

How the Majority Text Camp Identifies the Actual Text

(Excerpts from Pickering's *Identity of the New Testament Text*)

In prior editions of this book (except Identity III) I began Chapter 7 with Burgon's "Notes of Truth". Burgon was a product of his time, as we all are. He defended the Traditional Text against challenges based on a few early MSS. Then the work of H. von Soden, H.C. Hoskier, and more recently F. Wisse, showed that it is possible to group the MSS empirically, on the basis of a shared mosaic of readings. In the Apocalypse Hoskier identified nine groups or families. Wisse's study in Luke reduced 1,386 MSS to 37 groups (plus 89 "mavericks"). Such groups must be evaluated for independence and credibility.

I am sure that if Burgon were alive today he would agree that the discoveries and research of the last hundred and some years make possible, even necessary, some refinements on his theory. I proceed to outline what I used as a stepping-stone to my present approach to N.T. textual criticism. (I ventured to call it Original Text Theory-OTT.)¹

1) First, OTT is concerned to identify the precise original wording of the N.T. writings.²

2) Second, the criteria must be biblical, objective and reasonable.³

3) Third, a 90% attestation will be considered unassailable, and 80% virtually so.⁴

4) Fourth, Burgon's "notes of truth" will come into play, especially where the attestation falls below 80%.⁵

5) Fifth, where collations exist, making possible an empirical grouping of the MSS on the basis of shared mosaics of readings, this must be done. Such groups must be evaluated on the basis of their performance and be assigned a credibility quotient. A putative history of the transmission of the Text needs to be developed on the basis of the interrelationships of such groups. Demonstrated groupings and relationships supersede the counting of MSS.⁶

6) **Sixth, it presupposes that the Creator exists and that He has spoken to our race.** It accepts the implied divine purpose to preserve His revelation for the use of subsequent generations, including ours. It understands that both God and Satan have an ongoing active interest in the fate of the N.T. Text—to approach N.T. textual criticism without taking due account of that interest is to act irresponsibly.⁷

7) Seventh, it insists that presuppositions and motives must always be addressed and evaluated.⁸

1 I had thought of resurrecting the term 'traditional', but since Burgon and Miller were not here to protest, I hesitated; besides, that term is no longer descriptive. Terms like 'antiochian' or 'byzantine' carry an extraneous burden of antipathy, or have been preempted (besides not being precisely descriptive). So here's to Original Text Theory. Since I really do believe that God has preserved the original wording to our day, and that we can know what it is on the basis of a defensible procedure, I do not fear the charge of arrogance, or presumption, or whatever because I use the term 'original'. All textual criticism worthy the name is in search of original wording.

2 Here I reject the allegation that the original wording is lost and gone.

3 Here I reject the dependence on subjective criteria and a purely rationalistic approach.

4 This is now superseded by advances in point 5, although a 90% attestation remains difficult to assail.

5 This is also basically superseded by point 5, although his 'notes' remain valid, in general.

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

7 Those who exclude the supernatural from their model are condemning themselves to never arrive at the Truth—God and Satan exist, and both have been involved in the transmission of the NT Text.

8 In any scientific inquiry a rigorous distinction must be made between evidence, presupposition and interpretation. Since one's presuppositions heavily influence, even control, his interpretation of the evidence (that should be the same for everyone), any honest scholar needs to state his presuppositions openly. It is doubtless too much to expect sinners to expose their motives to the light of day (John 3:20).