



## Articles and Sermons :: What is the Textus Receptus?

### What is the Textus Receptus?, on: 2013/6/14 4:29

For anyone wishing to explore both the meaning and the implications for modern bible translations this article is very enlightening. I think it presents a balanced view. Hopefully the article won't arouse any unnecessary concern. Not only that I promise not to participate should anyone feel inclined to criticise the article. I have no personality invested in it.

What is the Textus Receptus?

By Dr. Herbert Samworth

This question, like most questions, has both a short and long answer. Let us begin with the short answer: the Textus Receptus, or Received Text, is a printed Greek New Testament that provided the textual base for the vernacular translations of the Reformation period.

This short answer raises as many questions as it answers. To answer these questions we must keep several things in mind. First, the name itself: textus receptus is a Latin phrase that can be translated as the received or agreed upon text. When speaking of the Textus Receptus, one must remember that it is a printed text, not a hand-copied manuscript. It was the Greek text available to translators during the time of the Reformation. Finally, the Textus Receptus is what is called a "text type." The text type of the Textus Receptus is known as the Byzantine because it came from the geographical area around Constantinople. A characteristic of this text type was the inclusion of additional words in the text itself due to scribal notes. If the above is not sufficient to cause confusion, there is the additional fact that there were several editions of the Textus Receptus.

To unravel this confusion, we must give a brief historical overview of its printing and publication. In the late fifteenth century, the Greek language, unknown for hundreds of years, was recovered in the West or the geographical area of the Latin Church. The Bible of the Western Church at that time was the Latin Vulgate translated by Jerome in the latter part of the fourth century.

With the rediscovery of Greek, the Vulgate translation was subjected to a critical examination in comparison with the Greek original. Scholars discovered numerous mistranslations or outright errors in the Vulgate. This provided an impetus to print the New Testament in its original language. However, the major stumbling block to this printing endeavor was the lack of a type font for the Greek letters. The creation of this font was accomplished by the second decade of the sixteenth century.

Two major printings of the Greek New Testament were undertaken in the second decade of the sixteenth century. The first took place in Spain under the leadership of Cardinal Francisco Jimenez de Cisneros. The New Testament was completed by 1514 but permission to publish or sell the book was withheld by Pope Leo X. In the meantime, a partnership between Johannes Froben, a Swiss printer from Basle, and Erasmus, the great Humanist, was forged to produce a Greek New Testament before the New Testament of Jimenez could be published.

Working at breakneck speed, Erasmus gathered together what Greek manuscripts he could locate in Basle. He was able to collect five, the majority of which were dated in the twelfth century. Erasmus worked with such haste that he did not even transcribe the manuscripts; he merely made notes on the manuscripts themselves and sent them to the printers. The entire New Testament was printed in less than six months and published in 1516. Erasmus himself had to admit that the work was "precipitously edited." Another person has called it the most faulty book ever published due to the proofing errors.

Despite its errors, the book became a best seller and the first printing was soon exhausted. In the second edition, which was published in 1519, Erasmus attempted to correct many of the printing errors but, unfortunately, there were nearly as many as the first edition.

In the meantime, the editors of the Greek New Testament printed in Spain were upset that they could not sell their book.

They examined the Erasmanian edition carefully and noted the absence of 1 John 1:7, a verse upholding the doctrine of the Trinity, although it was included in the Latin Vulgate. This was a serious charge and Erasmus rashly promised that he would include it in the next edition of his New Testament if manuscript evidence were provided. A manuscript with the verse was located and Erasmus printed it in his third edition that was published in 1522.

Erasmus published two other editions, in 1527 and 1535. Stung by criticism that his work contained numerous textual errors, he incorporated readings from the Greek New Testament published in Spain in later editions of his work.

Erasmus's Greek text became the standard in the field and other editors and printers continued the work after his death in 1536. Ten years later, the French printer, Robert Estienne or Stephanus, appeared on the scene. He printed the basic text of Erasmus in 1546, 1549, and a beautiful edition in 1550. Stephanus's third edition, known as the *Editio Regia* is considered to be the most beautiful Greek book ever printed due to the elegance of the Greek font.

Others printed the Greek New Testament including Theodore Beza, the friend of John Calvin. In 1624 Abraham and Bonaventure Elzevir of Leiden published an edition of the Greek New Testament. In 1633 they published a second edition. In the publisher's preface, in Latin, we find the following words: *Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum* that can be translated as: the (reader) now has the text that is received by all. From this publisher's blurb has come the words "Received Text." However, the Elzevir provided no definitive proof the text of their edition had been received by everyone.

The Textus Receptus became the dominant Greek text of the New Testament for the following two hundred and fifty years. It was not until the publication of the Westcott and Hort Greek New Testament in 1881 that the Textus Receptus lost its position.

