
Reviewed by
Peter R. Rodgers

Since it first appeared in 1965 this book has been widely used in schools and colleges as an introductory textbook for the study of the New Testament. The third edition updates the style and bibliography, adds illustrations and a glossary, and conforms the biblical citations to the New Revised Standard Version. Metzger has also added an appendix on the transmission and translation of the Bible.

Bruce Metzger is one of the great names in New Testament scholarship in the modern era. His contributions in the areas of textual criticism, translation and canon are well known, even beyond practitioners in the field. Now in his nineties, he continues to offer fresh, insightful and readable discussions of complex subjects. The beginner to New Testament study will find this book to be an accessible guide to the subject. But the mature scholar will also discover new insights and challenges. The useful chart tracing the lineage of the New Revised Standard Version (344-345) provides the best possible overview of Bible translation. Metzger's cautionary note on dogmatism with regard to the so-called "deutero-Pauline" letters (274 n. 6) is meant for the trained scholar as much as for the beginner.

This book is, in fact, deceptively simple. A brief summary sentence will conceal a lifetime of study and thought on a subject. For example, Metzger states that "neither individuals nor councils created the canon; instead they came to recognize and acknowledge the self-authenticating quality of these writings, which imposed themselves as canonical upon the church." (318). These are the last words of the first edition of this book. However, in 1987 Metzger published a major book on the subject. Many today prefer instead to see the formation of the canon of the New Testament as reflecting the power struggle between rival forms of early Christianity. Those who wish to discover why Metzger stands by his original conviction may consult his landmark treatment of the subject.

Another simple sentence that points to a lifetime of study is the principle for Bible translation which guided the translators of the NRSV: "As literal as possible, as free as necessary." (342). Metzger chaired the NRSV translation team, and those wishing to learn more about this and other principles that guided that project would profit from his book *The Bible in Translation* (2001). Indeed, most of Metzger's published works have appeared since the first edition of this introduction, and this third revised edition lists many of them, albeit with the author's customary humility. Even one word can open new vistas in Metzger's writing. The word "kaleidoscopic", used to describe Revelation (302) invites the reader to take up his 1994 book *Breaking the Code*.

Bruce Metzger is best known for his contribution to the field of New Testament textual criticism. In the appendix to this volume the reader is given a brief introduction to the subject (321-331). A few textual notes are given here, and others appear in the body of the book (e.g. 266 on the doxology in Romans, 270 on Ephesians 1:1). But perhaps more should have been included on this subject. Especially helpful would have been some fuller assessment of intentional alterations by scribes in the early church, since this subject is receiving increased attention in both scholarly and popular writings. Metzger mentions several of these (Matthew
6:14, Mark 9:29). He ends his brief discussion with the statement that "no doctrine of Christian faith depends solely on a passage that is textually uncertain." (327). While this is correct, there are voices in the study of the New Testament text today that insist that orthodox scribes corrupted their scriptures in the face of controversy and that the text grew freely. These new challenges within the discipline enjoy a wide adherence and need to be addressed, even in an introduction. Since no person commands more authority in these matters than Bruce Metzger, a fuller discussion of disputed textual questions would have been a welcome addition to the book. To give one example, a textual note on Mark 1:1 would have been helpful, since one recent translation (TNTV) has actually removed the words the Son of God from the text and relegated them to the margin. Many who will be exposed to this radical departure from the customary text would have been helped by a note along the lines of Metzger's balanced statement in A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament.