† Blessed is our God always, as it is now, was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. ... in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Through the prayers of our holy Fathers and Mothers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen. Glory to You, our God, glory to You.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, You are everywhere and fill all things, Treasury of blessings, and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

† Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us (three times).

† Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it is now, was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The Intellectual Dishonesty
of The Chicago Statement
on Biblical Inerrancy

So the process is not a process of ascertaining inerrancy. It is a process of assimilating Truth and custodianship of Truth, as Scripture is handed from the Father to the Son to John to The Church.

“The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses; commit these same things to faithful people, who are able to teach others as well.” — 2 Timothy 2:2

*Articles of Affirmation and Denial*

The articles of affirmation and denial specifically say:

*Article X*

“We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture,

**which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy**.

We further affirm that

**copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original**.

“We deny that

**any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs**.

We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.”

*Introduction*

We deny, as intellectually dishonest, that any reconstruction or recovery of the autographs, if possible at all, is achievable by simply examining the surviving manuscripts.[[1]](#endnote-1) This paper outlines a few of the difficulties in getting from inerrant autographic text of Scripture, to available manuscripts with great accuracy, to copies[[2]](#endnote-2) and translations of Scripture, which faithfully represent the original, without losing any essential element of the Christian faith along the way.

Article 10 uses the phrase, “in the providence of God”: at least for some theologians and many lay people, this means Textus Receptus, or even King James Only. The providence of God does not certify for us, lives free from pain and suffering; nor does it certify freedom from error. Error, like rain, falls on the just and the unjust alike.

This creates a considerable obstacle, especially for the lay person. Inerrancy attempts to convince us that the problems are few, and easily resolved by methods of human wisdom. This is simply not the case.

We do not discuss the immensity of the problem to frighten you; rather to enlist you in the fight for better solutions. Not nearly enough effort and financial support are being devoted to solving real problems; while much of the existing effort and financial support is misspent and misdirected. The Church needs you to get more involved. Inerrancy hides from you, where your involvement should be focused.

Let us begin with Bible Translations and work backwards.

*Translations*

The problem with translations is that the Bible has been translated to death. Moreover, the translators themselves believe that they have a moral and legal right to copyright the Bible, charging a considerable fee along the way. Selling Bibles is a very lucrative business. Aside from the fact that this is pure rubbish, the average person is confronted with so many choices that it is impossible to pick the “right” one, even if we could afford it.

This is not just an individual’s personal decision. Many denominations are weighing the best choice of Bible as an annotated study Bible or recommended pulpit Bible for their denomination: today the leading options seem to be the ESV and the New NIV. Which is better? Neither one: neither one of them is any better than average.

Which is the “right” one? None of them. Let us explain. Since you are most likely reading this on your computer, we direct you to an informative free website:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/>

At the top of the page, you will find two large white blocks. Depending on the size of your viewing window or desktop, these blocks will either be arranged side-by-side each other, or immediately above-and-below one another. The left or top block is for your topic or verse of search interest. The bottom or right block is for the Bible Translation or Version which you want to explore. There is a little grey “drop-down” or “pull-down” arrow at the right side of the Bible Translation or Version selection block. If we select that arrow, Bible Gateway shows us numerous language choices from Amuzgo de Guerrero (AMU) to (ZH) Chinese Union Version Modern Punctuation (Traditional) (CUVMPT). Overwhelming isn’t it?

There are other choices of greater interest to us right now. In the middle of the pile we find English (EN) Bibles, I counted fifty-four of them, over fifty to chose from: KJ II, Douay-Challoner, and several others were not found in the list, so the problem is worse than it looks. If you wanted to choose the best, you wouldn’t even know where to begin and neither would I.

So the claim, “We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original,” is nothing more than an arrogant, audacious, pompous, and rude presumption or pretension; an abduction or wild speculation of the worst sort. How would we ever know which ones “faithfully represent the original” since we can’t and don’t have the original in our possession?

No small task is set before us in just selecting a good English Bible. If such a task is monumental for whole denominations with several experts at their service, how will you or I make a good choice, let alone the best choice? How can we represent our local churches faithfully in any denominational meeting? We can’t, and neither can any denomination. What ever choice is made, will lead to other problems. If you have a favorite, you may as well stick with it. If you do not have a favorite, and need to buy a Bible you may as well grab the cheapest KJV or RSV you can find. Or just read Bible Gateway for free.[[3]](#endnote-3) Be sure to pray every day that the Holy Spirit will lead you in the way. Pray for the Spirit’s help with every word and verse: for He promises to lead you into all Truth.[[4]](#endnote-4)

With the Spirit’s help and leadership, there is a better path: original languages….

