SOME NOTES ON GENEALOGICAL METHODS IN TEXTUAL CRITICISM

BY

VINTON A. DEARING

London

In the outstandingly full and lucid exposition of textual criticism in The Text of the New Testament, Bruce M. Metzger lists as the third type of internal evidence "to be taken into account in evaluating variant readings" what he describes as "the genealogical relationships of texts and families of witnesses." 1) Most textual critics of the Bible, however, give comparatively little attention to textual genealogy, accepting the word of a few whose methods are capable of better formulation and application—with perhaps no corresponding revision of former conclusions, but no one can say until improved methods are put to use. This paper will describe more fully two improved methods for determining "the genealogical relationships of texts," for Professor Metzger, who mentions them, does not explain how to carry them out. One method developed since Professor Metzger's book will also be described. The three methods supplement each other, forming together a single and consistent method for solving problems of genealogical relationships.

Professor Metzger begins his chapter on "Modern Methods of Textual Criticism" with a clear and concise account of what he calls "The Classical Method of Textual Criticism," or "the genealogical method" (pp. 156-59; italics mine). The simple rules of this method will be familiar to many readers, and in any case will serve as an introduction to the more difficult concepts to be set out later. The central passage of Professor Metzger's description of the method is as follows:

The basic principle which underlies the process of constructing a stemma, or family tree, of manuscripts is that, apart from accident, identity of reading implies identity of origin. By way of

example, suppose that there are seven manuscripts of an ancient book, and that ... one of them (which we may designate A) stands apart, showing no great similarity to any of the other six, while B, C, and D, on the one hand, and E, F, and G, on the other hand, greatly resemble each other, though differing somewhat from the rest. We can express this by saying that B, C, and D form a family, descended from a hypothetical common ancestor which we may call X, and that E, F, and G form another family, descended from a hypothetical ancestor which we may call Y. ... It is possible to ... deduce ... a still more remote ancestor which we may call Z, the hypothetical archetype of all the manuscripts. Thus the pedigree of all ten manuscripts (the seven extant and the three hypothetical) would be as follows:

```
   Z
  / \  
 X   Y
 / \ / \ 
A   B C   D   E   F   G
```

This method is essentially vitiated by the fact that given the principle appealed to, and the evidence adduced by Professor Metzger, X or Y could equally well be the archetype, or the archetype could be at any of a number of other places in the linkage between the manuscripts, as was demonstrated by Sir Walter Greg in *The Calculus of Variants* 1). Greg gives the full

1) Professor Metzger gives an account of Greg's work (pp. 165-166), but not in enough detail to bring this out. Like a number of other critics, he objects to what he calls "a needless proliferation of pseudo-mathematical symbols" in Greg's Calculus, but Greg's notational system can be justified. It is not "pseudo-mathematical" unless the symbols in modern logic are so, and it performs the same function, that is, it allows certain fundamental qualities of the matter under consideration to be examined by themselves. In this instance, the problem is what can be made of the configurations of agreement and disagreement among manuscripts as distinct from the values of the readings. Greg may not have needed his symbols, and manipulating them may not have showed him the way to his conclusions, but the fact remains that he was the first textual critic to recognize that configurations of agreement and disagreement do not identify ancestors and archetypes, and that he was able to use his symbols to prove his point. My summary farther on in this paper of the rest of Greg's work avoids his notation to avoid objections like Professor Metzger's, but in extending Greg's rules I have often wished I had extended his notation as well, since truth and implication are so much more easily discoverable and demonstrable in this way. The notation used in lattice algebra was devised for geometric dia-