

AN EVALUATION OF JOHN W. BURGON'S USE OF PATRISTIC EVIDENCE

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Undoubtedly John W. Burgon, Dean of Chichester, was a Christian gentleman and scholar. In fact Kenneth W. Clark places Dean Burgon alongside Tischendorf as a textual scholar.¹ Burgon compiled an astounding index of Scripture quotations from the Church fathers totaling 86,589. It resides in the British Museum but unfortunately has never been published, leaving these patristic citations inaccessible for critical study.² Burgon held what is at least a reasonable position in that he accepted only the inspiration of the apostolic autographs and not the inerrancy of the Textus Receptus edition or any version, including the KJV. For example, he does not defend the KJV reading of Acts 8:37 and 1 John 5:7, which do not appear in any credible Greek MSS.³ Burgon's mission was to use his massive amount of patristic evidence to prove the inferiority of the Alexandrian and Western text types and the MSS that primarily support them, while defending the superiority and authority of the "Majority" or Byzantine text type, from which the Textus Receptus was compiled and the KJV eventually translated. Although all MS text types present all the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Christianity, Burgon unfortunately equates the debate over NT text types with the modernistic controversies that began to surface in his day.⁴ Since Burgon is the source many modern Majority Text defenders look to for their methodology, it is helpful to evaluate the problems with Burgon's use of patristic evidence more specifically.

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¹ See *New Testament Manuscript Studies* (ed. M. Parvis and A. P. Wikgren; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1950) 9.

² Burgon does cite patristic references throughout his key works that have been published: *The Revision Revised* (1883; Paradise: Conservative Classics, reprint 1977); *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to Saint Mark* (1871; Ann Arbor: Sovereign Grace Book Club, reprint 1959); *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (London: George Bell, 1896). E. Miller was a supporter of Burgon who authored a work espousing the Majority Text view: *A Guide to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: George Bell, 1886).

³ Burgon mentions 1 John 5:7 in *The Revision Revised* on p. 483 but does not defend its authenticity. He does not deal with Acts 8:37 at all and omits it from his Scripture index of well over 500 passages, which he does defend and explain.

⁴ See E. F. Hills, "The Magnificent Burgon," *Which Bible?* (ed. D. O. Fuller; Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International, 1978) 87.

I. A PRESUPPOSITIONARY APPROACH

1. *Theological assumption: divine preservation of one text type.* Throughout his works Burgon seems to labor under certain assumptions that cloud the objectivity of his arguments. First, he begins with the assumption that God has specially preserved the true NT text through the majority of manuscripts in use through the ages of the Christian Church, an assumption not supported in the NT data on inspiration and inerrancy.⁵ Besides being un-Biblical, this view of Burgon never faces the insurmountable problem of how the thousands of differences that exist even among Byzantine manuscripts could be reconcilable with this kind of divine textual preservation.

Next, based on his view of preservation, Burgon contends that the Majority Text (which he usually calls the "traditional text") preserves the reading of the original NT except for a few rare instances (which should, incidentally, cast some doubt on the entire theory). On this basis he suggests that orthodox Christians should defend "traditional" readings.⁶ Again, Burgon fails to recognize and resolve the problem of which "traditional" text MSS preserve the true text in the many instances in which they differ from one another.

2. *Consequent bias against other text types.* Burgon's theological presuppositions as to how God preserved his infallible Word lead him from the very beginning of his key work to manifest a bias that detracts from the obvious depth of the research he has done. He refers to the Westcott-Hort text underlying the 1881 English Revised Version (ERV) as "the systematic depravation of the underlying Greek" which he says is "a poisoning of the River of Life at its sacred source."⁷ Burgon thinks the traditional text is "the imperilled letter of God's Word."⁸ He charges that "the Old Latin and the two Egyptian Versions are constantly observed to conspire in error."⁹ Frequently he emotionally attacks the quality of the most ancient uncial manuscripts in existence, calling them "outrageously depraved documents."¹⁰ In a later attack on the early uncials he spares few words:

We venture to assure him [Bishop Ellicott of the ERV translation committee], without a particle of hesitation, that Aleph B D are *three of the most scandalously corrupt copies extant:—exhibit the most shamefully mutilated texts*

⁵ See chap. 5, "Bibliology and New Testament Citations," in M. H. Heuer, *New Testament Textual Variants and the Bibliology of the Church Fathers to A.D. 450: An Historical and Theological Contribution to the Modern English Controversy* (dissertation; Bob Jones University, 1988).