*Greek*

If you look farther down the list of Translations or Versions you will find Español (ES), Suomi (FI), Français (FR), and finally Κοινη (GRC), which is just the Greek word for Common. Don’t worry, you don’t need to be fluent in Greek, yet. Don’t tell me that this is too hard for you either: you can play some part, no matter who you are. You do need to learn the Greek alphabet and how to pronounce it.[[5]](#endnote-5) You also need an Analytical Greek Lexicon, such as the one Zondervan publishes.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Now when you check the Bible Gateway “drop down” arrow, you see that there are only four Greek language choices: 1550 Stephanus New Testament (TR1550), 1881 Westcott-Hort New Testament (WHNU), 1894 Scrivener New Testament (TR1894), and SBL Greek New Testament (SBLGNT). You’ll also notice date clues which tell you that western Christians have been working on this problem since before 1550; 466 years or more.[[7]](#endnote-7) We’ll start with the last choice, SBL Greek New Testament (SBLGNT), until we develop more skill: because it’s easier to use. Working with your *Analytical Greek Lexicon* and the SBLGNT, one verse, and one word at a time, you can begin working on the New Testament from the original language. This sort of approach might work best in a study group, where each of you can take a word or a verse and share the load. Eventually, you will build up a Greek vocabulary. In any case you will develop part of the tool set necessary for evaluating a good English Translation.

If you take some Greek courses and study some Greek grammar, with hard work you might become fluent in a dozen years or so.

What we want you to see is that what *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* implies in Article 10, as fairly easy and very trustworthy, is not as easy as it first looks and we are just starting to acquire the skills necessary for evaluating a good English Translation. To evaluate a good English Translation, we need to become fluent in Greek and that is not so easy. If working backwards from English to Greek is difficult, working forward from Greek to English is no easier. Greek is a relatively easy and simple language to learn. English is one of the most complicated languages ever known to man.

If you are not up to gaining Greek fluency, maybe you can help a young person learn Greek: for the simple problem is that not enough people know Greek in our churches. Maybe you can sponsor beginner’s classes. People can improve their fluency and pronunciation by listening to Greek Bible readings such as Dr. Spiros Zodhiates narration.[[8]](#endnote-8) Again, group study works best.

If promising students develop who are loyal to your church, perhaps a collection could be raised to fund a year, or two, or more of language study in Greece. Maybe you could even sponsor a team of twelve or thirteen recent high school graduates, who will study together in Greece.

*Text Criticism*

Along the way, students will begin to realize that the Greek Bible developed along differing lines in different major cultural areas of the Greco-Roman world. Perhaps the first such area was Alexandria, Egypt, which once had the best library in the Greek empire. This is probably why the Old Testament is thought to be first translated into Greek in Alexandria. Representatives of the Sanhedrin went to Alexandria to work because of the quality of research that could be done there. Later, Byzantium became a great center of culture and scholarship. Of course, Rome eventually became a leading city. Other centers include Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus. Greek study cannot advance without a good detailed understanding of the cultural development of these places. Alexandria and Byzantium are especially important: for these are the places with sufficient funding and resources to pursue Greek language research and studies.

From such a cultural base we can begin the study of Text Criticism.[[9]](#endnote-9) The usual approach to Text Criticism is eclectic: 1881 Westcott-Hort New Testament (WHNU) for example.[[10]](#endnote-10) What is the eclectic approach? It is as if someone cut the pictures in a picture album apart, then proceeded to guess at what the real people looked like by attempting to form a composite, so the “experts” voted to select the “best” ears, eyes, lips, noses, and other features to construct the best person: any relationship to the original would be purely accidental. So this is the method that eclectic “experts” use to construct an “original” New Testament. No scientist would tolerate such destruction of evidence. Recently scholars like Robinson and Pierpont[[11]](#endnote-11) have battled against such foolishness, yet their work is not widely enough known.

Most pastors are still working from an eclectic version, such as Westcott-Hort. We have access to one of these eclectic versions in Bible Gateway; yet there are at least a half dozen other eclectic versions and editions, several of which are still in print. Needless to say, we do not have enough competent scholars to check this work.

*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, Article 10, boldly claims “that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.” How many copies and translations using the eclectic method faithfully represent the original? None. Bible students are just starting to wake up to the fact that we have been sold a modernist bill of goods. Copies and translations are notoriously unreliable. The newer translations are often worse than the old ones. Instead we are following blindly where no man has ever gone before. We do not have nearly enough qualified people to check and perfect this work. So, you see, we are on a very difficult path, and we have been sold a lie convincing us that this is easy, that lay people do not need to learn Greek, do not need to understand the pitfalls of Text Criticism, do not need mastery of the cultural historical setting, etc. etc. etc.

