

# The Multivalence of the Term “Original Text” in New Testament Textual Criticism

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## Introduction

One hundred and ninety-one years ago, in 1808, Johann Leonhard Hug’s *Introduction to the New Testament* carried statements that, in part, may strike textual critics as being far ahead of their time. Hug laments the loss of all the original manuscripts of the New Testament writings “so important to the church” and wonders: “How shall we explain this singular fact?” Next, he observes that Paul and others employed secretaries, but Hug views the closing salutation, written in the author’s own hand, as “sufficient to give them the value of originals.” Then, referring to the further role that scribes and correctors must have played after such a Christian writing had been dictated by its author, he says:

Let us now suppose, as it is very natural to do, that the same *librarius* [copyist] who was employed to make this copy, made copies likewise for opulent individuals and other churches – and there was no original at all, or there were perhaps ten or more [originals] of which none could claim superiority.<sup>1</sup>

A writing with no original? Or, with ten originals? And proposed by a scholar at the outset of the nineteenth century? Later Hug asserts that “the New Testament has had the peculiar fate of suffering more by intentional alterations than the

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works of profane literature . . . and the heretics, to whom it would perhaps be attributed, had no share in it.”<sup>2</sup> What he is saying by both assertions is that, because “strange things had happened in individual mss, even at this early period”<sup>3</sup> (that is, before the mid-third century). The originals of the New Testament writings, through such alterations, have been obscured and the very notion of an “original” has been confounded.

This illustration from an early generation of modern criticism is hardly necessary to remind current textual critics that the question of “original text” in the New Testament is not only complex and tangled, but is also an issue that confronts one with increased intensity and urgency in this generation when, quite understandably, ambiguity is pervasive and multiple meanings are endemic to this multicultural world. The issue of “original text” is, for example, more complex than the issue of canon, because the former includes questions of both canon and authority. It is more complex than possessing Greek gospels when Jesus spoke primarily Aramaic, because the transmission of traditions in different languages and their translation from one to another are relevant factors in what is “original.” It is more complex than matters of oral tradition and form criticism, because “original text” encompasses aspects of the formation and transmission of pre-literary New Testament tradition. It is more complex than the Synoptic problem and other questions of compositional stages within and behind the New Testament, because such matters affect definitions of authorship, and of the origin and unity of writings. More directly, it is more complex than making a textual decision in a variation unit containing multiple readings when no “original” is readily discernible, because the issue is broader and richer than merely choosing a single “original” and even allows making no choice at all. Finally, what “original text” signifies is more complex than Hermann von Soden’s, or Westcott-Hort’s, or any other system of text types, or B. H. Streeter’s theory of local texts, or various current text-critical methodologies, including the criteria for originality of readings, or “rigorous” versus “reasoned” eclecticisms, or claims of theological tendencies or ideological alterations of readings and manuscripts, because the question of “original text” encompasses all of these and much more.

To be sure, New Testament textual critics have placed the words “original text” in quotation marks, but do they really understand what is signified thereby? Actually, those tiny marks protect against full disclosure, for – while conveying little by way of specifics – they appear to provide a generalized caution against expecting overly precise or fully confident conclusions, and thereby for most textual critics they signal a measure of humility in the face of the awesome task of accommodating and analyzing the thousands of manuscripts and the few hundred thousand variant readings that transmit a very small body of ancient writings. Why, then, should textual critics be expected to define and to disclose their purposes in fine detail when already they are overwhelmed by data and are struggling to find the way out of this textual morass? Yet, to the extent that the use of quotation marks around the words

“original text” represents a flight from forthrightness in the statement of text-critical goals, is it not time that textual critics scrutinize those aims and intentions, evaluate them realistically, and then articulate them as clearly as possible?

At this point textual critics may well be tempted to turn and run away – perhaps like the young man of Mark 14:51–52, because, like him, they feel caught in the face of a difficult and intractable situation, and they wish to flee, as it were, even if naked into the night. Yet, while textual critics may flee from the issue, the issue itself will not go away. Indeed, New Testament textual critics have been both slow and reticent to face what the term “original text” might mean or what implications might flow from any given definition of it, and they have been much more reluctant than their text-critical colleagues in Hebrew Bible or Septuagint studies to confront this issue.<sup>4</sup> Rather than using such negative terms, however, I much prefer to put a positive and forward-looking slant on the matter and to say that New Testament textual critics now have an opportunity to view afresh the richness and the possibilities for insights into the tradition and the theological culture of early Christianity that arise out of an analysis of “original text.”<sup>5</sup>

### **The Use of the Term “Original Text” Past and Present and Its Multivalence**

It is not only appropriate but helpful to place any discussion of original text in its historical and disciplinary setting. Two phases may be identified in the evolving understanding of “original text,” one that may be designated simply as the past, and another that may be characterized as a current, emerging use of the term, though there were preparatory developments for this latter phase that require elucidation as well.

#### **The Past Use of “Original Text”**

One might assume that all older text-critical manuals state simply and without reservation that the object of New Testament textual criticism is to establish the original text, that is, what the writers originally wrote – the autographs. A few handbooks do just that. For instance, long ago, in his text-critical manual of 1815, Frederick Nolan spoke of determining “the authentik readings” and of “ascertaining the genuine text of the sacred canon,”<sup>6</sup> and in 1878 Thomas R. Birks sought the principles that would show “what is the true and genuine form of the original text of the New Testament.”<sup>7</sup> It would be natural to expect a simple, straightforward goal from F. J. A. Hort, who characterizes the Westcott-Hort critical edition (1881) as “an attempt to present exactly the original words of the New Testament, so far as they can now be determined from surviving documents,” echoing, of course, the title of the Westcott-Hort edition, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*.<sup>8</sup> As all will recognize, however,

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the Westcott-Hort text and the theory behind it are not as simple matters as this statement suggests. It is interesting to note, however, that C. R. Gregory specifically names the Westcott-Hort “pre-Syrian” text the “Original Text,” repeating that it is “to all intents and purposes the Original Text. No one has been doctoring it. No one has set about changing it.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, “original” (at least for Gregory) can signify a critical text established on certain methodological grounds. Notice also the first sentence in Alexander Souter’s 1913 handbook: “Textual criticism seeks, by the exercise of knowledge and trained judgment, to restore the very words of some original document which has perished. . . .” Here “original” means autograph. Souter then appends a further assertion, frequently echoed elsewhere: “If we possessed the twenty-seven documents now comprising our New Testament exactly in the form in which they were dictated or written by their original authors, there would be no textual criticism of the New Testament.”<sup>10</sup> Of course, textual critics know how shortsighted is this latter statement, how much better they now understand the breadth of the discipline, and what it can tell them of the history of the church, its doctrine, and its culture. Perhaps it is unfair to make an example of Souter in this way, for both his small volume and his other works are sophisticated contributions. Yet it is of interest to discover just how few handbooks of New Testament textual criticism so simply define its task. A final, more recent example is found in J. H. Greenlee’s manual: “Textual criticism is the study of copies of any written work of which the autograph (the original) is unknown, with the purpose of ascertaining the original text.”<sup>11</sup> Again, “original” means autograph.

But elsewhere (besides Hug), the matter is far more complicated. At first glance, for example, Frederic Kenyon in 1901 appears to have stated the same simplistic goal for textual criticism: “the ascertainment of the true form of a literary work, as originally composed and written down by its author.” A page later, however, he explains that once “the original autograph” is gone, anyone who wishes to “know exactly what an author wrote has to discover it by examination of later copies, of which the only fact certain *a priori* is that all will be different and all will be incorrect.”<sup>12</sup> Where does that leave the search for the original text?

Surprisingly, other handbooks virtually ignore the entire issue and move directly to describing the witnesses available, the making of printed editions, and the practice of textual criticism – that is, how variant readings are to be evaluated. M. J. Lagrange does this (though the aim of textual criticism can be found in his preface: “to determine as nearly as possible the original text of the manuscript delivered to the public by the author”).<sup>13</sup> It is nonetheless surprising that the two manuals most widely used today – those of Bruce Metzger and of Kurt and Barbara Aland – also fall into this category. Both of these manuals proceed quickly to the materials of criticism, to critical editions and the history of the text, and to the practice of evaluating readings. Hence, in both manuals the search is rather lengthy for a definition or goal of textual criticism.

The Alands' handbook on *The Text of the New Testament* aims to provide “the basic information necessary for using the Greek New Testament and for forming an independent judgment on the many kinds of variant readings characteristic of the New Testament textual tradition,”<sup>14</sup> but it is only after 279 pages, when the authors turn to the praxis of textual criticism, that statements relevant to its aim appear. The Alands then set down as the first of twelve basic principles that “only *one* reading can be original, however many variant readings there may be.”<sup>15</sup> A dozen pages later they assert that “it is precisely the overwhelming mass of the New Testament textual tradition . . . which provides an assurance of certainty in establishing the original text,” for “. . . there is still the evidence of approximately 3,200 manuscripts of the New Testament text, not to mention the early versions and the patristic quotations [and] – we can be certain that among these there is still a group of witnesses which preserves the original form of the text. . . .”<sup>16</sup> We know from other writings of Kurt Aland that, on one hand, he can identify the “original text” with the kind of text that can be abstracted from the forty-eight earliest papyri and uncials<sup>17</sup> – those dating up to and around the turn of the third/fourth century – when he states that here the early history of the New Testament text “can be studied in the original.”<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, elsewhere Aland equates the original with the text of the latest Nestle-Aland and United Bible Society Greek New Testament, when, in referring to this common text, he asserts that it “has passed the test of the early papyri and uncials. It corresponds, in fact, to the text of the early time.” This leads Aland to the conclusion that “a hundred years after Westcott-Hort, the goal of an edition of the New Testament ‘in the original Greek’ appears to have been reached.”<sup>19</sup> Hence, the aim is to attain the “original” text, but what precisely is it?

Finally, Bruce M. Metzger's *Textual Commentary* puts the goal in the form of a question: “What is the original text of the passage?”<sup>20</sup> The title of his widely used handbook, of course, implies a text-critical goal: *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*.<sup>21</sup> But it is only well into this latter volume that Metzger refers to “efforts to ascertain the original text of the New Testament,”<sup>22</sup> and later appears the insistence that the textual critic must “rectify the errors.”<sup>23</sup> Little else of this nature appears in Metzger's text, although the diligent reader will find a clearer definition tucked away in the preface: “The textual critic seeks to ascertain from the divergent copies which form of the text should be regarded as most nearly conforming to the original.”<sup>24</sup>

Now, it is this last kind of *qualified* statement of the aim of New Testament textual criticism, namely, to establish the text “most nearly conforming to the original” or “as close to the original as possible” that is typical of what one finds elsewhere in numerous handbooks, though in varying forms and occasionally, but not often, with more explicit caveats. For instance, as far back as 1854 Samuel P. Tregelles asserted that:

The object of all Textual Criticism is to present an ancient work, as far as possible, in the very words and form in which it proceeded from the

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writer's own hand. Thus, when applied to the Greek New Testament, the result proposed is to give a text of those writings, as nearly as can be done on existing evidence, such as they were when originally written in the first century.<sup>25</sup>

Nor should one neglect to point out that Hort's statement cited earlier spoke of presenting "exactly the original words . . . *so far as they can now be determined from surviving documents.*"<sup>26</sup> Even Benjamin Warfield's frequently repeated statement regarding "original text" has a qualifier at the end – though it is not always quoted. Warfield wrote: "The autographic text of the New Testament is distinctly within the reach of criticism *in so immensely the greater part of the volume*, that we cannot despair of restoring . . . His Book, word for word, as He gave it by inspiration to men."<sup>27</sup> It is not necessary to multiply examples,<sup>28</sup> for in expressing the text-critical goal some kind of qualifying phrase, usually along the lines of "the most likely original text," is what most in the field have said or still say.