⁶ See J. W. Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* (ed. E. Miller; London: George Bell, 1896) 29–30.

⁷ Burgon, *Revision* vi.

⁸ *Ibid.* xvii.

⁹ *Ibid.* xxii–xxiii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* xix. On p. 15 he speaks of "the *depraved text* of codices Aleph A B C D,—especially of Aleph B D" (*italics his*). Perhaps Burgon does not consider uncial A "especially" depraved because of the fact that it is historically the earliest example of a partially Byzantine text in the existing MS evidence.

which are anywhere to be met with:—have become, by whatever process (for their history is wholly unknown), the depositories of the largest amount of *fabricated readings*, ancient *blunders*, and *intentional perversions of Truth*,—which are discoverable in any known copies of the Word of God.¹¹

Because of his obvious predilection for the Byzantine text and against all other text types, Burgon tends to minimize the conclusions of other equally conservative scholars who disagree with him.

Benjamin B. Warfield was an American contemporary of Burgon who at least equaled him in his scholarship, theological conservatism, and opposition to rationalistic, liberal higher criticism. Warfield, however, held textual views directly opposed to Burgon's. Rather than defending all the readings in one text type *a priori*, Warfield agreed with the Westcott-Hort approach of choosing the correct reading variant by variant.¹² Disagreeing with Burgon's partiality to the Byzantine text, Warfield notes that the textual tendencies of the ante-Nicene fathers are primarily Western and Alexandrian rather than Byzantine:

The Ante-Nicene patristic citations are prevailingly Western; this is true of those of Marcion, Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Methodius, Eusebius, and even to some extent of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. A large non-Western pre-Syrian [i.e. Alexandrian] element is found also, however, in the Alexandrian fathers, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius, Peter, and also in a less degree in Eusebius and others.¹³

Warfield further observes that the post-Nicene fathers begin to prefer the Syrian (Byzantine) text, which concurs historically with the rise of a consistent Byzantine text during the fourth century.

The Post-Nicene fathers generally present a Syrian text in their citations, although Cyril of Alexandria, Apollinaris, . . . and less markedly Epiphanius, and even John of Damascus, are to greater or less extent exceptions to this rule.¹⁴

While the majority of the ante-Nicene fathers (who are most significant in a study of early development of the text) tend to prefer one text type, there is no doubt that they use a mixture of texts, as Warfield implies. For example, Bruce Metzger notes that "in the *Stromata* Clement's quotations of Matthew and John are twice as often from the Egyptian (i.e., Alexandrian) text as from the Western text."¹⁵ Even E. F. Hills admits that in John 1–14 Origen largely uses an Alexandrian text.¹⁶

¹¹ *Ibid.* 16 (italics his). Compare Burgon's sweeping statement that Clement of Alexandria's early text of Mark 10:17–31 is the foulest text imaginable (p. 328).

¹² See B. B. Warfield, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896).

¹³ *Ibid.* 169.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ B. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (2d ed.; New York: Oxford University, 1968) 214 n. 1. Metzger points out that this impression of Clement's mixed text is based on research done by R. J. Swanson in *The Gospel Text of Clement of Alexandria* (dissertation; Yale University, 1956).

¹⁶ Introduction to Burgon, *Twelve Verses* 58.

II. PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE ACTUAL PATRISTIC CITATIONS

1. *Use of noncritical texts.* Since few patristic critical texts were available in the 1800s when Burgon wrote, he was forced through no fault of his own to use noncritical texts. Kenyon observes that Burgon's patristic "references are to comparatively uncritical texts of the Fathers (generally those in Migne)."¹⁷ Kenyon summarizes the problem well:

In the first place, the true text of the writer in question has to be ascertained, just as the text of the Bible or of the classical authors has to be ascertained, by the comparison of authorities. The texts of the Fathers, as they have generally been read until recently in the editions of the Benedictines or Migne's *Patrologia*, were based (like the received text of the New Testament itself) upon comparatively few and late manuscripts.¹⁸

Gordon Fee affirms that Burgon's lack of access to trustworthy critical texts of the Church fathers makes the patristic support for his theory ineffectual.

J. W. Burgon is often praised by his followers for his monumental index of patristic citations [over 80,000], deposited in the British Museum. But many of these as they appear in his *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (London, 1896) are useless because they reflect not the fathers' texts but the conformation of that text to the ecclesiastical text of the Middle Ages.¹⁹

Wilbur Pickering, one of Burgon's more scholarly modern followers, refers to the problem of noncritical patristic editions as a mere "quibble."²⁰ An example of the difference a critical patristic text can make appears in the list of patristic references Burgon uses in his support for the reading "God" rather than the earlier "he who" in 1 Tim 3:16. One of the many patristic references he cites is Ign. *Eph.* 7.2. Burgon quotes the pertinent phrase from Ignatius as follows: *en sarki genomenos theos* ("God coming in flesh"). If Burgon can prove that Ignatius definitely quotes 1 Tim 3:16 according to the Majority Text, it would be a significant piece of evidence for

¹⁷ F. G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 244 n. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 243.

¹⁹ G. D. Fee, "Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the *Textus Receptus*," *JETS* 11 (March 1978) 27 n. 32. This by no means implies that Burgon's patristic citations for the Byzantine text are wrong in every case. For example, at John 17:24 the earliest available NT Greek MSS (κ B D W) read *ho dedokas moi* (literally "that which you have given me") while the Majority Text reads *hous dedokas moi* ("the ones you have given me"). In this case Clement of Alexandria (*The Instructor* 1.8), according to Barnard's critical text, reads *hous* along with other Church fathers, disagreeing with the earliest Greek MSS extant today. The interpretation of the passage is not necessarily affected, and Metzger thinks the original reading must have been *ho*, which would likely have been smoothed out grammatically to the easier reading *hous*. See B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (3d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1975) 250. Also see P. M. Barnard, *The Biblical Text of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1899) 61; Burgon, *Revision* 217–218. F. C. Burkitt, in the introduction to Barnard's critical text, notes that the apparent agreement of Clement with the *Textus Receptus* in the John 17:24–26 passage is something of a quirk. He writes: "The length and general accuracy of Clement's citation of this passage . . . might lead some [such as Burgon] to build on it more than it can legitimately be made to bear" (p. xvii).

²⁰ W. N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977) 69.

the originality of this text since Ignatius wrote only about a decade after the apostle John (around AD 105–110).

This is, however, not the case at all. First, this passage in Ignatius deals with Christology in general, and Ignatius is making a general statement drawn from Christology. Ignatius does not mention Paul's epistle to Timothy in this context, and there is no evidence that he is referring to 1 Tim 3:16 at all. For this reason it is not valid for Burgon to use such a statement as definite proof for whatever reading this Church father happened to have in his scroll at 1 Tim 3:16.²¹

For our purposes here, however, there is a second problem with Burgon's use of Ignatius to support the "traditional" reading. Burgon's quotation of Ignatius at least sounds remotely similar to 1 Tim 3:16. But Kirsopp Lake has produced a critical text by using earlier patristic manuscripts and comparing the existing MSS of the apostolic fathers, including Ignatius. Lake's critical edition disagrees with Burgon's quotation of Ignatius and reads *en anthrōpō theos* ("[who is] God in man").²² Again, since there is no indication at all that Ignatius is quoting 1 Tim 3:16, we cannot logically construe even from the critical text reading that Ignatius reads "God" there. He merely makes a general Christological statement on the deity of Christ. Yet it is significant that the critical text moves Ignatius' phraseology here further away from the Majority Text by omitting *en sarki*. This is clearly an example in which a critical text of a Church father's writings can differ from the noncritical text Burgon uses, thereby moving a reading away from the Majority Text readings—if indeed Ignatius was thinking of 1 Tim 3:16 at all.

2. *Vague, incomplete footnotes.* Due to the character of Burgon's footnoting it is extremely difficult for modern readers personally to check the patristic references in his various published works. When referring to a father to support the Majority Text, Burgon normally cites only a page number or volume and page number from the noncritical edition of the father's work he happens to have used.²³ Occasionally Burgon's works refer to page numbers from a specific editor's issue of a Church father's writings. Even then, however, they are noncritical editions that were perhaps popular in Burgon's day but no longer in print or easily accessible for examination today.²⁴ Only rarely does Burgon cite the actual patristic work by name so that modern readers can easily find the reference in more modern critical patristic editions and verify the accuracy of Burgon's evidence. In the rare

²¹ Further examples of this kind of mistreatment of patristic evidence by Burgon are listed later in the article.