We have yet to really discuss the Greek Old Testament which came into existence around 200-100 BC or earlier. Of course it is a translation from Hebrew/Aramaic. Still, it is a better representative of the Hebrew Old Testament than the MT Hebrew Old Testament versions that would not develop for nearly one thousand years. The situation is more complicated than this; this is just to convince you that there are not enough laborers to complete the work: we must always pray to the Lord of the harvest for more competent laborers.[[12]](#endnote-12) This, of course, speaks of evangelism; yet, how will we conduct decent evangelism when everybody is convinced that the work is all done, and done well?

*Hebrew*

We would advise that you stay away from Hebrew until you are fluent in Greek, have some mastery of Text Criticism, and are well grounded in early church history.

Then you could start with the Greek Old Testament. Here is one place to get a copy:

http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/septuagint/default.asp

You will also need an, *Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint*.[[13]](#endnote-13)

After you learn to swim in Greek, you may be ready to get your feet wet in Hebrew. We can find Hebrew under the Bible Gateway “drop down” arrow: The Westminster Leningrad Codex (WLC) is found immediately after the Greek. The Leningrad Codex (1008-1009 AD) is the oldest surviving “complete” MT manuscript; only a very few other fragments remain. It must be tested against Greek and Latin for accuracy.

*Archaeology*

Archaeology has uncovered vast quantities of ancient documents: Egyptian, Akkadian, and several others. Reading these documents is critical to correct understanding of the Bible record. We do not even know how to translate some of these documents: the code has never been broken. This work requires other experts: epigraphers, ink and writing material experts, pottery and radiocarbon dating experts, students of ancient cultures, and several others. An expert epigrapher like Kenneth Kitchen takes years to develop. Manfred Bietak’s employment of ground-penetrating radar is cosmic.

When we have developed the skill-set to spot a palimpsest from across the street, or smell a fake manuscript from across the room, we may have developed sufficient skills to begin to understand the more difficult problems involved with reading ancient manuscripts, and start on our way to creating a better English translation.

*Autographs*

If we are having a bad day, we have pushed the calendar back to 1550 AD. If we are really lucky we may have reached as early as 400 with the Byzantine text, or 150 with the Alexandrian text, or possibly even earlier with the Greek Old Testament text. It is presently unthinkable that we would have solved every text critical problem by then.

We would have to take all our work from Greek, Text Criticism, Hebrew, Archaeology, and all their supporting sciences and skills; not to mention Latin, and dozens of other first century languages. We would have to crack the code and translate other ancient languages like Akkadian, Egyptian, and Sumerian to be able to guess at the exact content of the Autographs. We would still have no way to be absolutely sure that “our guesses had been good.”

We say again, from Revelation 5, that the Father has given the Autographs to Jesus alone; He alone is worthy to touch them; He alone is worthy to read, interpret, and fulfill them. That excludes all the rest of us.

Yet, in spite of the magnitude of this impossibility, we are not to despair for we have direct access to the Father, to the Son, and to the Autographs by the power of the Spirit. In spite of the Glory of this great gift, how many of us continue to try to read Scripture in the flesh? The Scripture cannot be read like any other book. The Scripture can only be eaten and digested, by much toil of prayer in the Spirit. Without the Spirit we are less than nothing.

*Textus Receptus*

So, how, pray tell, will we make the leap backwards from 1550, 400, 150 back to the Autographs of the Greek New Testament. Or how will we jump backwards from 100 BC, past the temple destruction (586), past David (1010), past the invention of Hebrew (1200) as a language, past all the troubles in Judges, to the Autographs of Moses (1406-1366), written in ancient Akkadian? It cannot be done. The Autographs, by definition are not available to us; even if we stumbled on them, we would have no means to identify the importance of our discovery. *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, Article 10, assures us that we don’t need the Autographs, everything is cool. Well, it’s not so cool from this worm’s perspective. I’ve been poking away at this since around 1970, and it looks like a very thorny problem to me.

It should be clear by now that a great deal of intensive Greek study, both Old and New Testament Greek study went on in the east for over a millennia before very many people started such study in the west. To be sure, there were such studies around Rome; yet, the output of such studies was Latin, not Greek. Still the Greek Old and New Testaments were for many years, The Bible of The Church: this was not even open to dispute. Augustine (395-430) vigorously defended the necessity of the Greek Old Testament against Jerome (347-420). When Robert Stephanus published his Greek edition in 1550, he was already over one thousand years behind, more nearly one thousand five hundred years behind. It is unlikely, with his limited supply of manuscripts, that Stephanus stumbled upon the best solution. Scrivener, working 344 years later in 1894 did not have good odds of doing any better. Today, we think it strange if new information is not published every year.