It should be clear that this review of handbooks on New Testament textual criticism has yielded little clarity regarding the use or meaning of "original text," and it is for this reason that I have pursued the matter at length – precisely to make the point that over the greater part of two centuries virtually no discussion of this matter is to be found in the very volumes that have been the major guides in the theory and practice of the discipline. At times, as has been shown, the term "original text" may be given an equivalent, such as "autograph," but discussion of the concept is lacking. Although I shall continue my search, the same judgment, I think, can be rendered on virtually all monographs and articles in the field up to the present time – with the exception of the several recent and current items to be discussed presently. It is significant also that nowhere in any of the examples cited above does "original text" appear in quotation marks.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, simply to speak of "the most likely original text" or that which is "as close as possible to the original," or to use similar qualifiers is clearly another way of putting quotation marks around the term. To reverse the image, these qualifying phrases doubtless represent what most textual critics signify by placing quotation marks on the term "original." Neither the qualifying phrases, nor the caveats, nor quotation marks, however, clarify or define "original" in any meaningful fashion. Most important of all, the term "original" in all of these formulations appears to have in view a *single* original text of the New Testament writings, with the assumption, I presume, that this "original" is to be identified with the autograph (at least ideally) and apparently with little thought given to questioning this assumption.

Now, "original" used in this sense of a single entity or a singular target automatically invokes the notion of "canon," that is, of authority.<sup>30</sup> While many textual critics have in the past and still employ the term with that unspoken bias, others have used the term "original text" to designate an elusive, unrealistic target, for which was then substituted "the earliest attainable or recoverable

text" as a reasonable goal for the discipline. Yet, even this redefinition of "original text," unaccompanied as it was by any close analysis, clarifies the problem only slightly, if at all, and only at a superficial level.

In view of the preceding survey, I choose to categorize these manuals and other text-critical studies as representative of the *past* as far as this issue of "original text" is concerned, and to name as the *present* or *current* view a change that is emerging in a small corner of New Testament textual criticism.

### An Emerging Use of "Original Text"

As far as I can discover, the pursuit by New Testament textual critics of a more specific, more clearly defined and more critically scrutinized, and hence a more honest meaning for the term "original" has appeared only in the past decade, and primarily in the work of a few members of the Society of Biblical Literature's New Testament Textual Criticism Group and of a creative and forward-looking scholar in the United Kingdom. Basic in their work are two relevant and crucial factors: first, their willingness to examine the assumptions underlying the notion of "original text" and to face the daunting implications of such an analysis; and, second, their insistence that the New Testament text and its myriad variant readings be scrutinized within the theological and sociocultural settings in which they were employed and manipulated. I begin, however, by defining what appears to me to have been a major stimulus for the new phase in our understanding of "original text."

*Stimulus from Helmut Koester.* The impetus for this new exploration came to some of us during a 1988 Notre Dame University conference on "Gospel Traditions in the Second Century," organized by William L. Petersen,<sup>31</sup> and specifically from a challenge launched there by Helmut Koester. Koester's discussion of "The Text of the Synoptic Gospels in the Second Century"<sup>32</sup> was introduced by the fully acceptable observation that (except for the fragment  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$ ) no second-century manuscript evidence for the New Testament exists<sup>33</sup> and, therefore, severe problems attend the reconstruction of the textual history of the gospels in the first century of their transmission. Koester then startled many by turning on its head the New Testament textual critics' standard claim that they are fortunate to have so many early manuscripts so close to the time the writings originated. In contrast, he aptly observed that "the oldest known manuscript archetypes are separated from the autographs by more than a century. Textual critics of classical texts know that the first century of their transmission is the period in which the most serious corruptions occur." He then added the provocative note that "textual critics of the New Testament writings have been surprisingly naïve in this respect."<sup>34</sup>

Working from textual agreements between Matthew and Luke when they use Mark, and from comparisons of the *Secret Gospel of Mark* with canonical Mark, Koester argued that an earlier form of Mark can be discerned behind

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the canonical Mark; that the latter represents a revision; and that the former becomes the “oldest accessible text of the Gospel of Mark” – accessible, that is, through the comparisons adduced. Next, using the gospel material quoted by Justin Martyr (ca. 150), Koester postulated that Justin’s aim was to produce “one inclusive new Gospel” by harmonizing or by using a harmony of Matthew and Luke; as he proceeded, Justin reveals a freedom to modify this material (to demonstrate, for example, a more complete fulfillment of prophecy in the events of Jesus).<sup>35</sup> Koester’s view is much more complex than this quick summary, but his point – whether or not his hypothesis is sustained in all of its detail – is clear and sharp:

[T]he text of the Synoptic Gospels was very unstable during the first and second centuries. With respect to Mark, one can be fairly certain that only its revised text has achieved canonical status, while the original text (attested only by Matthew and Luke) has not survived. With respect to Matthew and Luke, there is no guarantee that the archetypes of the manuscript tradition are identical with the original text of each Gospel. The harmonizations of these two Gospels demonstrate that their text was not sacrosanct and that alterations could be expected . . . New Testament textual critics have been deluded by the hypothesis that the archetypes of the textual tradition which were fixed ca. 200 CE . . . are (almost) identical with the autographs. This cannot be confirmed by any external evidence. On the contrary, whatever evidence there is indicates that not only minor, but also substantial revisions of the original texts have occurred during the first hundred years of the transmission.<sup>36</sup>

Whether or not textual critics acquiesce in all of these charges, a strong challenge remains, for they are left not only with text-critical questions – for example, which variants of Mark are most likely original? – but also with penetrating canonical questions, such as, which Mark is original?

Similar issues arise with respect to the composition of the other Synoptics, the Fourth Gospel, the Pauline letters, and other portions of the New Testament. The relation to the Fourth Gospel of the well-known Egerton Papyrus 2 (currently dated ca. 200) is one such example. Although usually understood as a later excerpt from all four gospels, Koester (retaining a dating in the first part of the second century) views the papyrus as representing a text older than John because, “with its language that contains Johannine elements but reveals a greater affinity to the Synoptic tradition, it belongs to a stage of the tradition that preceded the canonical gospels.”<sup>37</sup> If so, the gospel of which these surviving fragments were a part would have been read, without question, as authoritative in some early church(es) and possibly also could have played a role in the composition of our gospels. Again, the question arises, what or where is the original Mark? Or Matthew? Or Luke? Or John?

Now, if the goal of textual criticism is to recover the most likely “original” text, what in actuality is the object of textual critics’ research – a text of the gospels that is somewhat earlier than but very likely similar to the text of



the earliest manuscripts, or a text of even earlier and now largely lost predecessor forms of these gospels? In other words, textual critics face two or more questions rather than one: first, a prior question as to which Mark (or John, or Corinthian letters, or Ephesians, etc.) is “original,” followed by the more traditional inquiry as to which variant readings of a particular work are “original.” More clearly than before, the multivalence of the term “original text” emerges and confronts textual critics with its complexity.

Incidentally, should the illustrative examples employed here be rejected by some, others could be adduced, given that hypotheses about pre-literary or predecessor literary layers behind many of the present New Testament writings are numerous and of long standing. I have employed these examples from Koester, however, for two compelling reasons. First, his examples were educed in a specifically text-critical context that, as a matter of course, invited scrutiny of the term “original text” in a fresh and provocative fashion, and, second, these examples very directly “jump-started” my own ruminations on the meaning of “original text” and without doubt influenced others as well.<sup>38</sup>

I wish now to invoke, in chronological order, four contemporary views that appear to have departed decisively from the notion of a single “original” text and that favor the multivalence of the term.

*Bart D. Ehrman.* Bart D. Ehrman’s 1993 volume on *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*<sup>39</sup> raises relevant questions about the term, “original text.” Ehrman’s impressive and startling thesis, now well known, is to trace “the ways scribes modified their texts of Scripture in light of the polemical contexts within which they worked, altering the manuscripts they reproduced to make them more orthodox on the one hand and less susceptible to heretics on the other.”<sup>40</sup> Ehrman is concerned with scribes of the second and third centuries who were what he calls “proto-Orthodox Christians,” concerned to advance their own christological views against three main groups of detractors: adoptionists, docetists, and separationists. As scribes introduced intentional changes into their texts of writings that were to become the New Testament, they would, as Ehrman says, “make them say what they were already known to *mean*,” thus “corrupting” their texts for theological reasons – hence, the title of his book.<sup>41</sup> I call this a startling thesis, not because textual critics were unaware that scribes made such alterations in their manuscripts, but because of the *direction* in which Ehrman shows these changes to have moved – toward supporting and emphasizing the emerging mainstream theology, or orthodoxy, of the time – rather than following the previously common theme in textual criticism that heretics twisted the text to accredit their views. In the process, Ehrman treats just short of 180 variation units;<sup>42</sup> needless to say, one need not agree with all of his analyses to recognize his point, nor will the implications for “original text” be missed by many. The issue arises implicitly throughout the work but emerges explicitly in the final paragraphs:

[U]nderstanding a text . . . involves putting it “in other words.” Anyone who explains a text “in other words,” however, has altered the words.

This is exactly what the scribes did: they occasionally altered the words of the text by putting them “in other words.” To this extent, they were textual interpreters. At the same time, by *physically* altering the words, they did something quite different from other exegetes, and this difference is by no means to be minimized. Whereas all readers change a text when they construe it in their minds, the scribes actually changed the text on the page. As a result, they created a new text . . . over which future interpreters would dispute, no longer having access to the words of the original text, the words produced by the author.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, which is the “original,” the texts altered by the scribes – now much obscured – or the scribes’ altered texts? Subsequently, Ehrman comments that “[t]he ultimate goal of textual criticism, in the judgment of most of its practitioners, is to reconstruct the original text of the New Testament,” but he quickly modifies this statement in a footnote, emphasizing that:

[I]t is by no means self-evident that this *ought* to be the ultimate goal of the discipline, even though most critics have typically, and somewhat unreflectively, held it to be. In recent years, however, some scholars have recognized that it is important to know not only what an author wrote (i.e., in the autograph), but also what a reader read (i.e., in its later transcriptions). . . . Thus it is important for the historian of Christianity to know *which* form of the text was available to Christians in different times and places. . . . Given these historical concerns, there may indeed be scant reason to privilege the “original” text over forms of the text that developed subsequently.<sup>44</sup>

*William L. Petersen.* A second example of new views regarding the notion of “original text” appears in a 1994 article by William L. Petersen on “What Text Can New Testament Textual Criticism Ultimately Reach?”<sup>45</sup> Beginning with the classical scholar Paul Maas’s statement: “The business of textual criticism is to produce a text as close as possible to the original,”<sup>46</sup> Petersen says that first among the problems in New Testament textual criticism is “the difficulty of defining ‘original.’” Using Mark as an example, he asks a series of penetrating questions:

Is the “original” Mark the Mark found in our fourth-century and later manuscripts? Or is it the Mark recovered from the so-called “minor agreements” between Matthew and Luke? And which – if any – of the four extant endings of “Mark” is “original?” And how does the “Secret Gospel of Mark” . . . relate to the “original” Mark? It is clear that, without even having to consider individual variants, determining which “Mark” is “original” is a difficult – and perhaps even impossible – task.<sup>47</sup>

The burden of his article, however, runs parallel to these particular issues, namely, if the goal of New Testament textual criticism is to produce a text “as close as possible to the original,” then it should employ the sources that will

facilitate that goal. The papyri, Petersen says, will not do, for they contribute no new readings to the critical text of the gospels (that is, to the gospel text of Nestle-Aland/UBS), though they do frequently extend other manuscript evidence from the fourth century back to the third.<sup>48</sup> Petersen is asserting, I gather, that the early papyri by themselves do not/cannot establish a text any closer to the original than already exists in the B-text. The abundant Patristic evidence, he continues, “has been largely ignored,” especially compared to the papyri; the evidence for this is in the gospel text of Nestle-Aland/UBS, which, again, “shows not a *single* instance where the text is based solely – or even principally – upon Patristic evidence”; rather, Patristic evidence enters the critical text only when supported by the uncials.<sup>49</sup> Is this, Peterson asks, the proper use of Patristic evidence?

Petersen offers three examples that “demonstrate that by using multiple sources we can both readily and reliably triangulate readings from the second century,”<sup>50</sup> that is, readings solidly attested by second-century Patristic sources that are multigeographic and multilanguage in nature. His exhibits<sup>51</sup> first show that methodologically one can move behind the earliest manuscript tradition – the entirety of which (except for  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$ )<sup>52</sup> is from the third century or later. Secondly, Petersen raises the likelihood that some very early readings were excised from the gospel text, doubtless because they were “no longer theologically acceptable,”<sup>53</sup> and therefore did not survive long enough to appear in the manuscript tradition. A telling example is a variant of Matt 19:17 found in Justin (“One is good, [then Justin’s variant] *my father in the heavens*”), which is attested twice more in the second century, as well as in other early sources. Petersen argues impressively that this reading – at an early time – must have been well attested in manuscripts, but once it was “redacted away,” “excised” from Matthew, it virtually disappeared from our manuscripts (it is in two Old Latin manuscripts of the fifth century), and that it thereby discloses an earlier level of gospel text. Petersen’s question, then, is pertinent: “If these readings do indeed reflect a pre-180 manuscript tradition, then why do we not occupy ourselves with its reconstruction?”<sup>54</sup> What he has exposed here is a layer of text beneath what most would consider the “original text” that traditionally has been the object of textual criticism – that is, he documents a layer constituting an earlier “original” or “originals” that are open to restoration.

*The Author’s Preliminary Exploration.* In 1997 I published an excursus on “The Intersection of Textual Criticism and Canon” in a larger article in Stanley Porter’s *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*,<sup>55</sup> in which Koester’s Notre Dame paper was invoked in the manner that I have used it, in opening the issue of multiple “originals.” In that article, I also utilized an extended example from Nils A. Dahl on the Pauline corpus. Dahl’s example moves in the same direction, and it concerns early recensional activity within that corpus.

As is well known, the phrase, “in Ephesus,” is lacking in a small number of witnesses for Eph 1:1, though these witnesses include  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ ,  $\aleph^*$  and B\*. Based on the reading of these witnesses and the general or “catholic” nature of Ephesians,

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several theories were developed regarding the omission. These theories include the seventeenth century view of Archbishop Ussher that Ephesians was a circular letter intended for several churches and that a blank was left in 1:1 for names of churches using it, as well as the well-known theory of E. J. Goodspeed (1933) that “Ephesians” was written to introduce the first Pauline collection. Dahl, however, interprets this textual variant differently, first by rejecting the reading of the oldest manuscripts, suggesting that the context within Eph 1:1 requires a geographical designation, but then by allowing the possibility that:

[T]he letter was originally issued in several copies with a special address in each of them. In any case, the letter must have had a pre-history before it was published as part of the Pauline corpus. The text without any concrete address is to be understood as a result of a secondary “catholicizing,” [sic] to which we have an analogy in the textual tradition of Romans.<sup>56</sup>

The latter reference, of course, is to Rom 1:7 (and Rom 1:15), where “in Rome” is absent from a few witnesses. Dahl, in an elaborate argument, contends that the short, fourteen-chapter version of Romans – ending with 14:23 plus the doxology of 16:25–27 placed there by a number of manuscripts – circulated “in early days” without geographical designation and as another “catholic” epistle of Paul. The well-known text-critical problems involving the doxology serve, in Dahl’s view, as “further evidence of the existence of more than one recension of Romans.”<sup>57</sup> Like Ephesians, this fourteen-chapter version of Romans “will have to be explained as the result of editorial activity . . . between the times of Paul and Marcion.”<sup>58</sup> Dahl then points out that the earliest Patristic references do not easily support “a standard edition of the Pauline corpus before 100 A.D.” and that “the question whether our whole textual tradition goes back to one archetypal manuscript of the whole collection will need further investigation.”<sup>59</sup> What text, then, of Ephesians or Romans is designated by the term “original”?

These issues might well have been explored also by reference to Harry Y. Gamble’s *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans*,<sup>60</sup> with its extensive utilization of text-critical data.

My earlier exploration went on to raise matters of canon and authority that are parallel to or interactive with issues of multiple originals, and some of these issues will be revisited later in the article.

Before the final example of this emerging new view, a brief summary may be useful. Very recently the tasks of New Testament textual criticism have become more intriguing and more challenging as the discipline turns its attention, for example, away from the search for merely one “original text” to an understanding of earlier stages of composition and to earlier texts – earlier “originals” – that lie behind what textual critics have become accustomed to consider *the* “original.” In addition, various other “original” texts may have been defined by and during the lengthy canonization process, perhaps, for example,

at the point when the gospels or the Pauline letters were formed into collections. Finally, additional “original” texts were created as theologically motivated scribes altered the texts that were their “originals” by making the latter say what they knew them to mean. As a result, on one hand, textual critics have extended the process of textual transmission further into the past as they postulate the displacement of a previously conceived “original” by one or more preceding “originals,” so that a text long thought of as “original” suddenly is recognized as derivative. On the other hand, textual critics have pushed the notion of “original” forward in time, beyond what they have usually conceived as the autographs to encompass more recent reshapings of the texts, so that the original “original” is now replaced by a new, successor “original” that circulates in the church and thereby often obscures the earlier, now dethroned original. Within this complex tangle of texts and revisions that find their life settings in a vibrant, developing, and theologically multifaceted church, what, indeed, does “original text” mean? Which “original” or “originals” ought we to seek? Or, to anticipate a more radical question, ought textual critics to seek or emphasize the search for an “original” at all? Finally, as a new dimension, what meanings are carried by the words “canon” and “canonical” as they relate to these newly recognized multiple “originals”?

*David C. Parker.* My final example of a new current in the discussion of “original text” is the work of David Parker, who comes to this issue from a different perspective in his introductory volume, *The Living Text of the Gospels*.<sup>61</sup> Parker begins by challenging the common belief that “the purpose of textual criticism is to recover the original text,” followed by a call to examine whether there is an original text to be recovered.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, this question is “the principal theme” of his book.<sup>63</sup> But Parker does not eschew the “attempt to recover early text forms”; he does not,<sup>64</sup> because such a search is “a necessary part of that reconstruction of the history of the text without which. . . nothing can be understood.”<sup>65</sup> Yet Parker does distinguish the recovery of “earlier forms of the text” from the “original,” asserting that “it does not follow that it is also necessary to recover a single original text.”<sup>66</sup> He states, “The question is not whether we *can* recover it, but why we want to.”<sup>67</sup> To the question “whether the task of textual criticism is to recover the original text,” Parker replies, “[I]t may be, but does not have to be,”<sup>68</sup> and he chooses not to emphasize and often not to seek a single original.

The reasons are clear enough from the several chapter-length examples that he gives and from the larger context of his book. First, the diversity of readings in the manuscript tradition of the gospels (to which he restricts his study) reveals a text that from the beginning grew freely,<sup>69</sup> for “sayings and stories continued to be developed by copyists and readers.”<sup>70</sup> Parker affirms that the most dramatic changes in the text occurred in the first 150 years – “initial fluidity followed by stability.”<sup>71</sup> Hence, he characterizes the text of the gospels “as a free, or perhaps, as a living, text,”<sup>72</sup> and he asks again “whether the attempt to recover a single original text is consonant with the character

of a free manuscript tradition.”<sup>73</sup> The gospels are “not archives of traditions but living texts,”<sup>74</sup> and, therefore, “the concept of a Gospel that is fixed in shape, authoritative, and final as a piece of literature has to be abandoned.”<sup>75</sup> As he says elsewhere, “The [free] text indicates that to at least some early Christians, it was more important to hand on the spirit of Jesus’ teaching than to remember the letter. . . . [T]he material about Jesus was preserved in an interpretive rather than an exact fashion.”<sup>76</sup>

This conclusion bears on Parker’s second reason for choosing not to pursue an original text, one that arises out of important cases where the readings in a variation unit are multiple and do not yield an easily determined original reading, or to any plausible original at all. Two examples include the gospel sayings on marriage and divorce, and the Lord’s Prayer. Parker’s text-critical analysis of the gospel sayings on marriage and divorce lead him to conclude that “the recovery of a single original saying of Jesus is impossible”; rather, “[w]hat we have here is a collection of interpretive rewritings of a tradition”<sup>77</sup> – “the early church rewrote the sayings in their attempt to make sense of them.”<sup>78</sup> As Parker says of a similar example, the Lord’s prayer, which has six main forms in the manuscript tradition:

[A]ll six forms contribute to our understanding. Once we have discovered their existence, they will be part of the way in which we read and interpret the Lord’s Prayer. We shall not be able to erase them from our minds, and to read a single original text as though the others had never existed.<sup>79</sup>

His point, of course, is that the church has been and continues to be instructed by all meaningful multiple variants, because these variants disclose how the early church dealt with or thought about theological or ethical issues.