²² *The Apostolic Fathers* (LCL; 2 vols.; ed. K. Lake; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1912–1913) 180. In a footnote Lake explains that some patristic MSS follow the reading favored by Burgon.

²³ For examples of this kind of incomplete footnoting see Burgon, *Revision* 91, 123, 219, 356; *Causes* 105, 219.

²⁴ Cf. e.g. Burgon's reference to an editor of Clement of Alexandria by the name of Potter in *Revision* 327. He customarily gives no publication information that would help a modern reader follow the patristic citations he refers to.

case when Burgon clearly names an ancient work by its title he uses the same notation to refer to the book and chapter of the ancient work as he does when referring to volumes and page numbers in editions he consults for other ancient authors, causing additional confusion.²⁵

In many places Burgon simply gives long lists of Church fathers whom he says support a given Byzantine reading without giving references to any source material whatever.²⁶ This practice makes it impossible for modern readers to know what work of the ancient father Burgon is referring to. Such lack of precision precludes the modern critical reader from examining a critical patristic edition at a given place or even from determining whether such references are accurate patristic quotations in the first place, rather than memory citations or mere allusions on the part of the Church father.

On the whole, the vagueness and incompleteness of Burgon's footnotes and references are more than a mere stylistic problem. Rather, the situation seriously hampers modern readers from critically evaluating Burgon's alleged evidence without extreme difficulty. Even if one has access to a theological library with modern critical editions of patristic writings he must first know where to look in the vast writings of the Church fathers.

III. DIFFICULTIES IN ESTABLISHING EARLY PATRISTIC QUOTATIONS

In addition to the problem that Burgon refers to noncritical patristic editions using late MSS of the Church fathers' works, there is another even more basic difficulty with his use of patristic evidence. Burgon seems to grasp at straws to find patristic evidence supporting his "traditional text." He often makes the sweeping assumption that any remote patristic allusion to a text he discusses may constitute support for the Majority Text. In his examples he fails to take into account that Biblical paraphrases, allusions and memory citations do not attest the Biblical text of a father at a specific verse as would a more lengthy, accurate quotation.²⁷ In places where a father may merely partially incorporate the phraseology of a verse into a theological comment he is making, Burgon apparently thinks it fair game to use as a quotation when it serves his purpose.

The writings of the apostolic fathers present a special problem in this regard. These early successors to the apostles lived in a day when the "Bible" was still the OT. While the teaching of Jesus and his apostles was always the rule of true faith, the apostles' writings only gradually gained a status of

²⁵ Cf. e.g. Burgon's reference to the *Apostolical Constitutions* in *Revision* 43.

²⁶ Cf. e.g. Burgon, *Revision* 18–19, 23–24, 40, 132, 290–291, 410–411.

²⁷ Metzger observes: "Even for those patristic authors whose writings are available in reliable [critical] editions, the textual critic is often confronted with problems arising from the manner in which a Father refers to the biblical text. It goes without saying that reminiscences and allusions are of less value to the critic than specific citations of the very words of the scriptural passage" (*Text* 87). Even Burgon admits with modern textual critics that patristic paraphrases and allusions are not as accurate as precise quotations and are therefore less authoritative as a witness to the NT text (*Last Twelve* 100–101). He also recognizes the problem of NT citations from memory as less accurate (*ibid.* 97–98).

equality with the OT. During this transition period there seems to be little interest in accurate quotation of verses from the apostolic writings (the NT). Thus Kenyon concludes:

Up to A.D. 150 the quotations in extant ecclesiastical writers, though important in their bearing on the questions of the date and acceptance of the New Testament Scriptures, are of little value for purely textual purposes.²⁸

Eric L. Titus discusses the looseness of Biblical quotations in the apostolic fathers:

It is legitimate to ask what constitutes a variant and what a mere allusion. At times the difference is obscure In any case, the reading must be identifiable: its original place in the New Testament must be definitely established. . . . The immediate question is as to how far this is possible in the Apostolic Fathers. . . . The conclusion seems to be that in these writers, quotations from the New Testament are too loose and uncertain for the purposes of this study.²⁹

