CHAPTER ONE

THE “IGNORANCE MOTIF” IN ACTS AND ANTI-JUDAIC TENDENCIES IN CODEX BEZAE

The striking text that Codex Bezae presents, aside from evoking much controversy and several novel theories,\(^1\) has long been at the center of the yet unsolved mystery of the so-called “Western” text, which is itself one of the most urgent and yet most enigmatic areas of New Testament textual criticism. B. H. Streeter did not exaggerate when he said that many a scholar “. . . has met his Waterloo in the attempt to account for, or explain away, the existence of the Bezan text.”\(^2\)

What might be called a theological approach to textual criticism does, however, offer a fresh environment for the investigation of Codex Bezae. This approach accepts the fact that textual variants may conceal, and therefore can reveal, not only historical situations, but even dogmatic bias or some other tendentious viewpoint from which they arose. In other words, textual variants become a source for the study of the history of the church,\(^3\) and they do so apart from any primary concern for the elusive “original text” of the New Testament. Of course, this approach is not new; it was employed some sixty years ago by J. Rendel Harris\(^4\) and Kirsopp Lake,\(^5\) chiefly

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\(^1\) For example, Blass’s theory of two editions by Luke himself; Harris’s theory of Latinization; Chase’s theory of Syriac origin; Torrey’s of Aramaic; and A. C. Clark’s theory that the D-text was abbreviated to form the B-text.


against Hort’s view that, except for Marcion, there was no tampering with the text of the New Testament for dogmatic reasons. More recently this theological approach has been vigorously advocated by D. W. Riddle,7 Merrill M. Parvis,8 K. W. Clark,9 and Erich Fascher,10 among others.

Although successive isolated suggestions as to various theological tendencies or other motivations revealed by the textual variants of Codex Bezae have been made,11 no one apparently has undertaken a thorough investigation of these variants to see if some predominant and controlling tendency can be discerned, in which perhaps a great many of the variants might find their motivation. When, in fact, the variants of D in Acts are examined in this manner, a considerable body of evidence emerges indicating that a heightened anti-Judaism was a major preoccupation of the person or persons responsible for the text represented in this manuscript.12

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7 Riddle, “Textual Criticism as a Historical Discipline,” AThR 18 (1936) 220–33.
10 E. Fascher, Textgeschichte als hermeneutisches Problem (Halle (Saale): Niemeyer, 1953).
12 Detailed evidence for this view may be found in the writer’s doctoral dissertation, of which this paper is a part: “Theological Tendency in the Textual Variants of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis: Anti-Judaic Tendencies in Acts” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1961) 251pp. [See the précis in HTR 54 (1961) 299.] [Revised and published as The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts (SNTSMS 3; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); unchanged reprint: Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001.]

In such an investigation, the interest is not, of course, in the viewpoint of the late fifth century manuscript D itself, but in the early “Western” text of perhaps the second century, of which D is the best Greek representative. D has textual strata more recent than this, but these can be avoided by not basing judgments on D-variants opposed by other “Western” witnesses, notably, for Acts, Old Latin Codex h, syh, sych, cum, Iren, Cypr, Aug, Ephr. Where none of these is available, D must be given its due weight as a “Western” witness. [Now cop must be added as a primary “Western” witness: see “Added Notes, 2004” below.]