CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE MARC MULTILINGUE PROJECT

Among the many presentations of the Gospel text of the New Testament, be they synopses of the Greek, facsimile transcripts of a particular manuscript, an edited critical edition or horizontally printed lines of text from particular manuscripts (such as the *Itala* fascicles or *Das neue Testament in syrischer Überlieferung*), nothing so far published enables the historian of the text to have an objective presentation of all of the earliest materials. The *Marc multilingue* project sets out to serve such a need.

The project is a Francophone enterprise originally led by Prof. Christian-Bernard Amphoux (CNRS, Lunel) until June 2001, by J.-C. Haelewyck (Louvain-la-Neuve) since then and by J.K. Elliott (Leeds) with collaborators in France, Belgium and Switzerland. The project now functions under the banner of the ‘Société d’histoire du texte du Nouveau Testament’.

This article attempts to describe the aims and methods of a project-in-progress.

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The project arises from a recognition that printed editions of the Greek New Testament are unsatisfactory. None actually represents exactly the text of any one manuscript and certainly does not restore the autograph, which is irrevocably lost. All editors of ancient texts strive to reconstruct the supposed original of the text in question, but in the case of the New Testament the history of critical editions has made the

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1 With contributions from Christian-B. Amphoux and Jean-Claude Haelewyck.
practice of textual criticism rather more complicated. That is because
the first printed editions, since Erasmus’ edition of 1516, were based
on a distinctive form of the text that was in general use throughout the
middle ages, based largely on medieval manuscripts, whereas editors
from Lachmann onwards (that is since 1831) contrived to base the
printed edition of the Greek New Testament on the most ancient man-
uscripts available. Adherents of both camps, that is, supporters of the
so-called Majority text (more narrowly known as the Textus Receptus)
and of the ‘critical’ edition, continue to have influence nowadays. And
that debate, often conducted in an acrimonious or parti-pris manner,
has skewed the objective presentation and discussion of the evidence.

Readers of printed editions can therefore be divided into two: (a)
those who have access in the TR and more widely the so-called Majority
text to a form of the New Testament that was the one used and com-
mented on by the Reformers and whose text can be traced probably to
the fourth century; and (b) those who use a critical text, like the UBS
which favours the readings of manuscripts copied around 350 A.D., in
other words soon after the conversion of Constantine (313 A.D.) and
the recognition of Christianity as a major religion. Neither approach
and neither type of printed edition enables the reader to appreciate the
diversity of the New Testament textual transmission. And that is why
a third way is needed. The Marc multilingue project takes into account
the types of text in existence prior to 200 A.D., types which tended to
be eclipsed in copies made in the two following centuries, although
the witnesses of these earlier forms, from the 5th.–15th. centuries, are
often incomplete and imperfect. Marc multilingue does not aim to
produce an edited text or texts. Rather, it aims to present the existing
documentation in an attempt to enable the history of the changing
text to be recognised.

The quantity and variety of manuscript witnesses to the Greek New
Testament text as potential bearers of the actual wording employed by
the original authors are welcomed by those who seek to establish the
foundation documents of the Christian faith. But the aim of restoring
one, original text is impossible. The earliest witnesses display a variety
of text-types, which some speak of as a ‘free’ text. That fact can be dis-

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