

Is Textual Criticism to be feared ?

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Textual criticism is a subject all too often ignored in Evangelical and Confessionally Reformed circles. In a general way textual criticism – what Germanic theological jargon calls “lower criticism” to distinguish it from a pretended “higher criticism” which has for quite some time labored at the literary deconstruction of the Bible”, is quite well received in Christian circles which still remain attached to the doctrines of the infallibility and authority of the Bible.

To speak in a general way, higher criticism with its panoply of methods, its search for sources of the text under consideration, its hypotheses as to the dating of the books of the Bible, on the divergent theologies of Paul, John, Peter, its speculations on the form of the texts, and so on, is still considered by these traditional circles with certain suspicion, even though they too often afford these critics more attention than they deserve. But this is in no way the case for lower criticism (or textual criticism) whose presuppositions have been adopted for the establishment of the Greek text of most of our modern translations of the New Testament. Thus many passages in our French Bibles are printed enclosed in square brackets and the notes which accompany the brackets are often marked by indications according to which such and such a passage is not to be found in the oldest manuscripts or in the best manuscripts. The reader who, struck by such indications, would like to know more is, to say the least, left unsatisfied by the absence of reasons given for such apparently arbitrary affirmations. Why, he may ask, should a manuscript of the oldest type (that is of the Fourth Century) written in Greek capitals be necessarily considered better than a newer manuscript of the Ninth Century written in small type ? Is a *Witness of Jehovah Bible* dating from the beginning of the Twentieth Century necessarily better than a *Colombe Bible* printed at the end of the Twentieth ? Must one deduce that the criterion of time should be considered absolute ? What is the basis for such remarks ?

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The first method of establishing the text of the New Testament we shall consider is that utilised for the first time (in its modern phase) in 1516 both by Erasmus in Basel and at the same time in Spain by a team of Biblical scholars under the direction of Cardinal Ximenes. These two texts, were established, as from Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, from the textual tradition we now call “Byzantine”. The second method, which is commonly called the “Eclectic tradition” took off essentially as from Tischendorf’s discovery in 1859 of a very ancient text of the New Testament in a monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai. The conclusions he drew from this discovery were confirmed by the contemporary revelation of a very similar manuscript long hidden unknown in the Vatican Library. This text which came to be known as the “Vaticanus” also originated from the Fourth Century Alexandrine tradition. This method has since held a dominant position in academic circles. The first school of textual criticism, that inaugurated by Erasmus and Ximenes, is today almost completely unknown even in Evangelical and Reformed Academic circles desirous of being faithful to the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

Let us briefly indicate a number of factual errors in the position defended by the advocates of the eclectic method of textual criticism.

It is wrong, for example, to affirm, as is commonly done in these circles, that scholars have only recently begun to take an interest in the biblical quotations of the Fathers as well as in those found in lectionaries (anthologies of liturgical texts drawn from the Bible). To prove the contrary one has only to examine the impressive researches in this field of the greatest opponent in the XIXth century of the new critical method, John William Burgon (1813-1888). Burgon, in opposition to his eclectic colleagues – scholars like Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, and their numerous disciples, who consistently based their work on the texts of the Alexandrian tradition and in

particular the two oldest complete manuscripts of the New Testament, the Sinaiticus and the Vaticanus - made fullest use of all the patristic documents available to him. This included quotations of the Bible from the writings of the Fathers and those found in liturgical lectionaries in use in the early church. It is his exemplary knowledge of the latter which enabled him to give an explanation of the fact that the text of the account of the woman taken in adultery (John 7 : 53 – 8 : 1) is not to be found in a small number of ancient manuscripts of the Gospel of John, and is placed in another section of this Gospel. As Burgon has admirably demonstrated in his “Pericope de adultera”, the essential reason for the absence of this passage in certain manuscripts and its introduction elsewhere in others, is the fact that these manuscripts were not texts figuring in copies of the New Testament but in liturgical lectionaries, selections of biblical texts to be read during the celebration of Church services ¹.