If the TR falls so far short of the millennium and a half work of the Greeks, then what should we call the labors of Westcott and Hort, and every other eclectic text, if not a misguided blunder, a slaughtering of the manuscripts.

At such a point we are no longer asking if The Church has custodial authority over the Bible manuscripts; we are asking where The Church keeps custodial authority over the Bible manuscripts, and what is the provenance of such manuscripts. At least Robert Stephanus was wise enough not to rip the manuscripts to shreds, and try to paste them back together again.

The question that is now before us is no longer about finding the Autographs. We know where the Autographs are, and we are not allowed to touch them. The question before us now is about recovering and assembling the best possible manuscript evidence. Is the best possible manuscript, *Codex Sinaiticus*, which Tischendorf discovered (1844) in a wastebasket at St. Catherine’s Monastery, Mt. Sinai?[[14]](#endnote-14) Is the best possible manuscript a manuscript that Greeks refugees brought into the west toward the end of the late Middle Ages (1500)? Is the best possible manuscript a manuscript given to Rome, later found buried in dust in Roman libraries? Is the best possible manuscript an aggregate manuscript pasted together by modernist scholars?[[15]](#endnote-15) Is the best possible manuscript one of the manuscripts discovered at Alexandria?[[16]](#endnote-16) Or is the best possible manuscript the manuscript preserved by the Greek church for nearly 2,000 years?[[17]](#endnote-17) Or is it something else? Our necessary task is not finding the autographs. Recovering and assembling the best possible manuscript evidence is the difficult and necessary task that we must do, and do now. What is the Textus Receptus anyhow?

*King James Only*

If establishing the Greek text is so difficult; and yet, has not been accomplished to the satisfaction of all earthly churches to this very day, how can any translation be up to the task? How can England, with its limited knowledge of Greek grammar and vocabulary in 1611, possibly produce an “inerrant”, or even a good translation? As we begin to toil at the older prodigious works, we stumble upon the errors of our predecessors: we are confounded by only one question, how on earth did they get as far as they did with the tools that they had? Truly, there were giants in the land; yet, we can stand on the shoulders of such giants to see farther than they could possibly see.

Still, the task is greater than this: for the target language, English, is a moving target. The English of 1611 is no longer fully sensible to English speakers of today, especially not to those who speak the United States dialect.

Those who cling to the King James version as THE Divinely inspired version, are not being any more rational that those who cling to an eclectic Greek text.

*Providence of God*

What does God provide for you. He provides food and clothing, house and home, family and village, church and country; in brief, everything that you are and have. Have you tasted of His salvation? He gave it to you. Have you escaped death in the arena? He protected you. Still He did not protect Felicitas & Perpetua (203), who died in the arena, one little bit less. Nor did He neglect the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (320), who froze to death on the ice or drowned.

The providence of God does not guarantee an earthly life of health, wealth, and happiness. The providence of God guarantees an earthly life of crucifixion, pain, persecution, sorrow, and suffering. Take up your cross and follow Him. The providence of God guarantees that you will die in the arms of your faithful Creator, as you hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” The only guarantees that providence brings, is the comfort of the Spirit in this life, and blessedness in the heavenly spiritual life to come.

“It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” — 1 Corinthians 15:44

*Summary*

The work cannot be done without developing a highly competent and qualified work force, and without adequate funding. Statements like, “We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original,” or, “the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy,” only serve to trivialize the problem and convince the rest of us not to look into it. As a result, the work does not always faithfully represent the original. Much of this work has fallen to individuals who do not share our world and life view, and whose methods are highly suspect.

If we want a good English language translation of the Bible, many of us are going to have to learn this difficult material, with a view to producing our own Bible. The work needs to be done voluntarily so that such a Bible can be offered to the world without copyright or other use restrictions. This Bible needs to be a living translation, so that as new discoveries are affirmed, appropriate revisions can be made without a lot of folderol; so that new students can make their own notations, some of which may be worthy of inclusion.

It is frustrating to continue a work with one qualified laborer, where one hundred, possibly one thousand laborers are necessary. Again, our intention is not to terrify you. We are not in as good a place as *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* might lead us to believe; yet we are not in a hopeless place either. Very many problems of text criticism reduce to trivia; few represent translatable differences. We are in a place that simply requires a lot of highly skilled work, without enough highly skilled workers, and no means of supporting them financially. Most of this work is getting our local churches involved. Gradually, as we discover that many of our pet opinions have no basis in fact, we will be drawn more closely together, until at last, we again speak with one voice.