IV. MARK 16

Burgon improperly uses evidence from the apostolic fathers in his treatise defending Mark 16:9–20 as these verses stand in the KJV. He cites Papias of Hierapolis (c. 150) as an early witness to the long ending of Mark:

It is impossible to resist the inference that Papias refers to Mark xvi. 18 when he records a marvellous tradition concerning "Justus surnamed Barsabas," "how that after drinking noxious poison, through the Lord's grace he experienced no evil consequence." . . . The allusion to the place just cited is manifest. Now, Papias is a writer who lived so near the time of the Apostles that he made it his delight to collect their traditional sayings. His date (according to Clinton) is A.D. 100.³⁰

The verse Burgon refers to reads as follows: "They will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover" (NASB). Fragments of Papias' writings are extant only in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, almost two centuries after Papias' own time. To dispel any doubt it will be helpful to quote the pertinent section of Papias directly from Eusebius:

It has been shown, indeed, by what has gone before, that Philip the apostle resided in Hierapolis with his daughters; but now it must be pointed out that Papias, their contemporary, mentions that he had a wonderful story from the daughters of Philip. For he relates that the resurrection of a dead body took place in his day; and, on the other hand, he tells of another miraculous happening, concerned with Justus who was surnamed Barsabbas: that he drank a deadly poison and, by the grace of the Lord, suffered no unpleasant effects.³¹

²⁸ Kenyon, *Handbook* 249.

²⁹ E. L. Titus, *The Motivation of Changes Made in the New Testament Text by Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria: A Study in the Origin of New Testament Variation* (dissertation; University of Chicago, 1942) 5–6.

³⁰ Burgon, *Last Twelve* 101.

It is incredible that Burgon cites such a vague patristic reference as proof for the early existence of the “traditional” text. Papias (in Eusebius) quotes no words at all from the Majority Text of Mark 16:18. Even the word for “deadly thing” is different (*pharmakon* in Eusebius, as opposed to *thanasi-mon* in the Byzantine text). There is nothing whatever in the account of Papias to prove that he had Mark 16 in mind at all. It is just as likely that Papias recalls the account of Paul’s miraculous deliverance from a deadly snake bite in Acts 28:3–6 or that he alludes to no NT passage at all. Patristic evidence such as this is not evidence but merely speculation.

V. 1 TIMOTHY 3:16

Other examples of Burgon’s use of assumption in his patristic evidence comes from his lengthy defense of the Byzantine reading for 1 Tim 3:16.³² The earliest available MSS include the pronoun *hos*, resulting in the translation “He who was revealed [or manifested] in the flesh” (NASB). On the other hand, the late majority of MSS (the Byzantine text) reads *theos*, which results in the translation “God was manifest in the flesh” (KJV). The first Greek manuscript to read “God” in its original hand, however, is the ninth-century uncial K. The later reading “God” probably arose by a scribal error due to the similarity in uncial script between the pronoun ΟΣ (“he who”) and the manuscript abbreviation for “God” (ΘΣ).³³ None of the common variant readings here (*hos*, *ho*, *theos*) in any way denies the deity of Christ. The context implies that Jesus has a preexisting divine nature, since normal people are not spoken of in the Bible as being “revealed in flesh.” One of Burgon’s strongest arguments for the late reading “God” is the alleged use of this reading by the early Church fathers in their quotations of 1 Tim 3:16. Such definite quotations would imply (if such patristic readings are verified by a critical text and therefore likely to be original to the father) that this reading existed in the early Biblical text used by the various Church fathers Burgon cites. Again, however, Burgon makes use of patristic passages that are little more than general references to Jesus’ incarnation and implies that they are early patristic quotations of 1 Tim 3:16.

1. *Ignatius*. First, Burgon uses Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110) as evidence for the Majority Text reading of 1 Tim 3:16.³⁴ The first reference allegedly supporting the Byzantine reading of this verse is from Ign. *Eph.* 7. Only one passage in the longer version of this letter even remotely relates to the issue:

We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin. For “the Word was made flesh.”

³¹ Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.9.

³² Burgon, *Revision* 424–501.

³³ Cf. Metzger, *Text* 187.

³⁴ Burgon, *Revision* 463, 486.