We must her add that our remarks are solely addressed to the critical study of the manuscripts of the New Testament for which there exists an impressive number of variants, and not to the manuscripts of the Jewish Tanak (our Old Testament), for the latter was exceptionally well preserved by the Masoretic textual tradition.

This brings us to our second point. It is wrong to establish, as some do, an imaginary dialectical opposition between a “scientific” camp on the one hand - the defenders of the eclectic method – and, on the other, a “fundamentalist” party, defending the traditional attitude. The latter, we are told, is made up of dogmatic adherents of the received, ecclesiastical or traditional text of the New Testament. These two tendencies are usually opposed one to the other. Others, in a typical Hegelian manner, seek to resolve this opposition by a synthesis, a type of compromise solution, thus attempting the reconciliation of the irreconcilable. If they continue to accuse the traditional position for its pretended “dogmaticism”, they also attack the eclectic method for its pretended dictatorial methods, seeking as it does to impose by the force on all the

¹ John William Burgon, “Pericope de adultera” in : *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* Good Books, 2456 Devonshire Road, Springfield, IL 62703..

results of the so-called scientific logic, establishing thus a kind of intellectual tyranny on all schools of scholarly thought. Those who favor this dialectic solution accuse the advocates of the so-called “scientific” method of practicing a type of intellectual terrorism, for they impose on all the conclusions of their arguments as intellectually constraining.

But what makes such a dialectical solution quite impossible is that the scientific-fundamentalist opposition is in itself false. In fact, there has always existed (and there still exists) two schools of textual criticism of the New Testament. Both hold to strictly scientific pretensions. Their methodological principles are, however, very different. They are in fact thoroughly antithetical.

1/ The eclectic method in question can be described as follows. A variety of differing texts, considered to be of equal value, are examined by the textual critics without any kind of doctrinal *a priori*, but following a number of specific technical rules. Doctrinal positions are considered partisan, but methods are neutral. From this variety of readings (hence the word “eclectic”) they pick, in terms of the methods used, what they consider to be the most correct reading of the passage under consideration. They seek thus to reconstruct the original text (considered lost) of the New Testament. The text of the New Testament is thus placed at the same ontological and epistemological level as any other literary text. For the advocates of the eclectic method there is no essential difference between the Bible and any other book. The great figures of this tradition are such eminent scholars as Lachmann, Tischendorff, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort, Nestle, Aaland and Metzger.

This tradition explicitly rejects the presupposition which founded the older school of textual criticism. For, according to the traditional school, the Holy Spirit has been (and still is) objectively active in history so as to effect the very real preservation of the authentic (original) text of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit thus protects the New Testament text from the weakness and the malice of men as well as from the attacks of

the Devil. As Jakob van Bruggen points out, this method is today universally accepted.

One can even say that the modern textual criticism of the New Testament is based on the one fundamental conviction that the true text of the New Testament is at least not found in the great majority of the manuscripts. [...] This rejection of the traditional text, that is the text preserved and handed down in the churches, is hardly written or thought about any more in the 20th century ; is a *fait accompli*. [...] A critical investigation of the reasons for rejecting the Byzantine text soon encounters the difficulty that this rejection is accepted as a fact in the 20th century, but not defended as a proposition ².

The philosophical origins of the eclectic method are to be found in the rationalist spirit of the Enlightenment. It is one of the intellectual fruits of modern autonomous thought, thought freed from the constraints of the Word of God but freed also from the obligation of submitting its methods to the very nature of the object studied.

2/. The other tradition, amiably baptised by its critics with the expression “fundamentalist rationalism”, also vaunts itself of defending clearly defined scientific pretensions. However, placing their methodology under the authority of teachings of the New Testament, these defenders of the Traditional method also submit their methods to the nature of the object they are studying. They in fact take with methodological seriousness the infallibility and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures. Thus, for them this book has a specific and unique character. This requires an appropriate and unique method of study. This fact places all those, who study this very special book in a systematically Christian perspective, in a position which forces them to use a method appropriate to the specific ontological and epistemological status of the Bible. For the Bible itself states that its ultimate Author is the Holy Spirit and that this divine Author is also its constant Preserver.