Later, Parker treats an extended passage from Luke (the last three chapters), instead of merely small blocks of material, and finds that variants in some forty verses of the last 167 provide, as he says, “incontrovertible evidence that the text of these chapters was not fixed, and indeed continued to grow for centuries after its composition,”<sup>80</sup> including “a significant number of passages which were added to the Gospel in order to emphasize its orthodoxy.”<sup>81</sup> “We might say,” he concludes, “that Luke is not, in these early centuries, a closed book. It is open, and successive generations write on its pages.”<sup>82</sup> So, when Parker says that “the Gospel texts exist only as a manuscript tradition”<sup>83</sup> and not in an early, fixed form, he means that statement to apply not only to the past but to the present as well, allowing the richness of the manuscripts, with all of their variants and with the interpretations and insights that they offer, to illuminate not only the culture of the early church but the culture of today as well. Parker is affirming that the full manuscript tradition brings vastly more than restriction to a single original reading or text could ever provide, but this approach does not mean that all variants on divorce, for example, now have the authority traditionally ascribed only to one of those readings.’ The tradition is

manifold. . . . There is no authoritative text beyond the manuscripts which we may follow without further thought”; thus, “. . . the people of God have to make up their own minds. There is no authoritative text to provide a short-cut.”<sup>84</sup>

Parker’s bold statements carry us beyond merely the issue of multiple “originals” to a firm de-emphasis on the necessity or desirability of seeking a single “original text” of the New Testament or a single “original” reading in a given variation unit. In all of this discussion, however, a strong, positive thrust remains. Textual critics are encouraged to permit the New Testament’s fluid and living text of the past to sustain its free, vital, unbroken, multifaceted tradition in the present and into the future – with the multiplicity of text-forms presenting “a collection of interpretive rewritings”<sup>85</sup> of that tradition and sweeping textual critics up into the flow that makes them part of that ongoing tradition and also confirms that ancient tradition as very much their own.

### Have We Moved beyond the Legitimate Domain of Textual Criticism?

As I pursued these current, progressive viewpoints and contemplated the increasing complexity of defining “original text,” I was caught short by my review of a passage I had long ago marked in the Alands’ *Text of the New Testament*

[T]he competence of New Testament textual criticism is restricted to the state of the New Testament text from the moment it began its literary history through transcription for distribution. All events prior to this are beyond its scope.<sup>86</sup>

Do the views described above violate the parameters of textual criticism? On this definition in the Alands’ handbook, any precursor compositional levels, as usually understood and as employed above for illustrative purposes, would appear to be beyond the scope of the discipline. The context of the Alands’ statement confirms this exclusion, for they refer to such matters as “composition theories” concerning the Pauline letters and the Fourth Gospel:

None of the composition theories advanced today in various forms with regard to the Pauline letters, for example, has any support in the manuscript tradition. . . . At no place where a break has been posited in the Pauline letters does the critical apparatus show even a suspicion of any interference with the inevitable deposit of telltale variants. In other words, from the beginning of their history as a manuscript tradition the Pauline letters have always had the same form that they have today.<sup>87</sup>

Yet the context leading directly to this statement in the handbook describes the “utter chaos” of the textual tradition of the end of Romans (that is, the varying placement of the doxology), precisely the text-critical data that form

the basis for the predecessor composition theories of Dahl and also of Gamble regarding both Romans and the larger Pauline corpus. Quite clearly, then, such explorations of prior compositional levels in the Pauline letters and elsewhere in the New Testament have been regarded as legitimate text-critical enterprises by various scholars, whenever textual variants, manuscript marks, or other text-critical factors appear to reflect some kind of previous textual or literary layers or some textual disruption.<sup>88</sup> My own judgment also is that such explorations remain within the proper domain of textual criticism.

Moreover, do we not encounter some of the same issues that are involved in the term “original text,” when we analyze the phrase in the Alands’ previously cited quotation that refers to “the state of the New Testament text from the moment it began its literary history [or existence] through transcription [or copies] for distribution”? When does a writing’s literary existence begin? Can the beginning of a writing’s literary history be limited to the moment when copies were made and circulated (that is, the time of its “publication”)? And if earlier composition levels can be detected, especially when signaled by textual variants, have textual critics not uncovered an earlier “beginning” of that writing’s literary history? Or, to move forward in time, could not a literary process (such as revision or rearrangement of the text) have taken place after the first copies were made and released, thereby turning the earlier, copied version itself into a predecessor literary layer of the writing? Hence, the term “beginning” begins to take on multiple dimensions, just as “original” does, and textual critics face the possibility that the text of a writing that has been transmitted, which they presume to have stood at the beginning of that particular writing’s history, now can be shown (triggered by textual variants) to have evolved from an earlier “beginning” – an “original” has had earlier “originals.”

Without pursuing this further, perhaps most will agree on the following principle regarding what, in addition to the traditional investigations, falls within the proper domain of textual criticism:

Any search for textual *preformulations* or *reformulations* of a literary nature, such as *prior* compositional levels, versions, or formulations, or *later* textual alteration, revision, division, combination, rearrangement, interpolation, or forming a collection of writings, legitimately falls within the sphere of text-critical activity *if such an exploration is initiated on the basis of some appropriate textual variation or other manuscript evidence.*<sup>89</sup>

“Other manuscript evidence” would include marginal or other sigla in manuscripts indicating uncertainty regarding placement of a passage or pointing to another textual problem. The principle enunciated here might be exemplified further under two “categories,” with some random examples (though items may slip from one category to the other).

Category 1 looks behind our transmitted texts to preformulations (that is, to “pre-original” compositional levels):



1. Textual variants signaling *predecessor literary activity*, such as prior compositional levels, versions, or formulations, would provide legitimacy for, among others, the following:

Hypotheses about early sayings traditions or sources, or about early gospel harmonies – because of variant readings in the sayings of Jesus tradition (including *agrapha*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, etc.).

Theories about varying versions, revisions, formulations, partitions, or combinations behind, or interpolations into, or collections of the Pauline letters – because of variant readings concerning a letter’s addressees, the placement of doxologies, etc., and because of manuscript sigla indicating textual problems. (These and similar phenomena might fall into Category 2.)

Consideration of dual versions of Acts or Luke-Acts – because of extensive textual variation in the B and D textual traditions.

Hypotheses about the ending of Mark – because the (later) textual tradition provides various endings to adjust for the perceived abruptness in ending the gospel with Mark 16:8. (Could be Category 2.)

Consideration of the *pericope adulterae* (John 7:53–8:11), its authenticity/inauthenticity, and whether it was part of John, etc. – because of its several locations in manuscripts of John and Luke, its varying text-forms, its absence from early manuscripts, and because scribal sigla in other manuscripts indicate uncertainty. (Might be placed in Category 2.)

Category 2 largely looks at reformulation, the interpretive recasting of books, and especially of passages already in circulation and use (that is, at “post-original” literary activity), which, when accepted, may obscure the readings of the circulating text or, conversely, when neglected or suppressed, may be obscured by the dominant circulating textual tradition:

2. Textual variants signaling *successor literary activity*, such as reformulation or adaptation of an earlier level of composition, would provide legitimacy for the following:

Hypotheses about alterations to writings in the interest of orthodox or heretical theology or in the interest of pro- or anti-Judaic sentiments or pro- or anti-female views, etc. – because of numerous textual variants inviting such inquiries.

Consideration of rearrangements, additions, dislocations, and interpolations in already circulating writings, such as endings of Mark, portions of John or Pauline letters, etc. – because of variant readings and varying positions or sigla in manuscripts.<sup>90</sup>

Theories about liturgical embellishments to the Lord’s prayer, the Last Supper, etc. – because of multiple forms in the textual tradition.

Deliberations over the marriage and divorce sayings in the synoptic gospels – because of their tangled textual tradition.

As with the examples cited under category 1, many more examples could be cited here.

The explorations exemplified in these lists – and numerous others that might be added – directly and indirectly invoke the multivalence of the term “original text” and thereby enrich the text-critical discipline by opening the way for fresh insights from the varying interpretations of early Christian thought and life that they reveal. Moreover, recognizing the multivalence of “original text” ensures that New Testament textual criticism will certainly diminish and possibly relinquish its myopic concentration on an elusive and often illusive target of a single original text. Clearly, for some, these investigations of both predecessor and successor compositional activities will challenge not only the traditional object, but also the customary boundaries of New Testament textual criticism; yet, that challenge should be understood as expanding our horizons and making the discipline more broadly relevant than previously to related fields, such as literary-critical, hermeneutical, and church-historical studies.

### **The Relation of an Elusive, Multivalent “Original Text” to the Concept of “Canon”**

Text and canon have been treated together for generations, as scores of books and encyclopedia articles will attest, but more often than not their relationship has been one merely of juxtaposition rather than of interaction.<sup>91</sup> Our concern here is not so much with the long-standing and quite static juxtaposition of the two fields, but with the parallels or interaction between canon and text in the sphere of “authority.” “Canon” by nature embraces authority, for it involves “measure,” or “standard” – something measured and meeting a standard. When a Jewish or Christian writing has been measured and accepted as canonical (whether formally by leaders in a given region or informally in the life of a community), that writing and its text acquire authority. The “original text” of the New Testament – in its common understanding – also has been viewed as authoritative, and this point at which canon and text cross paths gives rise to penetrating questions. One example might be, if “original” is multivalent, can “canon” escape multivalence?

#### **Textual Variants as Canonical/Authoritative**

Several issues raised by the scholars whose views have been discussed in this article lead directly to this interaction between textual criticism and canon, that is, to the point at which they intersect over the concept of authority. One may begin by noting the extensive similarity between Parker’s view of “the living text” and the emphasis developed by the “Chicago School” of New Testament

textual criticism in the years before and after World War II, for, as I will discuss later in this section, those scholars also viewed the New Testament text as “a living body of literature,” which, through scribal changes in a vibrant theological and practical context, opened a window upon the history of the church and its doctrine. I refer especially to the studies of Donald W. Riddle, Ernest C. Colwell, and Merrill M. Parvis, surrounded by their distinguished Chicago colleagues, Edgar J. Goodspeed, Harold R. Willoughby, and Alan Wikgren, and, by extension, to graduates of this University of Chicago program, notably Kenneth W. Clark. The relevant view was summarized and highlighted in ten pages of the introduction to my 1966 monograph on Codex Bezae,<sup>92</sup> in which I labeled it “Present-day Textual Criticism.” This designation, I fear, was a quarter-century premature, for it was that long before the major work of Bart Ehrman exemplified this new understanding of textual criticism and nearly thirty years until David Parker engaged in it – though quite independently, it would appear. What exactly was the view that emerged from Chicago?

