Text is a Non-Existent Text*

It is commonly asserted that modern Bible scholars/translators manufacture a Greek text of the NT which does not follow any ancient manuscript. While it is true that Nestle-Aland's 27th Edition and UBS' 4th Edition Greek texts (the eclectic Greek texts the modern Bibles commonly resort to for their translation) are eclectic texts (selecting readings from a variety of manuscripts as opposed to adopting the readings contained in one manuscript), it is equally true that the TR and the published Majority Text are eclectic texts. For the production of the TR Erasmus had to choose between the textual variants in the six Greek manuscripts at his disposal, and the differences in the translations from which he worked.

Hodges and Farstad used an eclectic approach to the Byzantine manuscripts when producing *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*. The readings found in the published Majority Text are not found in any one specific Greek manuscript, but rather are derived from many different Byzantine manuscripts. The charge against the Critical Text that it is not based on any one particular manuscript is equally true of the TR and the published Majority Text.

There are only three options when it comes to determining the original reading of the Greek text. The first is to take one particular Greek manuscript and make it to be the original wording. There are a few problems with this approach, however. First, since every extant manuscript contains some element of error or discrepancy when compared to other manuscripts, upon what objective basis can we determine which of the thousands of manuscripts preserves the original words of the apostles and prophets without error? Secondly, what would we do with all the readings of the other ~5400 manuscripts? Do we ignore them? It would be foolish to adopt one particular manuscript's reading to the disposal of the other ~5400 witnesses.

The second option is to adopt a particular historical compilation of various Greek manuscripts. If this approach is taken we must decide which historical compilation is the original text. Is it the Textus Receptus, the Majority Text, Nestle-Aland's 27th edition, or UBS's 4th edition? To choose any of these as the original Greek text of the apostles and prophets would require an objective basis and good supporting evidence. Even then, to



adopt any of these published Greek texts is to support the eclectic approach to determining the original reading of the NT because each of these texts were produced from an eclectic approach to the extant manuscripts.

If we do not adopt either of the above options, then we are only left with an eclectic approach to determining the original wording of the NT, and that by a comparison of all extant manuscripts, not just one textual family. The eclectic approach to determining the original reading is necessary because there are variants in each manuscript, and in all text-families. Each variant must be weighed to determine which one preserves the inspired words given to the NT authors. Even the Byzantine Texts differ among themselves in many places. It is not as though all of the Byzantine Text-type manuscripts read one way, while the Critical Text manuscripts read several ways. Both textual-families have discrepancies among them, thus an eclectic approach must be taken no matter which text-type one believes to have best preserved the words of the apostles. There are hundreds of cases in the Byzantine Text-type in which the variant readings are nearly split in count, and no clear majority emerges. How are we to handle these cases when the Byzantine Text-type does not give us a majority reading? To condemn the eclectic approach to determining the original Greek text of the NT is to condemn every published Greek text (including the TR and Majority Text), and by extension every translation available to us today, because each translation comes from an eclectic approach to the Greek text.

*The Critical Text is Shorter Than the Byzantine Text, and Thus  
Takes Away From the Word of God*

It is commonly stated that the Critical Text is always shorter than the Byzantine Text, and thus the Critical Text is taking away from the Word of God. But a review of the evidence does not support such a conclusion. Comparing the Critical Text with Hodges/Farstad's Majority Text, there are 6577 places of difference, 4331 of which do not change the length of the passage, and only 1589 wherein the Byzantine Text is longer than the Minority Text. That is less than 25% of the differences. In 657 places the Byzantine Text is actually shorter than the Critical.[16](#)

*The Critical Text is Derived From the Corrupted Manuscripts of the Early Heretics*

Byzantine Text advocates often assert that many manuscript copies of the Scripture were corrupted in the early centuries of the church (pre-fourth-century), and these corrupted manuscripts are identified with the non-Byzantine Text-types, or particularly the Alexandrian Text-family which usually stands behind the modern translations. The following quotes from the Church Fathers do confirm that there were some heretical groups in the early church who did change and corrupt some manuscripts:

"But their chief and founder, Tatianus, having formed a certain body and collection of Gospels, I know not how, has given this the title Diatessaron, that is the gospel by the four, or the gospel formed of the four; which is in the possession of some even now. It is also said that he dared to alter certain expressions of the Apostles, in order to correct the composition of the phrase."  
[Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, Reprinted 1991), 166.]