Here we can do no better than to quote the very enlightening remarks of the

² Jakob van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, Premier Publishing Winnipeg, 1988 [1978], p. 11, 14.

Calvinist textual critical scholar, great connoisseur of these questions, Edward F. Hills. He was trained at Westminster Theological Seminary, sitting under the teaching of John Murray, Edward J. Young and Cornelius Van Til. He later pursued his academic career at Yale and Harvard. Here is what he writes :

Thus there are two methods of New Testament textual criticism, the consistently Christian method and the naturalistic method. These two methods deal with the same materials, the same Greek manuscripts, and the same translations and biblical quotations, but they interpret these materials differently. The consistently Christian method interprets the materials of the New Testament textual criticism in accordance with the doctrines of the divine inspiration and providential preservation of the Scriptures. The naturalistic method interprets these same materials in accordance with its own doctrine that the New Testament is nothing more than a human book.

And Hills adds,

Sad to say, modern Bible-believing scholars have taken very little interest in the concept of consistently Christian New Testament textual criticism. For more than a century most of them have been quite content to follow in this area the naturalistic methods of Tischendorf, Tregelles, and Westcott and Hort. And the result of this equivocation has been truly disastrous. Just as in Pharaoh's dream the thin cows ate up the fat cows, so the principles and procedures of naturalistic New Testament textual criticism have spread into every department of Christian thought and produced spiritual famine³.

Hill's work is but the culmination in the XXth century of a much older tradition of study of the manuscript texts of the New Testament. This tradition was at the same time both rigorously scientific and based on coherent methodological presuppositions in harmony with the Bible's own teaching on the question. This textual tradition was

³ Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, The Christian Research Press (P. O. Box 2013, Des Moines, Iowa 50310, USA), 1984 [1956], p. 3.

eventually called the “Ecclesiastical Tradition of Textual Criticism” for it was based on texts received as being authentic, and thus authoritative, in the Eastern Orthodox Church. To this tradition belonged such eminent scholars as Cardinal Ximenes of the Complutensian School in Spain, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Robert Estienne (editor of the Stephanus Text), Theodore of Beza, the Dutch Elzeviers (who established the Textus Receptus), John Owen ⁴ and David Martin ⁵ the famous reviser of the French Bible in 1707. This version, which was recently reedited in Dallas by a Pentecostal missionary organisation, is one of the rare editions of the French Bible today available which is based on the Ecclesiastical tradition of the biblical text. The situation is different in English where the King James Version is readily available, in German where Luther’s Bible is constantly republished or even in Spanish where the Reina-Valera version is easy to find.

This Ecclesiastical Tradition of textual scholarship was ably carried forward in the XIXth and XXth centuries, both in England and in the United States. Amongst the eminent figures who stand out in this little known school of textual criticism we find such names as John William Burgon ⁶, T. R. Birks ⁷, E. Miller ⁸, F. H. A. Scrivener ⁹ in the XIXth century. Then in the XXth such men as Edward F. Hills ¹⁰, Wilbur N. Pickering ¹¹, Theodore Letis ¹² and Jakob van Bruggen of the Theological Reformed

⁴ John Owen, “Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text” in John Owen, Works, Volume XVI, “The Church and the Bible”, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976 [1658] p. 281-421.

⁵ La Sainte Bible qui contient le Vieux et le Nouveau Testament, expliquée avec des notes de Theologie et de Critique sur la Version ordinaire des Églises Reformees, revue sur les Originaux, et retouchée dans le langage [...] par David Martin, Deux Volumes, Folio, Amsterdam, 1707.