Its roots can be traced back directly to Kirsopp Lake in 1904, in the context of his often-quoted evaluation of Westcott-Hort, though many readers may fail to move beyond that evaluation to Lake’s programmatic statement. Lake characterized Westcott-Hort’s edition as a “splendid failure” – “. . . it was one of those failures which are more important than most successes.”<sup>93</sup> As a result, Lake continues, it can no longer be supposed that the textual critic can immediately edit the original text; editing of local texts must come first, and this step complicates the task because the exegete must now “expound the meaning, not of Westcott and Hort’s text, but of the ecclesiastical Bibles in use at different times. . . . We need to know what the early Church thought [a passage] meant and how it altered its wording in order to emphasize its meaning.”<sup>94</sup> Thirty-some years after Lake’s assessment, Riddle wrote this impassioned paragraph:

The legitimate task of textual criticism is not limited to the recovery of approximately the original form of the documents, to the establishment of the “best” text, nor to the “elimination of spurious readings.” It must be recognized that every significant variant records a religious experience which brought it into being. This means that there are no “spurious readings”: the various forms of the text are sources for the study of the history of Christianity.<sup>95</sup>

Later Riddle refers to “the unreality of that common abstraction . . . the ‘original’ text from which all variants were derived.” He continues:

Of course the New Testament writers wrote something. But what is the use of picturing this original copy? It had no status as a sacred document; no reverence for it as Scripture was accorded it until a century after its writing; it was valued only for its practical value; it was early and frequently copied.<sup>96</sup>

Merrill Parvis echoes these notions regarding “spurious” readings:

All are part of the tradition; all contribute to our knowledge of the history of Christian thought. And they are significant contributions because they are interpretations which were highly enough thought of in some place and at some time to be incorporated into the Scripture itself.<sup>97</sup>

Thus textual variants and canon meet in dynamic fashion; not only are the variants that find their way into the canonical text of the church designated canonical, but also those that did not. “Canon” suddenly takes on more than one meaning or level. Parvis, however, goes further. Even when we have approached the autographs, he says, we still have only one form of the tradition. Then, almost lamenting the invention of printing, he states that prior to its use “the Scripture was a living body of literature, which was constantly being enriched as it was interpreted and reinterpreted by each succeeding generation.”<sup>98</sup>

A year later, across the Atlantic, Erich Fascher spoke of reflective scribes of the New Testament in this fashion: “The interpreting copyist moves between text and copy and forces his interpretation upon his later readers, since he has yet no knowledge of an authoritative text.”<sup>99</sup> This assertion regarding the lack of an authoritative text, and the similar statement by Riddle quoted above, were not, however, to be tolerated by another Chicago scholar, Ernest Colwell. After strong statements that “most variations . . . were made deliberately,” and that “[t]he majority of the variant readings in the New Testament were created for theological or dogmatic reasons,” he turns an old assumption on its head:

Most of the manuals and handbooks now in print (including mine!) will tell you that these variations were the fruit of careless treatment which was possible because the books of the New Testament had not yet attained a strong position as “Bible.” The reverse is the case. It was because they were the religious treasure of the church that they were changed.<sup>100</sup>

Colwell adds:

The paradox is that the variations came into existence because these were religious books, sacred books, canonical books. The devout scribe felt compelled to correct misstatements which he found in the manuscript he was copying.<sup>101</sup>

Colwell’s statements suggest that textual alteration was encouraged rather than discouraged by the notion of canonicity, which would suggest, in turn, that when effecting a theologically motivated textual reformulation, a scribe was actually making a canonical decision – an independent (or perhaps a community) enhancement to the New Testament canon. This hypothesis suggests, finally, that canon formation was a process operating at two quite distinct levels: first, at the level of church leaders in major localities or regions of Christianity,

who were seeking broad consensus on which *books* were to be accepted as authoritative; and, second, also at the level of individual scribes (though it might be assumed that usually they would represent a monastic or some other small community), whose interest would be in *individual variants* that would express appropriately their theological or liturgical understanding of portions of their already authoritative church writings.

From these notions flows a torrent of questions that can be treated here only by referring quickly to some examples, mostly discussed or alluded to in the preceding text of this article. First, however, it might be helpful to remember that gospels and epistles, though scribes copied them word by word, undoubtedly were read holistically in early Christian worship and use, and not discretely as is the tendency in critical scholarship. Early Christians, therefore, would not likely raise the “canonical” questions illustrated here, but would have treated as “canon” whatever text-form of a gospel or letter had reached them in the transmission process. For instance, if they possessed a gospel expanded by harmonization or by liturgical embellishment, they would not likely have noticed or been concerned – unless the reader or hearer were, for example, an Origen!<sup>102</sup> Consider the following inquiries:

First, in what sense were or are competing variant readings “canonical” (for example, in the marriage and divorce sayings), or to what extent were or are variants “canonical” that textual critics now reject but that were once authoritative scripture in the fourth or fifth centuries, or even the seventeenth century (for example, additional endings of Mark, or numerous readings of the *textus receptus* preserved in the King James Version)?

Second, was or is the doxology in Romans “canonical” after 14:23, after 15:33, or after 16:23, or after both 14:23 and 16:23 where several manuscripts put it? Or was this doxology never part of Romans, as attested by other manuscripts and church writers? And if a fourteen-chapter Romans was a literary successor to a sixteen-chapter Romans, which form of Romans is “original” and which is “canonical”?<sup>103</sup>

Third, was or is Romans “canonical” or “original” with or without “in Rome” in Rom 1:7 and 1:15? Or are both in some sense canonical and in some sense original? The same questions arise about “in Ephesus” in Eph 1:1.

Fourth, the Lord’s prayer has six main forms in our textual tradition. Was, for instance, the Matthean phrase (6:13), “but rescue us from evil,” “canonical” also in the Gospel of Luke for the numerous manuscripts that have it in their texts of Luke 11:14? Was the final phrase in Matthew’s version (at 6:13), “For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever,” “canonical” for the many witnesses carrying it (despite the clear evidence that it represents a successor, liturgical rewriting)?

Fifth, was or is the Book of Acts “canonical” in its B-text-form or its D-text-form, or both?

Finally, to change the focus of these questions and to return to one raised at the outset of this discussion, if “original” is multivalent, can “canon” escape

multivalence? What does “canon” or “canonical” mean? Just as each of the 5,300 Greek New Testament manuscripts and the perhaps 9,000 versional manuscripts is an “original,” so each of these thousands of manuscripts likely was considered “canonical” when used in the worship and teaching of individual churches – and yet no two are exactly alike. Consequently, each collection or “canon” of early Christian writings during the centuries-long process of canonization was likewise different, whether in the writings it included and excluded or – more likely – in the detailed content of those writings as represented in their respective manuscripts, with their varying textual readings. As for the latter – if one follows the insights of the Chicago School – interpretive variant readings had authority in one Christian community or another. So “canon” and “canonical,” which inherently involve authority, have varying dimensions of meaning at various times and in diverse places, and “canon” is no less polyvalent than “original text.”

### Proposed Dimensions of Meaning in the Term “Original Text”

It is clear that the notion of multiple “originals” is implicit in some and explicit in others of the several new views surveyed. These various “originals” or, better, “dimensions of originality” might be viewed as functioning in four ways with respect to the New Testament text. However, because the term “original” no longer has its apparent or traditional meaning, an alternate terminology – terms that do not confuse the issue (as “original” does) but that clarify or at least are neutral – is required. I shall try the term “text-form” as the common designation in all of the proposed dimensions:

First, a *predecessor text-form*, that is, a form of text (or more than one) discoverable behind a New Testament writing that played a role in the composition of that writing. Such a predecessor might have affected either larger or smaller portions of a writing. In less careful language,<sup>104</sup> this predecessor is a “pre-canonical original” of the text of certain books, representing an earlier stage in the composition of what became a New Testament book.

Second, an *autographic text-form*, that is, the textual form as it left the desk of Paul or a secretary, or of other writers of portions of what became our New Testament. Whole books in this dimension of originality would normally be close in form to the New Testament writings as we possess them – except in two important cases: when they have been subject to reformulation by the forces operative in one or both of the next two dimensions of originality. Most often, later reformulations of this autographic form would have affected some or many of its individual variation units rather than the entire book in wholesale fashion.

Third, a *canonical text-form*, that is, the textual form of a book (or a collection of books) at the time it acquired consensual authority or when its canonicity was (perhaps more formally) sought or established, such as when

a collection was made of the Pauline letters or of the fourfold gospel, or – at the level of detail – when phrases like “in Rome” or “in Ephesus” might have entered or been removed from the text. A major difficulty, of course, is determining the point at which “canonicity” – however defined – was attributed to a writing. (“Canonical original” may be a tolerable label, but it really should be designated “‘canonical’ ‘original,’” because of the multi-valence of both terms. Thus the complexities multiply!)

Fourth, an *interpretive text-form*, representing any and each interpretive iteration or reformulation of a writing – as it was used in the life, worship, and teaching of the church – or of individual variants so created and used. Actually, then, the interpretive text-form is a newly interpreted text that replaces the prior “original” upon which it has imposed its fresh reformulation. Examples abound in the works of Ehrman and Parker (noted earlier) and in those of many other textual critics who have explored text-critical reformulations motivated by theological, liturgical, ideological, historical, stylistic, or other factors. There is, then, a real sense in which every intentional, meaningful scribal alteration to a text creates a new text-form, a new “original,” though we may not wish to carry the matter to this extreme (if only out of practical considerations).

A series of distinctions such as this one veils numerous complexities. Of first importance is the caveat that, while these characterizations describe ways in which the various text-forms may have functioned and how they may be related to one another, they should not be understood as being discrete entities or as having a linear relationship. Nor will every writing or variation unit have incarnations in all of these text-forms: some will have one, others more. For example, an autographic text-form may really be, as far as one can tell, a canonical text-form and/or an interpretive text-form. That is, if an autographic text-form has predecessor text-forms, it is simultaneously an interpretive text-form, or, if it has emerged from the canonical process without reformulation, it will be identical with its canonical text-form. It should be clear also that, despite some 300,000 variant readings in the New Testament manuscript tradition, there will not always be sufficient variants or other manuscript indications to provide clear knowledge of what a given text represents among these possibilities. For instance, it seems fair to say that something both mechanical and creative has happened prior to, during, and after the composition of our various gospels and that a letter like Romans has a complex history of transmission; thus there is sufficient warrant for one or another of our labels in these cases, and certainly something has happened to yield two noticeably divergent textual streams in Acts, and so forth. Yet, in some larger pieces and in innumerable smaller ones, little may have affected the texts or, where a text has been altered for one reason or another, the reformulation may have left no trace in the manuscript tradition, forever obscuring the earlier “original.” Textual critics should not expect, therefore, that a search for one or more of the multivalent “originals” or text-forms will be easy or certain – should they choose to launch it. Yet, in so many instances textual critics have adequate data in their long and

rich New Testament textual tradition to make the search for dimensions and functions of “originality” a worthwhile and fruitful one. In any event, the multivalence of the term “original” is a reality not to be denied.

### The Distance between the Disciplines of Textual Criticism and Canon

Text and canon may be juxtaposed quite properly as twin disciplines that are in some sense foundational or basic to the biblical fields, and they may also be seen, quite correctly, as interactive in areas where the notion of “authority” is present. It is at the latter point, however, that I think a distinction must be drawn between the two, showing that in essence text and canon stand at a distance from one another. Canon, by definition, is concerned with and contains authoritative material – in the case of Christianity, authoritative writings that were or became normative for faith and practice. Canon by definition also involves limitations, even if the placing of limits was not accomplished immediately in the early church or by easily recognized criteria.