Even though the evidence of the text manuscripts has been pretty badly treated by some critics who hold the absurd extremes of higher criticism: the faithful were always there, so that much, if not most of the damage is recoverable. The untraced moving and handling of manuscripts may have obliterated the provenance of most of them, and that is a terrible travesty of human carelessness and even malice. Still, this is not a completely hopeless obstacle.

On the other hand the TR is not the solution: for if we pause to consider, which TR, the TR of 1550, of 1894, a full 344 years apart, or some other TR? Why not the TR of 400: for there are ample Byzantine manuscripts to examine? Why not the TR of 150: for we have Alexandrian manuscripts, as well. Who gets to decide what an authentic TR is: certainly not WH[[18]](#endnote-18), or NA[[19]](#endnote-19), or even my own mentors HF[[20]](#endnote-20). If the TR Bible in Greek is the only authority for the TR Bible in Greek, we are locked in an unsolvable argument, a tangle of circular reasoning.

The KJV only is no solution either. While there are many wonderful things we may say about the KJV, good translation is not among them: the English idiom has changed and is now hopelessly antiquated; our knowledge of language has advanced, so now it is clear that some translations are not correct, or so trite that they have no modern meaning.

*The Best Path*

*The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* has insisted that this work, “can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy.” We have just explained how difficult this work of ascertaining really is, while exposing a few of the colossal blunders that have taken place along the way. We have also insisted at every turn that ascertaining is the wrong method. We proclaim that:

The process is not a process of ascertaining inerrancy. It is a process of assimilating Truth and custodianship of Truth, as Scripture is handed from the Father to the Son to John to The Church.

“The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses; commit these same things to faithful people, who are able to teach others as well.” — 2 Timothy 2:2

If we search for the caretakers for this process of assimilating Truth and custodianship of Truth, we will most likely find them in the Eastern Orthodox Church, especially in the Greek Orthodox Church, where Greek is still their first language.

If we would search for manuscripts, the Greek Orthodox Church, was likely their first custodian. Such manuscripts made their way into western Europe because Greek Orthodox Christians brought them with them or sent them as gifts. Other manuscripts were found in Greek monasteries.

All these years the Greek Orthodox Church has maintained faithful custody of the Greek language Old and New Testament manuscripts and the publication of them. Other, segments of The Church have labored as well. Holy people of God have followed the pattern of Saint John the Evangelist and Revelator, in devouring these words handed down, and giving them to us by pouring them through their lives.

We have these treasures in earthen vessels, only because they were handed to us on platters of gold. So if there is any ascertaining to do we shall have to do it at the feet of the Holy Spirit and of the Greeks. There we will be humbled to discover that it is not the ascertaining of our minds; rather the Spirit powered assimilating of our hearts that brings us to Truth.

“Where [is] a wise person? Where [is] a scribe? Where [is] a debater of this world? Hasn’t God made foolish, the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God by wisdom, it pleased God, by the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those being persuaded: for Jews also demand a sign, Greeks seek [only] wisdom:”[[21]](#endnote-21) — 1 Corinthians 1:20-22

*Conclusion*

Instead of focusing on theoretical problems, such as the inerrancy of autographs, which we will never find; maybe we could focus on real problems such as: too many bad translations, uncertain and blunder filled text criticism, and shallow understanding of Scripture.

Chicago has presented a warmed over view of the Age of Enlightenment; the only thing that matters to Chicago is that we be smart enough to ascertain: this is a pagan world view; it is intellectually dishonest.

[[22]](#endnote-22)

1. Autographa.

Books presumably had one origin, an Autograph. This presupposition is not necessarily true. One author, writing on the same subject matter to different audiences may be highly motivated to customize nearly identical letters to each specific audience. Unless such customized presentations were widely separated in time subsequent readers would not know which one was the original or the Autograph. Only the original author, or his very close associate, his personal scribe would know which one was the Autograph, and which were copies. Depending on the author’s intent there may not exist any real distinction at all. In the author’s mind we may be confronted with several documents of equal importance. In this case we would be confronted with a collection of Autographa, not a single Autograph. Each document would have equal claim to being an Autograph and it would be impossible to sort them out. Nor would it make any real difference if we could sort them out. Each would receive equal weight. The compiled result would be a single core document with one apparatus assigning equal value to all variants. This line of discussion calls the whole idea of a single Autograph in question.

In the case of the discussion between The Glory and Moses, there was a single audience, Israel. Hence, in this case, there exists the possibility of a Torah Autograph in the Akkadian language, but it was destroyed or lost in 586 BC or before. Today, we can say without much fear of contradiction that this Autograph is possibly still extant, and it could only be resident at the right hand of God in heaven (Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 31:24-27; Revelation 5).

