CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

ANTI-JUDAIC TENDENCIES IN THE D-TEXT OF ACTS: FORTY YEARS OF CONVERSATION*

The text of Acts is legendary for its problems, and this is nowhere more evident than in the proportion of space allocated to its variants in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, where Acts occupies 32% of the *Commentary* while it constitutes only 13% of the Greek New Testament. In this present essay only the question of ideological bias in the so-called “Western” text of Acts will be surveyed, and then only to a limited extent.

I. New Emphasis on Textual Variants as Ideological Vehicles in the 1950s: The Conversation Evolves

Recognition of alterations in the New Testament text for theological or ideological reasons was not a new topic in 1962 when the *Harvard Theological Review* published my very first article, “The ‘Ignorance Motif’ in Acts and Anti-Judaic Tendencies in Codex Bezae,” though much of the earlier scholarship attributed such activity only to “heretics” with “ignoble” motives and not to mainstream Christian interpreters, annotators, or scribes who might be shown to have introduced intentional changes for various ideological reasons. Indeed, two summary judgments by prominent nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars inspired my further investigation of theological

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tendencies in the so-called “Western” text of Acts (which I prefer to call the D-text).  

The first pronouncement, very frequently quoted, came from F. J. A. Hort of Cambridge University in 1882:

... Even among the numerous unquestionably spurious readings of the New Testament there are no signs of deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes. ... It is true that dogmatic preferences to a great extent determined theologians, and probably scribes, in their choice between rival readings already in existence: ... the temptation was strong to believe and assert that a reading used by theological opponents had also been invented by them. Accusations of wilful tampering with the text are accordingly not unfrequent in Christian antiquity: but, with a single exception [Marcion], wherever they can be verified they prove to be groundless, being in fact hasty and unjust inferences from mere diversities of inherited text.  

Hort concluded this brief discussion with reassuring words about the preservation of the New Testament text—sentiments utilized at times over the past century among conservatives to comfort themselves and their constituencies:

The books of the New Testament as preserved in extant documents assuredly speak to us in every important respect in language identical with that in which they spoke to those for whom they were originally written.  

This is not the place to pursue this latter issue except to say that textual critics have learned much in the past 120 years about the treacherous pitfalls in any path toward the original text of the New Testament.

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3 My preference: D = Codex Bezae and its text, while D-text = the so-called “Western” text, whose most prominent representative is Codex D. Ideally, the term “Western” text should be dropped entirely, since it is no longer regarded as Western geographically, but was known in the East as well. Some, however, may understand “D-text” to mean the text of Codex D, whereas text-critical specialists will understand “D-text” to designate the broader “Western” text, especially those who adopt the A-text, B-text, C-text, D-text scheme (delineated in E. J. Epp/G. D. Fee, Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism (SD 45), Grand Rapids 1993, 233–295). Because of the potential ambiguity, in the present paper “Western” text is used frequently instead of “D-text” to avoid confusion between the terms D (the text only of Codex D) and D-text (the “Western” text).


5 Ibid., 284.