Ignatius does speak of the Word becoming flesh, but he nowhere even implies that he is referring to one of Paul's epistles to Timothy. Thus the citation is invalid in establishing the text of 1 Tim 3:16. Rather, if Ignatius intends to allude to any specific NT passage at all, his statement may be an allusion to John 1:14, which contains the identical clause: "The Word was made flesh."

A second reference to Ignatius' Ephesian letter is in chap. 19. The short form of the epistle reads: "God himself being manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life." The longer form at this point has the phrase "God being manifested as a man" (*theou anthrōpinos phaneroumenou*). Again, there is nothing in Ignatius' context that even implies he is referring to 1 Tim 3:16 rather than merely making his own theological observation regarding the person of Christ.

Burgon's final reference to Ignatius is from *Ign. Magn.* 8. The passage reads as follows:

On this account also they [the prophets] were persecuted, being inspired by his grace to fully convince the unbelieving that there is one God, who has manifested himself by Jesus Christ his Son.

Similar to the previous two references, Ignatius is referring in some way to the incarnation but reveals no clue as to what his scroll reads at 1 Tim 3:16, for there is no direct allusion to this passage.

2. *The Epistle of Barnabas.* The *Epistle of Barnabas*, which dates from AD 100 or earlier, may well be contemporaneous with the end of the apostolic era. Burgon refers to a passage in chap. 12 that supposedly supports the Majority Text. The epistle writer frequently cites OT passages but generally only alludes to NT passages, making it difficult to establish what specific NT text, if any, he has in mind. In chap. 12 the epistle discusses OT types that point to Christ and his work. The epistle states: "Behold again: Jesus who was manifested, both by type and in the flesh, is not the Son of man, but the Son of God." Even if this passage is an indirect allusion to 1 Tim 3:16, which is at least a possibility, it does not imply whether the author's NT scroll read *theos* ("God") or *hos* ("he who"). The writer speaks only of "Jesus" being manifested in flesh. How Burgon can deduce from this that the *Epistle of Barnabas* supports the Byzantine reading *theos* is difficult to imagine.

3. *Apostolical Constitutions.* Burgon cites the third- or fourth-century work *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* in support of the Byzantine reading in 1 Tim 3:16. In 7.26 this ancient writing has a strong Christological passage:

Thou, O God, who art powerful, faithful, and true, and without deceit in thy promises; who didst send upon earth Jesus thy Christ to live with men, as a man, when he was God the Word, and man, to take away error by the roots: . . . "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord"—God the Lord, who was manifested to us in the flesh.

This passage appears to be one of the stronger patristic supports for Burgon's theory. Undoubtedly this and some of the other patristic references Burgon cites do refer to the incarnation of our Lord in language similar to that of 1 Tim 3:16. The doctrine of the incarnation, however, appears in other NT passages and would stand even without the existence of 1 Tim 3:16.³⁵ Burgon fails to demonstrate (1) that statements such as the one in the *Apostolical Constitutions* unambiguously refer specifically to 1 Timothy, and (2) (if the statement does refer to 1 Tim 3:16 as opposed to other passages) that the author intends to quote the precise wording of the text rather than merely to allude to the gist of the verse as he discusses Christology.

4. *Basil the Great.* The last father Burgon cites whom we will refer to here is Basil the Great (c. 330–379), bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. Burgon refers to a passage in Basil's *Letter 261*, 1 (to the Sozopolitans):

After all these in the last days he was himself manifested in the flesh, "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

This passage of Basil is interesting because it demonstrates the difference between a vague allusion (which may refer to 1 Tim 3:16) and an intentional quotation (Gal 4:4) by the same Church father. It is evident from the length and style of Basil's reference to Gal 4:4 that he intends to quote this verse accurately. In such a case Basil's NT citation is valid as a witness to his NT text. With reference to the possible allusion to 1 Timothy, however, it is clear that Basil mixes Biblical phraseology with his own writing and does not intend to provide an accurate quotation of 1 Tim 3:16. To use this kind of allusion to establish the precise wording of a textual variant is simply not valid. While Basil does use the Biblical phrase "was manifested in the flesh," the subject of the phrase is not "God" but "he himself," which if anything leans toward the earlier non-Byzantine reading "he who" and away from the later Majority Text reading Burgon seeks to defend. Burgon's patristic evidence is ambiguous at best, if not plainly inaccurate at many points.