In the case of the epistles, many of them were intended to be circular, with multiple audiences. It is impossible to say that these were not customized. Moreover, there is some evidence of lost epistles of which we know nothing at all, except for vague references.

We could examine other scenarios, but the result would be the same. The only Autographa we could possibly have is that found in Revelation 5, where Jesus is, at one and the same time, Author, Fulfillment, and Interpreter.

Hence, the subjects of Inspiration, Autographs, and Canonicity are nearly irrelevant or moot. We have no direct access to any of them, and we need to rethink what they mean.

Inspiration, because we tend to say that it only applies to Bible Autographa; we tend to deny that any Inspiration is involved in Bath Kol, and the like. Moreover, we tend to claim that there is any Inspiration associated with new ideas, art, etc. Consequently, we continue to heap up glory to ourselves, collecting accolades, patents, and the like; while consistently failing to give glory to God for His gifts.

Autographs, because we have no access to them: we cannot manually, visually verify our copies. We should be asking if there is any way to verify our copies at all.

Canonicity, because genuine Canonization appears to be the work of God employing the service of man under the direct supervision of God: much of our standard view of Canonization is simply the work of corrupt human flesh.

“The basic problem, as described by Paul Maas, is as follows:

‘We have no autograph manuscripts of the Greek and Roman classical writers and no copies which have been collated with the originals; the manuscripts we possess derive from the originals through an unknown number of intermediate copies, and are consequentially of questionable trustworthiness. The business of textual criticism is to produce a text as close as possible to the original (constitutio textus).’ ” — <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textual_criticism>

“Maas comments further that ‘A dictation revised by the author must be regarded as equivalent to an autograph manuscript’. The lack of autograph manuscripts applies to many cultures other than Greek and Roman. In such a situation, a key objective becomes the identification of the first exemplar before any split in the tradition. That exemplar is known as the archetype. ‘If we succeed in establishing the text of [the archetype], the constitutio (reconstruction of the original) is considerably advanced.’ ” — ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Copies.

Copies are manuscripts written by professional scribes. Before the invention of the printing press and moveable type, documents were published by manual transmission. The publisher would employ sufficient numbers of scribes to meet his customer demand and run a profitable business.

One method was for a master reader, slowly and precisely, to read the master document. This may, at times have required letter by letter reading. Scribes would listen to the reading and write down what they heard. One hundred scribes could produce one hundred copies at a time. Errors in the master copy would extend to dependent copies as well. Readers could make reading errors. Scribes could make hearing errors. Other types of errors were possible. The work required meticulous attention to detail. Such work was necessarily conducted at or near Solomon’s Temple to meet the need for Torah and other scrolls throughout all of Israel. After the development of synagogues, this demand only increased.

Another method, a slower one, was for the scribe to read and copy the master document by himself. The reading and writing process conducted by a single person was not only slower individually, but only one document could be produced at a time. This method resulted in its own set of errors: some identical, some similar, some unique.

Later generations of copies accumulated previous errors and added new ones. The manuscript stream became more divergent.

The problem is, of course, to move in the reverse direction, up the manuscript stream, resolving all the connections; and hopefully arriving at a relatively pure archetype. This supposes several things that are obviously untrue.

To have a complete picture, we must have all the copies, at least from some terminal date (say before 1000 AD) backwards. Obviously, this is not realistic. We do not have all the copies. We have no way of even knowing how many manuscripts are lost. New manuscripts are being discovered rather frequently. Many known manuscripts have never been collated.

Then the documents must be studied for scribal style, materials, and variations in text. Such studies may result in the grouping of copies and fragments into like sets.

Once sets are constructed, a hoped for pattern may emerge from the evidence. If a pattern is discovered it can be arranged in an historic tree.

With a little luck the trunk of the tree will be the Archetype, and the Archetype will be an accurate representation of the Autograph, assuming that there is one. We will also have a critical edition, which represents the historic tree, and most of the major variations. The editors may also include a report of their working principles. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Suppose you want to study John 1:1. Just open up <https://www.biblegateway.com/> and type John 1:1 into the left or top block. Suppose you want to see what RSV has to say. Use the “drop-down” arrow and select RSV from the list. Your results should look like this.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1%3A1&version=RSV>

You can continue reading the rest of the chapter by changing the search to John 1.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1&version=RSV>

You can go backward or forward by picking the arrows on the left and right side of the page. You can scroll down or up to see the rest of the chapter.