⁶ John William Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*, Associated Publishers and Authors, Grand Rapids, no date [1871] with an important introduction of 50 pages by Edward F. Hills ; *The Revision Revised*, A. G. Hobbs (P.O. Box 14218, Fort Worth, Texas 76117), 1983 [1883] ; *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospel Vindicated and Established*, Dean Burgon Society Press (Box 354, Collingswood, New Jersey 08108, U.S.A.), 1998 [1896] ; *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, Dean Burgon Society Press, 1998 [1896].

⁷ T. R. Birks, *Essay on the Right Estimation of Manuscript Evidence in the Text of the New Testament*, London, 1878.

⁸ E. Miller, *A Guide to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, London, 1886.

⁹ F. H. A. Scrivener, *A plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (2 vols), George Bell, London, 1894.

¹⁰ Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, The Christian Research Press (P. O. Box 2013, Des Moines, Iowa 50310, USA), 1984 [1956] ; *Believing Bible Study*, CRP, 1991 [1967] ; “Introduction” in : John William Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*, Associated Publishers and Authors, Grand Rapids, without date.

¹¹ Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 1980 (1977). Of this book D. A. Carson writes in his book, *The King James Version Debate*, “The most formidable defense of the priority of the Byzantine text yet published in our day.” John Wenham wrote in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, “It is not often that one reads a

College of Kampen in the Netherlands¹³. A revised critical edition of the traditional text of the New Testament is today again available in an edition established by Zane Hodges and A. Forstad¹⁴.

The traditional or ecclesiastical position defended by this school is not only based on a scrupulously scientific study of the texts, but on the self-conscious conformity of the method adopted to the standards of the Reformed Confessions. Here is what the Westminster Confession affirms :

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic.

.At this point is indicated the following Biblical reference Matthew 5 18, to which we could add Revelation 22 18-19 :

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book :
If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book ; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book¹⁵

And in that last of Reformed Confessional Confessions the *Helvetic Consensus Formula* of 1675, we can read in the First Canon :

God, the Supreme Judge, not only took care to have His Word, which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. (Rom : 16), committed to

book which reorients one's whole approach to a subject, but that is what this has done to me."

¹² Theodore P. Letis (Editor), *The Majority Text. Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, (P. O. Box 5114, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 46895, U.S.A., 1987); *The Ecclesiastical Text. Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind*, The Institute for Renaissance and Reformational Biblical Studies (6417 N. Fairhill, Philadelphia, PA 19126, U.S.A.), 2000.

¹³ Jakob van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, Premier Publishing (One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R2J 3XE), 1988 [1978].

¹⁴ Zane Hodges et A. Forstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, Nelson, Nashville, Tennessee.

writing by Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care ever since it was written up to the present time, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the Church justly ascribes it to His singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have, to the end of the world, a “sure word of prophecy” and “Holy Scriptures” (2 Tim. 3 :15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, “one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass.” (Matt. 5 : 18) ¹⁶

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A certain number of clarificatory remarks are here in order :

- The textual problems raised by a certain number of manuscripts (less than 20%) only concerns the New Testament for the text of the Old Testament was so carefully copied by the Massoretic scribes that very few errors were introduced.
- The immense majority – between 80% and 90% of the manuscripts of the New Testament currently available, which are texts of the Ecclesiastical tradition of the Eastern Church in miniscule letters, are in all essential points unanimous. Only very minor different readings remain.

On this last point Wilbur Pickering writes :

The argument from statistical probability enters here with a vengeance. Not only do the extant MSS present us with one text form enjoying an 80-90% majority, but the remaining 10-20% do not represent a single competing text form. The minority MSS disagree as much (or more) among themselves as they do with the majority. [...] Or to take a specific case, in 1 Tim. 3 : 16 over 300 Greek MSS read “God” while only eleven read something else. Of those eleven, two have

¹⁵ John H. Leith (Editor), *The Creeds of the Churches*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1977, p. 196. We underline.

