

questions as it displays usefully the prospects and challenges facing Reformed churches today.

—Ryan M. McGraw

Stanley E. Porter. *How We Got the New Testament: Text, Transmission, Translation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013. 222 pp.

Stanley Porter is president, dean, and professor of New Testament at McMaster Divinity College. *How We Got the New Testament* is an expanded version of his 2008 Hayward Lectures presented at Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia. The book, like the lectures, is aimed at “an inquisitive and generally well-educated and thinking audience” (8).

As the title reveals, Porter divides his work into three parts. In the first section, Porter first tackles the goal or purpose of textual criticism. He notes that the traditional definition of this goal as the reconstruction of the original text has come under fire in recent years. Porter, however, defends reconstruction as the goal of textual criticism: “Thus, the goal of the study of the text of the New Testament remains to establish by the best means possible, through the available manuscript evidence, the original or ‘published’ (i.e., authorized) text of the biblical book concerned, or as close as possible on the basis of the manuscript evidence” (36).

Porter then provides a history of the printed Greek text from Erasmus to the latest modern critical editions. In this discussion, he unfortunately perpetuates the legend concerning Erasmus’s promise to include the *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 5:7) and the fabrication of a Greek manuscript to that end (39), without reference to H. J. de Jonge’s crucial article which debunked the anecdote.¹ Porter makes clear his preference for the modern critical Greek text of the New Testament over against the traditional text, whether the Majority/Byzantine text or the *Textus Receptus*. Consistent with his defense of the traditional goal of textual criticism is his defense of the traditional text types (particularly the Alexandrian, Western, and Byzantine).

1. Cf. H. J. de Jonge, “Erasmus and the *Comma Johanneum*,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* (1980): 381–89.

Along these lines, he is also critical of the new "Coherence Based Genealogical Method" advocated by many contemporary textual critics (59).

The most intriguing aspect of Porter's discussion of the Greek New Testament text, however, is his closing suggestion that it might be better to make use of single manuscripts of New Testament books as opposed to the eclectic modern critical text. He comes to this conclusion based on three facts: 1) the discovery of papyri in the modern era have had little impact on the development of the modern critical text; 2) the major codices still form the basis of the modern critical text; and 3) the major critical editions of the eclectic text do not conform to any extant ancient manuscript. Thus, he recommends "that those seeking the original text of the New Testament consider seeking it through individual manuscripts" (74). Nevertheless, he suggests this be done in a piecemeal fashion (e.g., Sinaiticus or Vaticanus could be used for the Gospels, p46 for some of Paul's epistles, p72 for the Petrine epistles and Jude, etc.). Porter argues that these texts were at least used by early Christians who "in reality [got] closer to the original autographs in terms of quantifiable evidence than a text edited in the nineteenth, twentieth, and now twenty-first centuries" (75).

In the second part dealing with transmission, Porter discusses the writing, copying, collecting, and dissemination of the early New Testament manuscripts. He asserts that the New Testament books can be conveniently divided into "three major subcorpora" as follows: the Gospels and Acts, the Pauline letters, and the rest of the New Testament (84). Of note here is his early dating of Acts (AD 64/65), suggesting it was written while Paul was still imprisoned in Rome (85).

Regarding the Gospels and Acts, Porter moves beyond the notion of the second century as a shadowy "tunnel period" by arguing that strong evidence exists indicating that "sometime in the second century the fixed corpus of four Gospels and Acts was firmly established" (87). In support of his argument he surveys evidence from Tatian's *Diatessaron*, Marcion, and various extra-canonical writings. Of note here is his discussion of the longer ending to Mark (99–102), which he concludes "was created by the end of the mid-second century" (101).

Regarding Paul's letters, Porter defends the traditional views of their authorship and date. He states that if one adapted the skepticism of "extreme critics," one "must surely end up doubting one's own existence" (107)! Thus, Porter affirms his belief "that the traditional

ascription of the thirteen letters to Paul is historically and critically defensible" (107). After surveying the papyri and Marcion, Porter suggests that by the mid-second century at least ten of Paul's letters—and perhaps all thirteen of them, along with Hebrews—existed as a distinct collection (111). He is also open to this date being pushed back even earlier. Porter also discusses the ancient placement of Hebrews in the Pauline corpus, noting that this inclusion "keeps open the possibility" that it was either directly or indirectly considered to be Pauline (120). With respect to the remainder of the New Testament, Porter admits that tracing transmissional history is much more difficult and speculative (120–21).

Proceeding to discuss the manuscript evidence that exists after the "tunnel period" of the second century, Porter offers a sketch of the major Greek New Testament codices (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, and Ephraemi Rescriptus). This is followed by a briefer discussion of the minuscules and lectionaries. Porter concludes this discussion by repeating a recommendation he has previously made in other scholarly writings, namely, that a "more nuanced method" is needed in discussing Greek manuscripts of the New Testament (141). His suggestion is that manuscripts be divided into two categories: those that have a continuous text of at least one New Testament book, and those that do not have such a clearly continuous text (141–46).

