

of Judg 5 mentions unsafe highways (v. 6); and the theophany hymn of Hab 3 mentions the destruction of a sanctuary (v. 7).

But the most serious problem of all in the author's otherwise careful work is the ivory-tower mentality which characterizes it from start to finish. Absent is any sense of the comprehension of (or sympathy with) the terrible, violent times that peoples of the Near East endured (as his title implies). Only once does Dobbs-Allsopp step out of his sterile study to approach the agony of that ancient world; he suggests in his conclusions that the ancient poets wrote "about actual destructions" as opposed to "imaginatively creating situations for which the city-lament genre would be appropriate" (162). But these "actual destructions" and the sense of social loss that they created is what the lamentations about fallen cities are all about! This is the reason such poems were written and preserved. This is the reason such literature has meaning for us in these present violent times.

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Epp, Eldon Jay, and Gordon D. Fee. *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*. Studies and Documents No. 45. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993. xiv + 414 pp. Hardcover, \$39.99.

In the field of NT textual criticism, modern scholarship suffers from an abundance of materials and methods. If the first task of text criticism is the establishment of an original reading by sorting through and comparing the ancient manuscripts, then that task is complicated by the plethora of documents from over twelve centuries of church history, from different Mediterranean, European, and Middle Eastern source-locational subregions, with differing values of MS evidence as witness to an original text! Eldon Epp and Gordon Fee perform a genuine service by offering a set of "best-of-all" essays to guide the modern student through this very real maze.

From two senior scholars who have for years been at the cutting edge of their discipline, this is a welcome and informative addition. Their gift to the scholarly world stems from their deep knowledge of the history of the discipline, their original ideas about how to organize and assess the textual evidence, and certainly their demonstrated ability in presenting that research in a lucid and readable way.

Contrary to the suggestion of the publisher, this collection of critical essays is not for the novice in Greek exegesis or for first-time students of critical introduction. Nevertheless, it is sufficiently well laid out to enable one with limited facility in the field to proceed in an orderly way to a more informed understanding of the discipline. For the practiced scholar also, here is as good an assessment of the current research as one can find anywhere.

The first four essays provide the needed orientation for the more general reader: In essays one and two Epp and Fee explore the history of research in

NT textual criticism. Next, each author presents his views on the definition of a textual variant. Fee (62-79) illustrates textual variation by page-size charts for several passages from Luke and John. This kind of historical diagram of all the MS evidence (easily performed today with computer graphics) provides an important aid for assessing the value of the different textual traditions and of the separate witnesses within each tradition. It also shows why it is difficult to determine today what really is a "significant variant," and reveals the difficulty in deciding what is to be the precise textual unit for consideration.

In the next set of essays, the authors weigh the pros and cons of modern views and procedures for NT textual criticism. The last three sections of the book (a total of seven essays) attempt to answer the question, How does one today perform the task of using ancient MSS to determine the original text? Contained in this section are current guidelines for establishing textual relationships, the use and relative significance of the papyri in text-critical method, and the use of Patristic quotations (and paraphrases). Since most of these essays are recent (or recently revised), they show where the authors themselves are today in their application of method, while they also serve to encourage students of the next generation to solve the remaining unsolved problems by way of these tried-and-true guidelines, exploratory methods, and trial-and-error findings.

Typical of these collected essays is Epp's on the value of the "eclectic method" (141-173). Epp's historical survey of the different "critical canons" from the modern period for the determination of the originality of variant readings in a textual tradition reveals contradictions, prejudices, and oversights when one canon is compared with another. Moreover, there is no consensus about what the "eclectic method" is or how it should be applied by modern practitioners. For instance, Tischendorf (1849) maintained rightly that "readings should be studiously retained that are in accord with the Greek language and style of the individual authors of the NT." But was he correct in reducing the priority of this criterion compared with other internal and external considerations? Epp stresses the importance of this same criterion today, and helpfully defines it with much more rigor (163). Nevertheless, there remains the question of how to reconcile conflicts between internal and external evidence. What is one to do when one arrives at a decision, based on the systematic application of internal evidence, that is in conflict with the conclusion of criteria related to the external (MS) evidence? This is only one of many ambiguities the eclectic method still contains, despite all of its refinements.

Studies would be useful for a graduate or seminary course on NT textual criticism as a supplement to a more basic sourcebook (such as Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 1993).