¹⁶ J. Gaberel, *Histoire de l'Église de Genève depuis le commencement de la Réformation jusqu'à nos jours*, Cherbuliez, Genève, 1862, Tome III, p, 496. Une traduction anglaise du Consensus Helveticus se trouve dans John H. Leith (Editor), *Creeds of the Churches*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1977 [1963], p. 308-323.

private readings, two have a third reading, and seven agree in reading “who”. So we have to judge between 97% and 2%. It is hard to imagine any possible set of circumstances in the transmissional history sufficient to produce the cataclysmic overthrow in statistical probability required by the claim that “who” is the original reading¹⁷.

What is little known is the complete dead end into which the eclectic tradition of textual study of the New Testament has today pushed itself. No-one in these circles considers any longer that by the use of these critical tools, of almost universal acceptance in Academia, one can ever hope to discover the authoritative original text of the New Testament. It is this methodological uncertainty which Jakob van Bruggen describes in considering the desperate situation in which the eclectic editors of the New Testament find themselves¹⁸.

This again means an acquiescence in a consensus-text which has been determined on the basis of uncertainty. This time no mean from three modern text-editions, like the older Nestle, but the mean of the opinions of five modern textual-critics, Aaland, Black, Martini, Metzger, Wikgren together have established a text by majority-vote. It is clear from the Textual Commentary of Metzger on this text, that there are many readings which have been chosen only by the majority of the Committee. That they did not unanimously arrive at a text, is also not surprising. A present there is no certainty concerning the history of the textual tradition. [...] Thus the agreement concerning the text-edition to be used camouflages the uncertainty which prevails during the fixation of the text¹⁹.

- The age of a manuscript does not by itself necessarily guarantee either its quality or

¹⁷ Wilbur Pickering, *Op. cit.*, p. 118-119. Just to consider the French versions of this passage, the Colombe edition of the Bible gives the Arian reading found in an exceedingly small number of manuscripts “He who was manifested in the flesh”, and this without the slightest explanatory comment. This replaces the majority reading (97% of the manuscripts) which all give the Orthodox formula : “God was manifested into the flesh.” This is the reading we find in the Martin, Ostervald and Trinity Bible Society French translations.

¹⁸ The reference here is to the Third Edition of the Greek Text of the New Testament published by the United Bible Societies.

¹⁹ Jakob van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, *Op. cit.*, p. 10-11.

even its authenticity. As we have already shown the Ancient manuscripts written in capital letters such as the Vaticanus or the Sinaiticus, dating from the IVth century, are not, by the sole consideration of their antiquity, good texts of the New Testament. This is equally the case for the numerous papyri discovered in the sands of Egypt during the course of the XXth century. The majority of these fragments of the New Testament represent in fact very defective copies. It may well be that the astonishing preservation of the Sinaiticus and the Vaticanus texts be essentially due to the fact that, as defective copies, they were never put to liturgical use and were thus never destroyed by constant practice. Such a physical preservation occurs similarly with a *Witness of Jehovah Bible* resting unused on the shelves of a Christian home from which it is never taken down for family worship. It would obviously be preserved much longer than the orthodox Bible in constant use for personal and communal worship.

- We may now raise the decisive question :

Is it possible to exclude faith from any truly scientific research on the New Testament ?

The tradition of Textual Criticism which pretends to the exclusive methodology appropriate to the scientific study of the New Testament, tradition which goes from Lachmann and Tischendorff to such modern scholars as Nestle, Aaland and Metzger and includes the work of men like Westcott, Hort and Tregelles – not forgetting the prestigious name of Warfield²⁰ – affirms categorically that faith is here NOT in any way necessary. Indeed, in their view, the intrusion of considerations relative to faith in textual studies would automatically disqualify the scholar who had the temerity of adopting such a position from the respect of the authorised scientific community. In this