"...Theodotus, the leader and father of this God-denying apostasy, as the first one that asserted that Christ was a mere man. ... The sacred Scriptures ... have been boldly perverted by them; the rule of the ancient faith they have set aside, Christ they have renounced, not inquiring what the Holy Scriptures declared, but zealously laboring what form of reasoning may be devised to establish their impiety."... But as to these men who abuse the acts of the unbelievers, to their own

heretical views, and who adulterate the simplicity of that faith contained in the Holy Scriptures,.... For this purpose they fearlessly lay their hands on the Holy Scriptures, saying that they have corrected them. And that I do not say this against them without foundation, whoever wishes may learn; for should any one collect and compare their copies one with another, he would find them greatly at variance among themselves. For the copies of Asclepiodotus will be found to differ from those of Theodotus. Copies of many you may find in abundance, altered, by the eagerness of their disciples to insert each one his own corrections, as they call them, i.e. their corruptions. Again the copies of Hermophilus do not agree with these, for those of Appollonius are not consistent with themselves. For one may compare those which were prepared before by them, with those which they afterwards perverted for their own objects, and you will find them widely differing. ... For either they do not believe that the Holy Scriptures were uttered by the Holy Spirit, and they are thus infidels, or they deem themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and what alternative is there but to pronounce them daemoniacs? For neither can they deny that they have been guilty of the daring act, when the copies were written with their own hand, nor did they receive such Scriptures from those by whom they were instructed in the elements of the faith; not can they show copies from which they were transcribed." [Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, Reprinted 1991), 214-216.]

Tertullian (second-century AD) spoke of Marcion's tampering with Luke's gospel, saying, "For if the (Gospels) of the apostles have come down to us in their integrity, whilst Luke's, which is received amongst us, so far accords with their rule as to be on a par with them in permanency of reception in the churches, it clearly follows that Luke's Gospel also has come down to us in like integrity until the sacrilegious treatment of Marcion. In short, when Marcion laid hands on it, it then became diverse and hostile to the Gospels of the apostles. I will therefore advise his followers, that they either change these Gospels, however late to do so, into a conformity with their own, whereby they may seem to be in agreement with the apostolic writings (for they are daily retouching their work, as daily they are convicted by us); or else that they blush for their master, who stands self-condemned either way - when once he hands on the truth of the gospel conscience smitten, or again subverts it by shameless tampering. Such are the summary arguments which we use, when we take up arms against heretics for the faith of the gospel, maintaining both that order of periods, which rules that a late date is the mark of forgers, and that authority of churches which lends support to the tradition of the apostles; because truth must needs precede the forgery, and proceed straight from those by whom it has been handed on." [Tertullian, Book III Ch. V]

The above quotations confirm that there were heretics in the early centuries of the church who attempted to change some manuscripts to fit their doctrinal persuasions, but the assumption being made by Byzantine Text proponents as to the *identity* of the corrupted manuscripts needs to be questioned. First of all, why would it be strange to think that it was the Byzantine Texts which were the corrupted manuscripts? This would make sense considering the fact that there is no evidence for a Byzantine text before the fourth-century. There would be little evidence for the Byzantine texts in the first centuries of the church because the orthodox would have attempted to stamp out the heretical copies. Some could have survived, and subsequently been carried off to Byzantium to be copied multiple times by Eastern scribes, which now makes up the Majority Text readings. I do not claim that this conjecture is true, but it is just as equal of an option, and based on as much evidence as the declaration that the heretical copies are to be identified with the non-Byzantine Text-types. In all probability the corrupted manuscripts were destroyed by the orthodox or perished in time, and thus are not represented in any extant manuscript today, or only a few. The point which must be seen here is that the identity of these corrupted manuscripts spoken of by the Fathers is mere guess-work on the behalf of the Majority Text advocates.