VI. FAILURE TO DISTINGUISH DISTINCTIVELY BYZANTINE READINGS

Sometimes Burgon defends "traditional" readings that he says are strongly attested in some of the early fathers.³⁶ The problem, however, is that many of these readings are not distinctively Byzantine at all. Where critical patristic editions would seem to support the early attestation Burgon and Miller claim for the Byzantine text, one must note that some variant readings they call Byzantine are not unique to the Byzantine text at all but originated in Western MSS or other early non-Byzantine MSS. Such patristic "evidence" does not prove the early existence of a complete Byzantine

³⁵ Cf. e.g. 1 John 4:2: "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ *has come in the flesh* is from God" (italics mine).

³⁶ Cf. Burgon, *Traditional* 94–122.

tine text. Rather, it merely demonstrates that some of the readings later incorporated into the Byzantine text were early. Kenyon summarizes this matter quite well:

The thirty "traditional" readings, which he shows to be so overwhelmingly vindicated by the Fathers, are not what Hort would call pure "Syrian" readings at all. In nearly every case they have Western or Neutral [Alexandrian] attestation in addition to that of the later authorities. Thus the insertion of Matthew xvii. 21 is supported by D L and the Old Latin version; Matthew xviii. 11 by D, the Old Latin and Curetonian Syriac; *agathe* in Matthew xix. 16 by the Old Latin, Curetonian and Sinaitic Syriac, Bohairic and Sahidic; *eremos* in Matthew xxiii. 38 by Aleph D, the Old Latin, and most Coptic MSS.; the last twelve verses of St. Mark by D, the Old Latin (except K), Curetonian Syriac, and most Bohairic MSS.; Luke xxiv. 40 by Aleph B L, the Bohairic, etc.; John xxi. 25 by every authority except Aleph, and every editor except Tischendorf. In short, Mr. Miller evidently reckoned on his side every reading which occurs in the Traditional Text, regardless of whether, on Hort's principles, they are old readings which kept their place in the Syrian revision, or secondary readings which were then introduced for the first time.³⁷

Thus Burgon and his editor, Edward Miller, do not take into account that there were many early, isolated readings existing in the ante-Nicene period that were not incorporated into a complete Byzantine text until the fourth century, when the MS evidence indicates that a partial Byzantine text first arose.

VII. USE OF LATE FATHERS AS CORROBORATING EVIDENCE

Burgon cites a number of later or medieval Church fathers as evidence for Byzantine readings in the NT. He refers, for example, to fifth-century writers such as John Cassian, Cyril of Alexandria, Gelasius, Germanus, Nestorius, Theodoretus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, as well as various sixth-century writers, including Caesarius, Leontius, Severus of Antioch and Vigilius. Burgon also cites even later writers, including John of Damascus (d. 749), Isidorus (d. 636), Maximus (d. 662) and Photius (d. 891).³⁸ While such examination of later fathers can undoubtedly be fruitful in textual matters, it is questionable to use such late evidence to attest the early existence of a Byzantine text.

After the advent of a largely Byzantine text of the gospels in Codex A around AD 350, distinctive readings of the Byzantine text begin to appear with increasing frequency in the writings of the Church fathers. Thus it would be surprising if there were not at least some Byzantine readings in patristic writings after that time, which raises the question of whether it is valid for Burgon to add late fathers to the lists of fathers he gives in support of the Byzantine text.

³⁷ Kenyon, *Handbook* 323.

³⁸ Burgon, *Revision* 538-540.

VIII. SUMMARY

No one can doubt Burgon's assiduousness in studying the Church fathers and amassing the vast number of patristic quotations appearing in his published and unpublished works. But his theological presuppositions and

his lack of access to modern critical patristic texts lessen the objectivity and accuracy of his work. In addition Burgon frequently presumes that explanatory comments or vague allusions by the Church fathers are definite references to certain verses and are thereby authoritative in establishing their Biblical text, which is an invalid assumption. His use of the medieval Church fathers, while enlightening, provides little evidence for the earliness of the Byzantine text. Undoubtedly some of the early fathers do cite isolated readings that later were assimilated into the Byzantine text, but even this does not demonstrate the existence of an early Byzantine text, as Burgon hoped.