²⁰ See B. B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1893, where the great defender of the inerrancy of the original manuscripts of the Bible capitulates totally before the specious arguments of Westcott and Hort as to the variants in the manuscript tradition. See here the first two chapters of the collection of articles by Theodore P. Letis, *The Ecclesiastical Text. Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind*, op. cit., p. 1-58.

they adopt the immanent perspective which is that of modernity, perspective which considers the Bible as it would any other book. Thus, in this view, the study of textual criticism, whatever the text might be, dispenses with the scholar's faith in its effort to establish by scientific means the true text of the New Testament. These scholars function intellectually as if this text did not in fact proceed from the revelatory action of a transcendent God, manifesting in this way His divine supernatural power. The holiness of the Divinity was thus communicated to the very character of the written text in which we find God's revelation which we rightly name the Holy Scriptures. Thus, this methodologically atheistic scholarly tradition implicitly affirms that the text of the Scriptures in no way needs for its very preservation from the attacks of the Devil, from the destructive malice of men and from the natural weakness of copists, the protective and preserving action of the Holy Spirit.

Things are very different with regard to the Ecclesiastical method of textual criticism. Here, in what we must unashamedly call the truly scientific study of the manuscripts of the New Testament, the Ecclesiastical method directly takes into methodological consideration the supernatural character of the object of its research. We have seen how the textual tradition of the Ancient Church, resurrected by the labors of humanist scholars at the time of the Reformation, and carried forward by the Burgon's, the Scrivener's, the Hills', the Hodge's and the Pickering's of the past two centuries, integrate into their truly scientific study of the sacred text, respect for the marvelous supernatural manner in which our Sovereign God revealed and preserved (and continues to preserve) these sacred writings. For God indeed keeps them free from the errors produced by a false science which rejects the sacred character of the object of its study. In fact, in this particular domain, so-called Academic scholarship, systematically refuses to place God within the very workings of the scholarly mind. It is here that we must carefully heed the apostle's warning :

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Conclusion

Let us end with a question. What can be the use of the most absolute doctrine of the inspiration, the infallibility and the inerrance of the original manuscripts of the Bible (such as that taught by B. B. Warfield, for example) if the text in our hands is not entirely worthy of our trust ?

In opposition to the doubts, which the deceitful practices and the errors of a science which excludes all knowledge of God from the methodology it has adopted for the study of the Bible, might raise in our minds, let us quietly declare that this book in our hands, inspired and preserved by God, is indeed what it affirms to be : the very Word of the living God. For God has watched with such care over the transmission of his Holy Word through the ages that, in spite of the falsifications produced by those who put themselves in the place of the Holy Spirit as judges of what in this Book is of God, and what is not of Him, we can still today hold in our hands God's very revelation to men. In spite of the numerous new French translations of the Bible – to speak only of the French speaking world – based on uncertain texts it is, by God's grace, still possible today to find translations grounded on the traditional text of Holy Scripture, as originally inspired by God and as it has, over the centuries, been received and preserved in the Church. Thus, with the presence in our midst of the Martin, Ostervald and Trinitarian Society ²¹ French translations of the true text of the Bible it is possible for men to read in French the infallible witness of God to the thoughts he chose to reveal to men for their salvation ²².

²¹ *La Sainte Bible, Version Martin 1855* [1707], Association Biblique Internationale, Box 225,646, Dallas, Texas 75265, USA, 1980. *Bible Version Ostervald* (1996), C. N., Baughman, 315 rue Moise Bodhuin, F-02000 Laon. *La Sainte Bible*, Trinitarian Bible Society, 217 Kingston Road, London, SW19 3NN, Angleterre.

²² This does not mean that the currently available versions of the Bible based on the eclectic text (Colombe, TOB, Darby, Segond, Osty, Crampon, Jerusalem 1956, etc) do not permit their readers to know God and his thoughts for men. We must

again repeat that these versions, based as they are on partially uncertain texts, cannot have the certainty of those founded on the Majority Text as it has always been received in the Greek Churches of the East.