Suppose you want to do a parallel comparison study between RSV, Greek, and NRSV. Let’s stick with John 1. At the far right side of the gray heading bar, below the white blocks, you will find an icon that looks like two combs back-to-back. Pick on this icon. A new (third) “drop-down” arrow appears in the gray bar. Find and select, SBL Greek New Testament (SBLGNT). Choose the comb icon a second time. Another new (forth) “drop-down” arrow appears in the gray bar. Find and select New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). You should now be looking at RSV, SBLGNT, and NRSV side by side on the page.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%201&version=RSV;SBLGNT;NRSV>

You are not familiar with the Greek words, Ἐν ἀρχῇ, so you look them up in your new *Analytical Greek Lexicon*. There you learn that Ἐν is the Greek preposition that means exactly the same thing as “in” in English most of the time. You can even see how en developed into in. You also find that ἀρχῇ means beginning. Now you see that there is no word “the” at this place in the sentence: Greek uses “the” in a very different way than English uses “the”. You’re going to have some trouble with this if you don’t already know the Greek alphabet (alphabetw).

Suppose you are at Romans 1:12 and don’t remember the last verse of the chapter but want to look at it anyway. You could always go back to Romans 1, but this would lose your focus on verse 12. Instead, change your search to Romans 1:12-2:1, it will roll right around the corner and find the last verse for you.

Suppose you wanted to compare Matthew 1:1, Mark 1:1, and Luke 1:1. Just type Matthew 1:1, Mark 1:1, Luke 1:1 or Matthew 1:1; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:1 in the search block.

Let’s try a word search. This doesn’t work very well with multiple versions, so close all the columns except RSV by picking the X in the gray bar right corner, just right of the double comb icon. Do it again. Only RSV is left. Does the RSV have the word, Nicodemus? Type, Nicodemus, in the search block instead of a verse. You learn that “Nicodemus” is found five times in the RSV, all of them in John.

Let’s try a multiple word search. You may have to experiment a little or change Versions to a more familiar Version. You can have too many words or too few words. Try to limit yourself to important key words (you just don’t need to look for a, an, I, me, you, the, them, they, and the like very often). I always find the verse I’m looking for. Now where is, Jesus wept? Type, Jesus wept, in the search block. You find five more verses: two say that Peter wept (these were found because Jesus is in the same verse); two say Jesus wept; one says that Mary wept (it was found because RSV has a title, with Jesus in it, attached to the verse).

When we get really stumped, we go back to Google and type in a whole phrase as best as we can remember it. This has (so far) always turned up one or more verses to look up. Then I go back to Bible Gateway and get it by typing the verse in the search block.

One last search…. Type, love, in the search block. The word, love, is used 745 times in an RSV Bible: 419 times in the Old Testament, 234 times in the New Testament, 31 times in SOS, 18 times in 4 Maccabees, 39 times in John’s Gospel, 33 times in John’s epistles, 7 times in Revelation. Who knows more about love? John? or Solomon? Now change the Version to KJV. Only 442 verses were found? Why? [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. John 16:13 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. There are at least two vocalizations: the Modern Greek one, which we recommend; and the one that Erasmus invented, which we do not recommend. You can learn both alphabet and vocalization from the Papaloizos Publications CD, *Learn Greek the Easy Way*. The course presentations have changed and expanded somewhat; this link should get you started in the right direction. If in doubt, call 1-855-473-3512 and ask.

<http://www.greek123.com/learn-greek/package/level-one-package> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. My copy is, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1973: 444 pages), reprinted from Bagster’s. Here is a link to the 1978 edition, followed by a \*.pdf link:

<https://www.amazon.com/Analytical-Greek-Lexicon-Revised-1978/dp/0310202809>

<http://saltlakebiblecollege.org/library/Lib%20A/Bagster_analytical_Greek_lexicon.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Previously, Latin translations were prevalent in the west. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. My CD cost around $5.00 on the internet; bulk prices were also available. Dr. Spiros Zodhiates’ narration is available in several places: here are two.

<http://www.amgpublishers.com/main/index.cfm?do=view&subdo=detail&isbn13=9780899571201&id=444&CFID=33618337&CFTOKEN=9ebbb3c89586afb-4C73B7CB-A2D0-7DC5-264A4A5FBE069F99>

<http://www.christianbook.com/na26-koine-greek-testament-audio-cds/9780899571201/pd/571201> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textual_criticism> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Eclecticism does not refer merely to the gathering of as many copies, opinions, or voices as possible. It refers, rather, to the attempt to organize and sort all known copies on the basis of clearly observable variation, into distinct groups. Ostensibly, documents with identical additions, errors, and omissions would belong to the same group; it would be highly unlikely that these identical additions, errors, and omissions would accidentally cross-pollinate another group. Consequently, we hope, by a process of diligent sorting to identify these distinct groups, their priority, and their relationship with each other.