Our earlier survey of the use of the term “original text” in text-critical handbooks permits the deduction that over several generations New Testament textual critics have been socialized into thinking of a single original text as their object. That approach, in turn, may suggest at first glance that the text-critical discipline, too, is necessarily concerned with authority. After all, in simpler times, this single “original text” was more often than not identified with the autographs, and the autographs with the canonical, authoritative New Testament text that was the standard for Christian faith and practice (as, for example, in Nolan [discussed earlier]: “the genuine text of the sacred canon”<sup>105</sup>). Recent and current views are making it clear, however, that no easy equivalence exists between “original” texts and “canonical” texts, because each term is multivalent. Thus, there is no more a single “canonical” text than there is a single “original”; our multiplicities of texts may all have been canonical (that is, authoritative) at some time and place. To paraphrase Parker, the canon of the New Testament should be viewed “as a free, or perhaps, a living *canon*” and therefore “the concept of a *canon* that is fixed in shape, authoritative, and final as a piece of literature has to be abandoned.”<sup>106</sup> The same vitality, the same fluidity that can be observed in textual variation carries over to canonicity.

As a result of this conclusion, textual criticism as a discipline is not automatically and necessarily concerned with authority. For example, difficult though it may be, if one can establish a text or reading to be “as close as possible” to an autographic text-form that appears unaffected by predecessor or successor text-forms, does that text-critical decision in fact create an authoritative text or reading? – “authoritative” in the sense of theologically normative? My answer is clearly negative; rather, it means only that a scholarly decision has been



reached that affirms a given text or reading to be “as close as possible” to an apparently un-preformulated and un-reformulated text-form. The text-critical discipline per se carries with it no normative implications and imposes no theological overlay onto such a text or variant. As I have emphasized earlier,<sup>107</sup> some (perhaps many) textual critics may be seeking an authoritative “original” New Testament text and may choose to identify it with an authoritative “canon,” but such a goal is neither intrinsic to textual criticism as a historical-critical discipline, nor is it within the domain of textual criticism to place a theological overlay on either its purposes or its results. In the same breath, however, I wish also to emphasize that every textual critic has full freedom to perform his or her text-critical work within any chosen theological framework, but that choice constitutes a fully separate, voluntary, additional step and one not intrinsic to or demanded by the discipline.<sup>108</sup>

### Conclusion

As New Testament textual criticism moves into the twenty-first century, it must shed whatever remains of its innocence, for nothing is simple anymore. Modernity may have led many to assume that a straightforward goal of reaching a single original text of the New Testament – or even a text as close as possible to that original – was achievable. Now, however, reality and maturity require that textual criticism face unsettling facts, chief among them that the term “original” has exploded into a complex and highly unmanageable multivalent entity. Whatever tidy boundaries textual criticism may have presumed in the past have now been shattered, and its parameters have moved markedly not only to the rear and toward the front, but also sideways, as fresh dimensions of originality emerge from behind the variant readings and from other manuscript phenomena.

Nor (for those who choose to work within a theological framework) is textual criticism a “safe” discipline – a phrase I have heard for four decades – that can be practiced without challenge to theological convictions or without risk to faith commitments or truth assertions. I doubt that it ever was “safe” – at least for any who have thought through the implications of our myriad variation units, with their innumerable competing readings and conceptions, as well as the theological motivations that are evident in so many. But if it has been a “safe” discipline, it is safe no more. And if it has been or is now conceived to be a “narrow” or neatly circumscribed discipline, either by those inside or outside the field, it is narrow no more. Any who embrace it as a vocation will find its intellectual challenges to have been increased a hundredfold by its enlarged boundaries and broadened horizons, which extend into codicology and papyrology and also into related early Christian, classical, literary, and sociological fields, all of which favor accommodation of the richness of the

manuscript tradition, with its multiplicity of texts and its multivalent originals, rather than the myopic quest for a single original text. Both broad training and knowledge, and a capacity to tolerate ambiguity will be high on the list of requisite qualifications for its practitioners. A decade ago François Bovon warned that “[s]pecialization is already revealing its limitations. Textual critics should reach back into the discipline of codicology and forward into the field of hermeneutics,”<sup>109</sup> and Martin Hengel, in his 1993 presidential address before the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, also regretted that New Testament textual criticism has become highly specialized and insisted that “it must again become a shared task, especially since burning theological and historical issues lurk behind it.”<sup>110</sup> Though not all will agree, it appears to me that promising avenues of cooperative research have been opened by these recent and current viewpoints and that New Testament textual criticism now is poised to contribute to the understanding of early Christianity more broadly and more richly than ever before.

## Notes

This article is based on a paper presented at the New Testament Textual Criticism Section, Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Orlando, Florida November 1998. An earlier exploration of several of the issues appeared in an excursus on “The Intersection of Textual Criticism and Canon” (73–91) in Eldon Jay Epp, “Textual Criticism in the Exegesis of the New Testament, with an Excursus on Canon,” in Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (NTTS 25; Leiden; Brill, 1997) 45–97. The author wishes to thank ElDoris B. Epp, Ph.D., for her critique and suggestions at crucial points in the writing of this article.

1. Johann Leonhard Hug, *Hug’s Introduction to the New Testament* (trans. from the German 3d ed. by David Fosdick Jr. with notes by Moses Stuart; Andover, MA: Gould & Newman, 1836) 70–71 [German original, 1808; 3d ed., 1826]. I have not found the 1808 ed., but I have checked the 2d (1821) and 4th (1847) German eds., where the language is identical to that translated in the English ed.
2. *Ibid.*, 85.
3. *Ibid.*, 86.
4. See the extensive discussion in Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1992), esp. chap. 3B on “The Original Shape of the Biblical Text,” 164–80. Note Tov’s comments elsewhere: “Textual criticism deals with the origin and nature of all forms of a text, in our case the biblical text. This involves a discussion of its putative original form(s). . . .” (1); and “. . . the concept of an ‘original text’ necessarily remains vague” (11). For various views of “original” text, with critique, see James A. Sanders, “The Task of Text Criticism,” in Henry T. C. Sun, Keith L. Eades, et al., eds., *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 315–27, esp. 319–22; 325; and *idem*, “Stability and Fluidity in Text and Canon,” in Gerard J. Norton and Stephen Pisano, eds., *Tradition of the Text: Studies Offered to Dominique Barthélemy in Celebration of His 70th Birthday* (OBO 109; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 205–6; 213–14; 217. It would be fruitful to compare these views with those in New Testament textual criticism, but that is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

5. I was struck by one of Fenton John Anthony Hort’s emphases in his three-page description of textual criticism: “textual criticism is always negative, because its final aim is virtually nothing more than the detection and rejection of error” (Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* [2 vols.; Cambridge: Macmillan, 1881–82; 2d ed., 1896] 2. 3. Perhaps this statement or at least such sentiment – repeated too often – has contributed to the morosity of some practitioners and to the view of many outsiders that textual criticism is a dull if not moribund discipline. A subsidiary purpose of the present paper is to demonstrate the broad relevance, the deep vitality, the high excitement, and the positive reach forward of current New Testament textual criticism.
6. Frederick Nolan, *An Inquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate or Received Text of the New Testament: In Which the Greek Manuscripts Are Newly Classified, the Integrity of the Authorised Text Vindicated, and the Various Readings Traced to Their Origin* (London: Rivington, 1815) 2–3.
7. Thomas Rawson Birks, *Essay on the Right Estimation of Manuscript Evidence in the Text of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1878) 1; compare v. Also, in the strongly apologetic, biased writings of John William Burgon (and of his followers up to the present time), clear-cut definitions are to be expected. Burgon writes, “The object of textual criticism . . . is to determine what the Apostles and Evangelists of Christ actually wrote – the precise words they employed, and the very order of them” (Burgon’s posthumous work, Edward Miller, ed., *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* [London: Bell, 1896] 19). Elsewhere Burgon refers to establishing “the true text” (p. 6).
8. Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2. 1. Further on the relationship between autograph and original text, see 2. 66–68. The progress of textual criticism, Hort says, consists “in approximation towards complete ascertainment of definite facts of the past, that is, towards recovering an exact copy of what was actually written on parchment or papyrus by the author of the book or his amanuensis” (p. 3).
9. Casper René Gregory, *Canon and Text of the New Testament* (International Theological Library; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907) 485.
10. Alexander Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament* (1913; 2d ed., London: Duckworth, 1954) 3. Similarly, Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Text of the Greek Bible: A Student’s Handbook* (2d ed.; London: Duckworth, 1953) 12: “If the author’s original manuscript had survived, it would of course be unnecessary to trouble about later and less accurate copies of it, or the work of revising editors. . . .” This sentiment is echoed, for example, in J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (1964; rev. ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995) 2.
11. J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction*, 11.
12. Frederic G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (1912; 2d ed., London: Macmillan, 1926) 1–2. A qualified statement appears in his *Text of the Greek Bible*, 9.
13. Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Critique textuelle, II: La critique rationnelle* (2d ed.; EtB; Paris: Gabalda, 1935) vii.
14. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (trans. Erroll F. Rhodes; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Leiden: Brill, 1989) v.
15. *Ibid.*, 280. This principle is reminiscent of Hort: “Where there is variation, there must be error in at least all variants but one; and the primary work of textual criticism is merely to discriminate the erroneous variants from the true” (Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2. 3).
16. Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 291–92.
17. With the discovery and publication of sixteen additional New Testament papyri from Oxyrhynchus (P<sup>100</sup>–P<sup>115</sup>), of which thirteen date at or prior to the turn of the third

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into the fourth century (P<sup>100-104</sup>, P<sup>106-109</sup>, P<sup>111</sup>; and P<sup>113-115</sup>), this important group of early papyri now numbers sixty-one. For the forty-eight listed in 1989, see Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 56–57; 93. For the new papyri, see the listing in *Bericht der Hermann Kunst-Stiftung zur Förderung der neutestamentlichen Textforschung für die Jahre 1995 bis 1998* (Münster: Hermann Kunst-Stiftung, 1998) 14–18; for the texts, see vols. 64 (1997), 65 (1998), and 66 (1999, forthcoming) of *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Greco-Roman Memoirs 84–86; London: The British Academy by the Egypt Exploration Society).

