TEXTUAL CERTAINTY IN THE UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES’ GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

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In the time that has elapsed since the 1993 publication of the fourth edition of the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament there has been considerable critical discussion surrounding the methodology underlying this most recent critical text. At the same time, there has been little direct response from the United Bible Societies in answer to these numerous criticisms. I have, from the outset of my research into the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament, always been appreciative


2 With regard to my own criticisms, it was greatly encouraging to discuss my pre-published work with Dr. Eugene A. Nida, who not only acted as the impetus for the formation of the United Bible Societies, but has also been intimately involved with work on the Greek New Testament (hereafter referred to in its various editions as the UBSGNT¹, UBSGNT², UBSGNT³, UBSGNT³corr, and the UBSGNT⁴ except when reference is being made to all editions in general where UBSGNT will be used). In conversation with Dr. Nida (18 September, 1995), and in later correspondence (26 January, 1996), he affirmed the primary tenets of my work concluding that, “There are many things that have occurred to justify this kind of re-evaluation. In the first place, the team in Münster has done a remarkable job in evaluating not just the evidence from critical texts but also from the manuscripts. They have computerized most of the relevant data and are in a position to judge both qualitatively and quantitatively. Furthermore, their study of the Byzantine tradition has shown that there are significant differences within the Byzantine tradition, and this leads therefore to greater confidence in the major early codices. There is probably negative evidence for this shift, because those who have been working with the material published by the UBS have on the whole been quite satisfied with the results. And the text prepared primarily for translators, as well as the so-called Nestle-Aland text (27th edition), have been generally accepted as the more satisfactory texts for textual scholarship of the New Testament.”
of the efforts made by its editorial Committee, members both past and present. They have without doubt, over the years, continued to produced one of the most useful critical editions of the Greek New Testament available. In many regards this fourth edition of the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament, which reflects the extent of our modern text-critical methodology, deserves the right to be called the “Standard Text”. However, the Committee states on page vi of this volume that it is “always genuinely grateful to readers for their proposals and suggestions”. I have taken this invitation to heart, and, therefore, offer this additional essay on the topic in the hope that it might initiate dialogue with the United Bible Society and its Committee of worthy and dedicated scholars.

1. A Brief History of the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament

In 1955 work began on the United Bible Societies’ first edition of The Greek New Testament—an edition that was strongly influenced by the methodology of B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort. The editorial com-

3 The unexpected passing away of Kurt Aland in the spring of 1994 is to be greatly lamented by all New Testament textual scholars. His profound insight and critical scholarship contributed immensely to the field by establishing a number of its foundational modern tenets, stimulating rigorous academic debate, and advocating methodological progress. He will certainly be remembered as one of the primary thinkers of modern New Testament textual criticism. Serving as a memorial volume to Professor Aland is B. Aland and J. Delobel (eds.), New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis and Church History: A Discussion of Methods (Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 7; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994).