Eclecticism then attempts to arrive at the Archetype by combining the several witnesses to produce a text that may not actually exist in any known manuscript.

“Since the mid-19th century, eclecticism, in which there is no a priori bias to favor a single manuscript, has been the dominant method of editing the Greek text of the New Testament (currently, the United Bible Society, 4th ed. and Nestle-Aland, 27th ed.). Even so, the oldest manuscripts, being of the Alexandrian text-type, are the most favored, and the critical text has an Alexandrian disposition.” — ibid.

Eclecticism is supposedly performed without bias. However, current work has tended to favor the Alexandrian text-type with considerable bias. — ibid

This method also carries the real statistical risk of producing a manuscript that is worse than any of its parent manuscripts.

Example one: Say we begin with 1000 known true exact copies of the Autographa (an absurd assumption). An evil person has mixed 10 fraudulent copies with the good ones. Our inspection accuracy is 99%, which is exceptionally good. We correctly identify frauds as frauds, and trues as trues 99% of the time. We only err 1% of the time. The resultant examination identifies 9.9 fraudulent documents as frauds, and only 0.1 fraudulent document as true. 990 true manuscripts are verified to be true, but only 10 are mistakenly designated to be frauds. Now we regroup and find that we have identified a total of 19.9 documents as frauds and 990.1 documents as trues. We seem to have gotten worse, not better. Why? Moreover, our 19.9 manuscripts identified as frauds, actually condemn 10, more than half of the documents falsely. Meanwhile, our set of trues actually contains .1 fraud. We started with a set including 10 frauds, or 10 Byzantines, or 10 Westerns, and 1000 known Alexandrians: a 0.99% fraudulent set. Now we only have a 0.01% fraudulent set. However, this improvement cost us the loss of 10 good documents manuscripts. Repeated sorting may actually make the outcome better, but at a steadily increasing cost.

Example two: Suppose we begin with 1000 known true exact copies of the Autographa. This time an evil person has mixed 1000 fraudulent copies with the good ones. Our inspection accuracy is still 99%. The resultant examination identifies 990 fraudulent documents as frauds, and only 10 fraudulent document as true. 990 true manuscripts are verified to be true, but only 10 are mistakenly designated to be frauds. Now we regroup and find that we have identified a total of 1000 documents as frauds and 1000 documents as trues. Our 1000 manuscripts identified as frauds, still condemn 10 documents falsely. Meanwhile, our set of trues actually contains 10 frauds. We started with a set including 1000 frauds, or 1000 Byzantines, or 1000 Westerns, and 1000 known Alexandrians: a 50% fraudulent set. Now we only have a 1% fraudulent set, or misidentified Alexandrian set. However, this improvement still cost us the loss of 10 good manuscripts.

It is even possible to sort the set and make it worse. Such sorting cannot be trusted to the hands of sloppy workers. It is a high risk venture that must be committed to the most meticulous and skilled. The better the original set, the harder it is to improve it. It is entirely possible to mistakenly identify Byzantine documents as Alexandrian or Western. It is not out of the question that even the group names Alexandrian, Byzantine, and Western are in error.

I have no experience with sorting ancient documents. I have a great deal of experience with the nearly identical process of inspecting industrial parts. It is a costly and often worthless enterprise. Once errors are introduced into any system it becomes unbelievably difficult to weed them out. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Robinson, Maurice A. and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek Byzantine Textform 2005* (Chilton Book Publishing, Southborough, MA, 2005: 587 pages). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Matthew 9:38; Luke 10:2 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Taylor, Bernard A., Lust, Eynikel, Hauspie, *Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint* (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 2014: 591 pages). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantin_von_Tischendorf> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textual_criticism>, especially:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textual_criticism#Canons_of_textual_criticism> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandrian_text-type> [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_text-type> [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Westcott-Hort [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Nestle-Aland [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Hodges-Farstad [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Imagine that! God does by the message of declaration, what men expect requires miraculous signs to confirm, or extraordinary intelligence to understand. Christ is risen! Christ is ascended! Christ is enthroned! Christ has all authority! The Holy Spirit is descended! The Church is born!

Ironically, most of the Jews missed the coming of the Holy Spirit over all of The Church.

Ironically, most of the Greeks did not have enough wisdom to see it.

A mere mortal human being has no strength to attain salvation; it has to be handed to mere mortal humans on a golden platter. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. If you have been blessed or helped by any of these meditations, please repost, share, or use any of them as you wish. No rights are reserved. They are designed and intended for your free participation. They were freely received, and are freely given. No other permission is required for their use. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)