18. Kurt Aland, “The Twentieth-Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism,” in Ernest Best and Robert McLachlan Wilson, eds., *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 11.
19. Kurt Aland, “Der neue ‘Standard-Text’ in seinem Verhältnis zu den frühen Papyri und Majuskeln,” in Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee, eds., *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis: Essays in Honour of Bruce M. Metzger* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 274–75.
20. Bruce M. Metzger on behalf of and in cooperation with the Editorial Committee of the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (1971; 2d ed., Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), orig. ed., xiii; 2d ed., xv.
21. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (1964; 1968; 3d ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
22. *Ibid.*, 150.
23. *Ibid.*, 186.
24. *Ibid.*, v.
25. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament; With Remarks on Its Revision upon Critical Principles* (London: Bagster, 1854) 174. Tregelles’s preface is less cautious, however: through textual criticism “we know, on grounds of ascertained certainty, the actual words and sentences . . . in the terms in which the Holy Spirit gave it” (viii [italics in original]). Yet, on the first page of his large handbook, a rewriting and revision of Thomas Hartwell Horne’s *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (11th ed. by Horne, John Ayre, and S. P. Tregelles; 4 vols.; London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860) 4. 1, Tregelles defines textual criticism as “that species of criticism which has to do with the ascertainment, as far as is practicable, of what it was that the writer of any ancient work actually wrote.” Tregelles’s work appeared earlier and separately, with the same definition, in *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Longman, Green, et al., 1856) 1.
26. Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2. 1; my emphasis.
27. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (1886; 7th ed., London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907) 15; my emphasis. The omission of the italicized portion may be found, as a random example, in Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament As Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 522 (see n. 108 below). Warfield also speaks of the need to restore the texts “substantially to their original form” (11).
28. See, for example, the following: Frederick Henry Ambrose Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament for the Use of Biblical Students* (2 vols.; 4th ed. by Edward Miller; London: Bell, 1894) 1. 5; Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament* (trans. from 2d German ed.; London: Williams and Norgate, 1901) 156: “The task is to exhibit what the original writer intended to communicate to his readers, and the method is simply that of tracing the history of the document in question back to its beginning, if, and in so far as, we have the means to do so at our command.” Compare Nestle’s *Einführung in das griechische Neue Testament* (1897, 1899; 1909 [p. 168]; 4th ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923, ed. by

Ernst von Dobschütz [p. 118]); E. Jacquier, *Le Nouveau Testament dans l'église chrétienne, tome second: Le texte du Nouveau Testament* (2d ed.; Paris: Gabalda, 1913) 1; Heinrich Joseph Vogels, *Handbuch der Textkritik des Neuen Testaments* (1923; 2d ed.; Bonn: Hanstein, 1955) 1; Archibald Thomas Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1925) has no direct, introductory statement, but see p. 173 and esp. p. 221; Kirsopp Lake, *The Text of the New Testament* (6th ed., rev. by Silva New; Oxford Church Text Books; London: Rivingtons, 1928) 1; Vincent Taylor, *The Text of the New Testament: A Short Introduction* (2d ed.; London: Macmillan, 1963) 1; Leon Vaganay, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (2d ed., rev. by Christian-Bernard Amphoux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 1: textual criticism “aims to retrieve the original form of a text or at least the form closest to the original” (compare. 1st English ed., 1937, p. 9; French eds., 1934; rev. ed., 1986, p. 15); David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994) 12: “. . . to recover the original text of the New Testament from the available evidence”; Keith Elliott and Ian Moir, *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament: An Introduction for English Readers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995) 1.

Finally, the life-goal of Lobegott Friedrich Konstantin von Tischendorf, as stated in a letter to a patron in 1844 (after he had outlined his plans to collect and to publish pre-tenth century manuscripts, ancient Latin manuscripts, and the Patristic quotations), was to form “a text that will approach as closely as possible to the very letter as it proceeded from the hands of the Apostles” (cited in Matthew Black and Robert Davidson, *Constantine von Tischendorf and the Greek New Testament* [Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1981] 7).

29. I am not surprised now to discover that I used the term in quotation marks already in 1966 (though not consistently) in *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (SNTSMS 3; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) for example, 13<sup>bis</sup>, 18<sup>bis</sup>, 36.
30. See discussion on “The Relation of an Elusive, Multivalent ‘Original Text’ to the Concept of ‘Canon’ ” and “Textual Variants as Canonical/Authoritative” later in the article.
31. The conference papers were published in William L. Petersen, ed., *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Origins, Recensions, Text, and Transmission* (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 3; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).
32. Helmut Koester, “The Text of the Synoptic Gospels in the Second Century,” in Petersen, ed., *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century*, 19–37. It is of interest that among the nine conference participants (from six nations) only Koester, though he works in the text-critical field (for example, “The Text of 1 Thessalonians,” in Dennis E Groh and Robert Jewett, *The Living Text: Essays in Honor of Ernest W. Saunders* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985] 219–27) would not be first identified as a “textual critic”; he chooses the term “exegete” (ibid., 219).
33. To  $\mathfrak{P}^{52}$  (a fragment of John) now should be added the fragmentary  $\mathfrak{P}^{90}$  (*POxy.* 3523, second century, John);  $\mathfrak{P}^{104}$  (*POxy.* 4404, second half of the second century, Matthew), and probably  $\mathfrak{P}^{98}$  (second century[?], Apocalypse of John). Three other papyri date “around 200”:  $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ ,  $\mathfrak{P}^{64+67}$ , and  $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$ , while two others (both with portions of Matthew) stem from the late second/early third century:  $\mathfrak{P}^{103}$  (*POxy.* 4403) and  $\mathfrak{P}^{77}$  (*POxy.* 2683+4405). [For  $\mathfrak{P}^{103}$  and  $\mathfrak{P}^{104}$ , see n. 17, above].
34. Koester, “The Text of the Synoptic Gospels in the Second Century,” 19.
35. Ibid., 21, 30–33.
36. Ibid., 37; compare idem, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990) 275–86, 295–302, 360–402. A description and assessment of Koester’s view may be found, for example, in Philip Sellev, “Secret Mark and the History of Canonical Mark,” in Birger A. Pearson, et al., *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 242–57. Note that Sellev proposes terminology for four stages in Mark’s

history that, in three cases, have parallels to my proposed “dimensions of originality”: Original Mark, Augmented Mark, Secret Mark, and Canonical Mark (243, n. 6). For a critique of Koester’s view, see David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 107–10.

François Bovon, “The Synoptic Gospels and the Noncanonical Acts of the Apostles,” *HTR* 81 (1988) 19–36, provides a new perspective on “the alterations of older sources made by the Evangelists as well as the subsequent modifications of their work made by those who came later” (21) by comparing such literary activities with their parallels in the transmission of the Christian apocryphal literature. In the process he relies on codicological data, citation, imitation, and adaptation techniques; redactional tendencies; the witness of early church writers, etc. to conclude, for example, that “perhaps Matthew and Luke used a version of the Gospel of Mark that was earlier than, and different from, our canonical Mark” (27).

Very recently and (like Bovon) by using noncanonical gospel material, James M. Robinson, “A Written Greek Sayings Cluster Older than Q: A Vestige,” *HTR* 92 (1999) 61–77, demonstrates from a textual variant in *P. Oxy.* 655 (supported by the first hand of  $\aleph$ ), namely οὐ ζῶναι for αὐζῶναι, that this Oxyrhynchus fragment of the *Gospel of Thomas* carries a text that is not only pre-Matthew and pre-Luke, but clearly pre-Q as well. Thus, a “very ancient tradition” is exposed that “obviously originated prior to Q and the canonical gospels written in the last third of the first century” because it was “not contaminated by the scribal error that made its way already into Q and thus into the canonical gospels” (67). This evidence, not insignificantly, also confirms that “Q was indeed a written Greek text, behind which stood an older written Greek text as *Vorlage*” (61). Compare J. M. Robinson and Christoph Heil, “Zeugnisse eines schriftlichen, griechischen vorkanonischen Textes: Mt 6, 28b  $\aleph^*$ , *P. Oxy.* 665 I,1–17 (EvTh 36) und Q 12,27,” *ZNW* 89 (1998) 30–44.

37. Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2: *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 182. Koester more recently (*Ancient Christian Gospels* 206–16) endorsed the argument of J.B. Daniels’s dissertation that the synoptic parallels in *P. Egerton 2* represent “a separate tradition which did not undergo Markan redaction” and that the author of the papyrus “did not make use of the Gospel of John in canonical form” (207).
38. It is obvious to me that Koester’s Notre Dame paper also was a direct influence on William L. Petersen’s views in his “What Text Can New Testament Textual Criticism Ultimately Reach?” in Barbara Aland and Joël Delobel, eds., *New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis, and Early Church History* (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994) 136–52, esp. 136–37, inasmuch as Petersen edited the volume of conference papers (see n. 31, above) and uses similar examples. Also, Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes were among the very few nonlocal attendees at the Notre Dame conference. Holmes twice refers to Koester’s views from that conference in his extremely brief discussion of the emerging issue of what really is meant by terms such as “autograph” and “original” in his chapter, “Reasoned Eclecticism in New Testament Textual Criticism,” in Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, eds., *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (SD 46; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) 353–54.
39. Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
40. *Ibid.*, 15, compare 275.
41. *Ibid.*, xii (italics in original); compare 276.
42. Review of Ehrman by David C. Parker, *JTS* 45 (1994) 707.
43. Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 280 (italics in original).
44. Bart D. Ehrman, “The Text as Window: New Testament Manuscripts and the Social History of Early Christianity,” in B. D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, eds., *The Text of*

- the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (SD 46; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 361 and n. 1 (italics in original).
45. Petersen, “What Text Can New Testament Textual Criticism Ultimately Reach?” 136–37.
  46. Paul Maas, *Textual Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958) 1.
  47. Petersen, “What Text Can New Testament Textual Criticism Ultimately Reach?” 136–37.
  48. *Ibid.*, 138–39. Petersen’s claim concerns the 27th ed. of Nestle/Aland = 4th ed. of UBSGNT.
  49. *Ibid.*, 139–40 (italics in original).
  50. *Ibid.*, 148.
  51. *Ibid.*, 140–47.
  52. But see n. 33, above.
  53. Petersen, “What Text Can New Testament Textual Criticism Ultimately Reach?” 148; compare 150.
  54. *Ibid.*, 149.
  55. Eldon Jay Epp, “Textual Criticism in the Exegesis of the New Testament,” in Stanley Porter, ed., *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament* (NTTS 25; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 45–97; the “Excursus” occupies pp. 73–91.
  56. Nils A. Dahl, “The Particularity of the Pauline Epistles as a Problem in the Ancient Church,” in W. C. van Unnik, ed., *Neotestamentica et Patristica: Eine Freundesgabe, Herrn Professor Dr. Oscar Cullmann zu seinem 60. Geburtstag Überreicht* (NovTSup 6; Leiden: Brill, 1962) 267.
  57. *Ibid.*, 268.
  58. *Ibid.*, 269.
  59. *Ibid.*, 271 n. 2.
  60. Harry Y. Gamble, *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans: A Study in Textual and Literary Criticism* (SD 42; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) 11–35; 96–142. Compare *idem*, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) 58–65.
  61. David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
  62. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
  63. *Ibid.*, 7.
  64. *Ibid.*, 132–37.
  65. *Ibid.*, 211.
  66. *Ibid.*, 208.
  67. *Ibid.*, 209.
  68. *Ibid.*, 182.
  69. *Ibid.*, 203.
  70. *Ibid.*, 45–46.
  71. *Ibid.*, 70; compare 200.
  72. *Ibid.*, 200.
  73. *Ibid.*, 209.
  74. *Ibid.*, 119.
  75. *Ibid.*, 93.
  76. David C. Parker, “Scripture is Tradition,” *Theology* 94 (1991) 15.
  77. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels*, 92–93.
  78. *Ibid.*, 183.
  79. *Ibid.*, 102.
  80. *Ibid.*, 172.
  81. *Ibid.*, 183.
  82. *Ibid.*, 174.
  83. *Ibid.*, 203.
  84. *Ibid.*, 212.