Finally, in Part Three on translation, Porter begins with a historical overview of the ancient New Testament versions (Septuagint, Syriac, Latin, Coptic). He proceeds to discuss the history of English translations, noting that over one hundred English translations were made in the twentieth century alone. When it comes to more recent translations, Porter is critical of the NET Bible with its "hyperabundant notes that are more literalistic and sometimes highly repetitious" and "not always to be relied upon for issues of Greek grammar" (171). As for the ESV, Porter observes: "I find it ironic that the ESV is basically a 'theologically corrected' RSV (I understand that the publisher of the ESV bought the copyright for the original RSV)," adding, "I would imagine that some of the biggest supporters today would have been the same type of people who protested when the original RSV appeared" (171–72, n. 94).

When it comes to translation philosophy, Porter expresses a desire "to move beyond the simple opposition between literal and dynamic equivalence" (177). On one hand, he holds that "strict formalism" is

“difficult if not impossible” and that “accommodation” to differences in the source and target languages must be acknowledged (180). On the other hand, Porter suggests that the dynamic equivalent method is often little different than the literal approach, since it is also tied “to the lower syntactical levels of language use” (187).

Porter next turns to discuss various emerging views of translation philosophy (including “functional translation,” discourse-analysis based translation, relevance theory, descriptivistic translation, and cultural/postcolonial theory) (187–205). He does not advocate any particular translational model, but believes that the formal/dynamic debate has “run its course” and needs to pass on to “the next stage” (208). In the end, however, one wonders if Porter has not overstated the similarities between the literal and dynamic methods, while placing too much stock in contemporary theories that have produced little fruit and will likely diminish in influence with time.

Analysis and Evaluation

Porter is a leading evangelical scholar in the field of the text and translation of the New Testament. This book provides an often-creative overview of many of the key facts, issues, and methods related to the contemporary academic study of the text, transmission, and translation of the New Testament. It also inadvertently illustrates some of the general difficulties faced by broad evangelicals who have embraced the modern historical-critical method, including its approach to text and translation.

One such problem is consistency. Porter defends some traditional biblical views (like an early date for Acts and authorial authenticity of the Pauline epistles), but is willing to surrender others, such as the authenticity and integrity of the ending of Mark. He defends the older goal of textual criticism against the contemporary abandonment to finding the “original text,” but he does not altogether address objections to a “restorationist” approach.

There are some points of light in the discussion. Though Porter is generally an advocate for the modern critical text, he also raises several key challenges to the method that has produced and is producing it. Most important here is his challenge of the eclectic text in favor of a text based on single manuscripts. Porter also raises an important critique of the Coherence Based Genealogical Method, whose influence is already seen in the catholic epistles of the current editions of the

modern critical text (28th edition of the Nestle-Aland/5th Revised edition of the United Bible Societies Greek New Testaments) and will, no doubt, be more widely influential in the next editions of these works.

Though the book ably converses with those in the academy, its chief limitation is that it is weak in its conversation with those in the church. Furthermore, Porter does not offer a confessional view of Scripture; there is no discussion or consideration of the doctrines of preservation or infallibility, and no evaluation of whether or not it is safe for believers to deliver custody of their Scriptures to the academy. Nevertheless, surely doctrinal questions must also be posed when Christians consider the text, transmission, and translation of their Scripture, and this work helps to some degree to answer these questions.

—Jeffrey T. Riddle

Carl R. Trueman. *Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2015. 224 pp.

Here is an eye-opening view of the life and theology of the father of the Protestant Reformation, the German Augustinian friar Martin Luther. The author, Carl Trueman, himself not a Lutheran but a Presbyterian, claims Martin Luther for the whole church of Jesus Christ and presents here a solid piece of scholarship. At the same time, this work remains accessible and readable for the contemporary lay reader.

In the introduction, *Luther on the Christian Life* acknowledges the immense debt that Western Christianity owes to the German Reformer, but also considers the problems readers of Luther confront in contemporary society. First, dramatic sound bites are tirelessly and relentlessly echoed in phrases such as “theologian of glory,” “theologian of the cross,” “justification by grace through faith alone,” “the hidden versus the revealed God,” “the bondage of the will,” and “the epistle of straw.” These are powerful, theologically rich doctrines that are worthy of broader discussion and debate for some, while for others they are a cause for joy and celebration. The problem is that familiarity with these phrases does not necessarily mean an understanding of them. As Trueman writes, there is an “evangelical propensity to reinvent heroes of the past as modern-day evangelicals.... Luther was