### Conclusion

Considering the debate over translations, it must be realized that all translations can only be considered the Word of God insofar as they accurately determine the original wording of the texts penned by the apostles, and correctly translates the same into the English language. The KJV is not the standard to judge the accuracy of the newer translations, but is rather one translation among many which made a judgment call as to the reading of the original autographs. The KJV, along with all other modern versions must be evaluated in light of all the manuscript evidence available to us today, and not the evidence in light of the translation.

Too often debates over translations degenerate into the complete discrediting of one, and unconditional acceptance of another, elevating the latter to a near-inspired status. This is an uneducated and dishonest stance to take. All translations have their pros and their cons, and unique translational errors. No translation is without flaw, or should be accepted without question. Every translation must be evaluated critically and individually based on the available evidence. We should not canonize one particular version because it is old and tested, or new and popular, but must evaluate the evidence behind the translation to see if the translation accurately reflects the Word of God given to the apostles and prophets of old. With this sort of evaluation we may come to believe that one particular translation is to be preferred over another, but we will not fall prey to blindly labeling some translations as 'tools of Satan' or 'perversions of the Word of God' without examining the critical issues of the Greek texts and translation theories behind each translation.

Although the issue of which textual tradition (Byzantine or Critical) best preserves the Word of God is extremely important (and which translation by extension), any conclusions we may come to is not going to change the message of the Gospel. The passages which are affected by variant readings do not affect any major doctrine, and do not change the Biblical message. We should focus on the amazing similarities between the texts, and their ability to communicate the Gospel, rather than focusing on their dissimilarities, which are often trivial.

### Footnotes

1. James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), 39. [<back>](#)
2. *Ibid.* [<back>](#)
3. It should be noted that no modern versions base their translation solely on the Majority or Minority Text. All use an eclectic text, i.e. choosing the best readings from among all the existing manuscripts. The newer versions utilize both the Minority and Majority Texts. [<back>](#)
4. Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 102. [<back>](#)
5. There are approximately 6,577 differences between the Majority and Minority Texts. It is often said that the Minority Text has shorter readings than the Majority Text, and is then concluded that the Minority Text takes away from the Word of God. In all reality there are only 1,589 places in which the Majority Text is longer than the Minority Text, which is less

than one-fourth of all occurrences. There are 657 places where the Majority Text is actually shorter than the Minority Text. All claims that the Minority Text takes away from the Word of God must be reconsidered in light of this fact (Daniel B. Wallace, "Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text;" available from <http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/89c3.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 May 1999). [<back>](#)

6. Daniel B. Wallace, "Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text;" available from <http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/89c3.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 May 1999. [<back>](#)

7. Metzger, 100. [<back>](#)

8. White, 152. [<back>](#)

9. Ibid. [<back>](#)

10. Daniel B. Wallace, "The Conspiracy Behind the New Bible Translations;" available from <http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/conspire.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 May 1999. [<back>](#)

11. Wallace, "Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text." [<back>](#)

12. Daniel B. Wallace, "The Majority Text and the Original Text: Are They Identical?"; available from <http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/91b2.htm>; Internet; accessed 24 January 2001. [<back>](#)

13. Ibid. [<back>](#)

14. Ibid. [<back>](#)

15. Ibid. [<back>](#)

16. Wallace, "Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text." [<back>](#)

<http://www.apostolic.net/>"<http://www.apostolic.net/>

[Email](#) | [Statement of Faith](#) | [Home](#) | [Browse by Author](#) | [Links](#) | [Copyright](#) | [Q & A](#) | [Submitting Articles](#) | [Search](#)