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85. *Ibid.*, 93.

86. Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 297. See the statement in *Der Text des Neuen Testaments* (Stuttgart:Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1982) 298: “Denn die neutestamentliche Textkritik kann über den Textbestand der neutestamentlichen Schriften nur urteilen von dem Augenblick an, wo sie durch Abschriften ihre literarische Existenz beginnen, zu dem, was vorher war, hat sie keinen Zugang.”

For a discussion of the task and boundaries of Old Testament textual criticism, see James A. Sanders, “The Task of Text Criticism,” 319–22, and his further references; *idem*, “Stability and Fluidity in Text and Canon,” 205–6; and Ferdinand E. Deist, “Text, Textuality, and Textual Criticism,” *JNSL* 21 (1995) 59–67, who treats implications of textual criticism, defined as “text-restoration,” for recent literary theory. See also n. 4 of this article.

87. Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 296.

88. See discussion on Bovon and Robinson in n. 36. Jacobus H. Petzer, “Reconsidering the Silent Women of Corinth – A Note on 1 Corinthians 14:34–35,” *Theologia Evangelica* (Pretoria) 26 (1993) 132–38; esp. 135–37, uses this text to illustrate his view of an “original text” and a later-developed but oldest “received text” of the epistle – indicating, in our present language, two levels of originality.

On the complex issue of interpolations, see William O. Walker Jr., who has suggested both principles for and examples of possibly interpolated passages in the New Testament, always insisting that “text-critical considerations should play a significant role in the identification of interpolations” (“Is First Corinthians 13 a Non-Pauline Interpolation?” *CBQ* 60 [1998] 496, but see esp. his “The Burden of Proof in Identifying Interpolations in the Pauline Letters,” *NTS* 33 [1987] 610–18; “Text-Critical Evidence for Interpolations in the Letters of Paul,” *CBQ* 50 [1988] 622–31; “1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and Paul’s Views Regarding Women,” *JBL* 94 [1975] 94–110; and “1 Corinthians 2.6–16: A Non-Pauline Interpolation?” *JSNT* 47 [1992] 75–94). For a critique of Walker’s views, see Frederik W. Wisse, “Textual Limits to Redactional Theory in the Pauline Corpus,” in James E. Goehring, Charles W. Hedrick, Jack T. Sanders, with Hans Dieter Betz, eds., *Gospel Origins & Christian Beginnings in Honor of James M. Robinson* (Forum Fascicles, 1; Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1990) 172–78.

89. I offer this definition of the proper sphere of New Testament textual criticism and the descriptions of two subcategories as the first such attempts; they aim to clarify the issues but also to stimulate further consideration of these complex subjects.

90. On interpolations, see n. 88. Extensive literature has developed on the possible interpolation (thus, doubtless non-Pauline) or dislocation of 1 Cor 14:34–35; it is found after 14:40 in D<sup>p</sup> 88 et al., is treated as a separate paragraph in  $\mathfrak{B}^{46}$  B  $\aleph$  A D<sup>p</sup> 33, and is marked in various manuscripts by sigla interpreted by some to indicate either that it was lacking in those manuscripts or dislocated. See, for example, Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 699–708; Walker, “1 Corinthians 11:2–16,” 95 n. 6; 109; Philip B. Payne, “Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor 14.34–5,” *NTS* 41 (1995) 240–62; *idem*, “MS. 88 as Evidence for a Text without 1 Cor. 14.34–5,” *NTS* 44 (1998) 152–58. For a contrary view, see Curt Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14.34–5,” *NTS* 43 (1997) 242–55.

Alistair Stewart-Sykes, “Ancient Editors and Copyists and Modern Partition Theories: The Case of the Corinthian Correspondence,” *JSNT* 61 (1996) 53–64, argues that *complex* compilation or partition theories regarding the Pauline letters would have been “a virtual physical impossibility” on the assumption that Paul’s letters were both written and preserved on rolls – because rolls could not be manipulated in a fashion that would permit such literary rearrangements. Nowhere, however, does he discuss the large issue of the codex in early Christianity, nor does he refer, for example, to the paleographic and codicological work of C. H. Turner, C. H. Roberts, or T. C. Skeat, or



- to recent work, like Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*; compare my “The Codex and Literacy in Early Christianity and at Oxyrhynchus: Issues Raised by Harry Y. Gamble’s *Books and Readers in the Early Church*,” *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 10 (1997) 15–37, esp. 15–26.
91. For an earlier, brief attempt to clarify this relationship, see my “Textual Criticism in the Exegesis of the New Testament,” 73–84.
  92. Eldon Jay Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (SNTSMS 3; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) see 12–21.
  93. Kirsopp Lake, *The Influence of Textual Criticism on the Exegesis of the New Testament* (Oxford: Parker, 1904) 3–4.
  94. *Ibid.*, 11–12. Compare Lake’s earlier, similar, but less well-developed suggestions in “The Practical Value of Textual Variation Illustrated from the Book of Acts,” *Biblical World* 19 (1902) 361–69, esp. 363–64, 369. How forward-looking this view of Lake was in his day can be seen by contrasting it with what Warfield was still saying in 1907 in the 7th ed. of his *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 11: “The text conveys the sense; but the textual critic has nothing to do, primarily, with the sense. It is for him to restore the text, and for the interpreter who follows him to reap the new meaning.” But when Lake speaks of the “textual critic” and the “exegete,” they are intimately related, if not identified, as he brings the interpretive task virtually into the textual criticism enterprise. Certainly the two tasks become one in the views of Riddle and Parvis.
  95. Donald W. Riddle, “Textual Criticism as a Historical Discipline,” *AngThR* 18 (1936) 221.
  96. *Ibid.*, 227.
  97. Merrill M. Parvis, “The Nature and Tasks of New Testament Textual Criticism,” *JR* 32 (1952) 172.
  98. *Ibid.*, 173.
  99. Erich Fascher, *Textgeschichte als hermeneutisches Problem* (Halle [Saale]: Max Niemeyer, 1953) 12.
  100. Ernest Cadman Colwell, *What Is the Best New Testament?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) 52–53.
  101. *Ibid.*, 52.
  102. On Origen as a textual critic, see Epp, “Textual Criticism in the Exegesis of the New Testament,” 83.
  103. For these views of Romans, see Gamble, *Textual History of the Letter to the Romans*, 15–35; 96–129; compare John J. Clabeaux, *A Lost Edition of the Letters of Paul: A Reassessment of the Text of the Pauline Corpus Attested by Marcion* (CBQMS 21; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1989) 1–4, for a summary; Ulrich Schmidt, *Marcion und sein Apostolos: Rekonstruktion und historische Einordnung der marcionitischen Paulusbriefausgabe* (Arbeiten zur Neutestamentlichen Textforschung 25; Berlin; de Gruyter, 1995) 284–94; and Peter Lampe, “Zur Textgeschichte des Römerbriefes,” *NovT* 27 (1985) 273–77.
  104. The terms “pre-canonical original,” “canonical original,” and “interpretive original” were used in my earlier attempt to describe levels or, better, dimensions of originality (“Textual Criticism in the Exegesis of the New Testament,” 89), but obviously I prefer the terminology and refinements adopted for the present paper.
  105. Nolan, *An Inquiry into the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate*, 2–3.
  106. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels*, 200, 93, refers to the New Testament “text” in these statements, and it should not be assumed that he would approve my substitution of “canon” for “text.”
  107. See “Textual Criticism in the Exegesis of the New Testament,” 91.
  108. Brevard S. Childs, *New Testament as Canon*, applies his “canonical approach” to the entire New Testament, and his excursus on “The Hermeneutical Problem of New Testament Text-Criticism” (p. 521–30) is equally ideological. I cannot do justice to it here

(nor am I confident that I understand all of its many nuances), though its relevance to our discussion is frequent and considerable. For example, Childs recognizes that “[t]he selection and shaping of the books of scripture took place in the context of the worship of the struggling church as it determined canonicity by the use and effect of the books themselves” (p. 31); and he also affirms “. . . the effect of the canonical collection in its final form on the shaping of the tradition for those who treasured these writings as scripture” (p. 32). In Child’s view, “[t]he earliest levels of textual witness reveal a state of wide multiplicity” and the goal of restoring the “original autographs” “seems increasingly one-sided” (p. 524). For him, the term canon also has different uses (p. 41), yet the New Testament canon is “that corpus received as scripture. . . . The canonical form marks not only the place from which exegesis begins, but also it marks the place at which exegesis ends. The text’s pre-history and post-history are both subordinated to the form deemed canonical” (p. 48). And the “canonical vision” involves “interpreting the New Testament as sacred scriptures of the church” (p. 53). As for New Testament textual criticism, it is “part of the larger canonical process” (p. 523), and Childs sees a crucial need to “redefine the task of New Testament textual criticism in such a way as to do justice to the text’s peculiar canonical function within the Christian church,” that is, “establishing the church’s received and authoritative text” and “to recover that New Testament text which best reflects the true apostolic witness found in the church’s scripture” (p. 527). Methodologically, he asserts, this redefinition is accomplished by starting with the *textus receptus* because it describes “a full range of textual possibilities which actually functioned in the church,” from which one discerns, critically, “the best received, that is, canonical text” – “that text which best reflects the church’s judgment as to its truth” (p. 528). Childs recognizes the “element of subjectivity” in this “continuing process,” for “the discipline of text criticism is not a strictly objective, or non-theological activity” (p. 529).

Of course, textual criticism is not a strictly objective exercise, but I differ in thinking that it is preferable to begin the enterprise with the earliest witnesses/texts rather than later ones (though for me that is more a matter of convenience than ideology) and that canon and text should be distanced rather than integrally joined. The many references by Childs, within the last few pages of his excursus, to the text best reflecting “the true apostolic witness” (p. 527), or “the church’s judgment as to its truth” (p. 528), or “the truest witness to the gospel,” or the best-received text’s “purity” (p. 529), or, finally, to “the truest textual rendering” (p. 530), heighten his unification of text and canon as jointly a theological enterprise. I would seek ways, rather, to distance them one from the other as an essential aspect of textual criticism as a scholarly discipline.

Further on “canonical criticism,” including interaction with Childs’s views, see the works of James A. Sanders, esp. *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

109. François Bovon, “The Synoptic Gospels and the Noncanonical Acts of the Apostles,” *HTR* 81 (1988) 35.
110. Martin Hengel, “Aufgaben der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft,” *NTS* 40 (1994) 341–42. A slightly revised version appeared in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996) 76–86; see p. 79.