We do not have space to trace the entire history of the Textus Receptus. It received criticism from the time of its first printing. With the discovery of older manuscripts, considered superior to the manuscripts of the Textus Receptus, the Textus Receptus no longer holds the first place in the estimation of most Greek scholars. Regardless of the position one holds regarding its relative value, the following points are worthy of consideration.

First, the differences between the two text traditions do not affect a major doctrine of the New Testament. One of the characteristics of the Textus Receptus is that it tended to add words that many people considered to be notes or glosses made by scribes. Over a period of time, these glosses became part of the text. Later editions of the Greek New Testament, including the Westcott and Hort Greek New Testament, have shown that many of these were not part of the original text.

Second, with these new aids, a thorough investigation of the New Testament was stimulated. From this searching of the Scriptures came the rediscovery of the teaching of salvation by grace.

Third, there is reason to be grateful for those who had the foresight to print the text of the New Testament in its original language. With a printed Greek New Testament, it was possible to translate accurately the Scriptures into vernacular languages. The knowledge of the Word of God contributed immeasurably to the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century.

Many consider Luther to be the Father of the Reformation and there is good reason to hold this view. Few people know that Luther had a profound knowledge of the Scriptures in the original languages. He studied the Scriptures and it was in them that he rediscovered the doctrine of justification by faith.

However, Luther was not content to keep that knowledge to himself. At great risk, he translated the Scriptures into the German language so his fellow countrymen could read the Word of God themselves. Perhaps the greatest impact that Luther made was through the translation of the Bible into German.

We could say the same for William Tyndale. He gave the English-speaking people their first printed New Testament. Others followed in his steps to provide the entire Bible in English after Tyndale's martyrdom in 1536.

Both Luther and Tyndale translated the Scriptures into their vernacular languages using the same basic Greek text. Luther translated from the second edition of the Erasmus New Testament and Tyndale utilized the third edition.

The King James Bible is considered by many to be the crown of English Bibles. Even at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Greek text used in preparing the King James Bible was the Textus Receptus. We should be grateful to God for providing a competent Greek text from which these heroes of the faith could translate the Word of God.

**Re: What is the Textus Receptus? - posted by Renoncer, on: 2013/6/14 12:34**

Interesting article. Thank you for posting it.

I would like to add an important piece of information: When Erasmus compiled the Greek manuscripts, he could not find any manuscript that had the last six verses of the Book of Revelation. So, he translated the last six verses of the Bible from the Latin Vulgate, into Greek. Yes, the last six verses of Revelation in the Textus Receptus were written by Erasmus (not the exact words of the apostles), based on his understanding and translation of the Latin.

Nevertheless, if you compare the Textus Receptus with Greek manuscripts that were later discovered and published (e.g., those published by Westcott-Hort and others), you will see that Erasmus did a pretty good job; he was close, though he made a few minor mistakes.

Nevertheless, we should appreciate the fact that God has still preserved His Word, which transcends fallible human languages (yes, even Greek and Hebrew!). Human language can only capture God's Word by way of analogy (neither univocity nor equivocity), which is why we should put more emphasis on "meaning" rather than the "vessels of meaning" (human words). God's Word was available in Latin, as it was in Greek and Hebrew, and as it is in English, French, and so many different languages today!

Praise God!  
Renoncer

**Re: What is the Textus Receptus? In Continuum, on: 2013/6/14 17:31**

Author

Desiderius Erasmus, born 1466 in the Dutch town of Gouda, was the second illegitimate son of a local Priest. He took monastic vows at the age of 21, and was himself ordained a Priest at the age of 26. A largely self-taught classical scholar, he began to take an interest in the Greek New Testament around the age of 34, and at the age of 39 published an edition of Valla's Annotations on the New Testament. In 1511, at the age of 45, he published a satirical work called *Moriae encomium*, "Praise of Folly," in which he ridiculed the hypocritical churchmen of his day. His first edition of the Greek New Testament appeared in 1516, when he was 50 years old. The Reformation broke out in Germany five years later, and many expected him to join the Protestants; but he did not share their theological convictions, and preferred to remain safely in the church of Rome. He died in 1536, at the age of 70.

Sources:

Erasmus' Greek text was based upon three of the cursive manuscripts readily available to him in Basle. They are (as designated by the notation of Scrivener and Miller 1894): Evan. 2 (15th cent.); Act.Paul. 2 (13th to 14th cent.); and Apoc. 1 (12th cent.). He sometimes adopted readings found in three other cursives also at Basle: Evan.Act.Paul. 1 (10th to 13th cent.); Act.Paul. 4 (15th cent.); and Paul. 7 (date undetermined). For his second edition (1519) he evidently consulted the cursive Evan.Act.Paul. 3 (12th century). He also made much use of his notes on various readings of the Latin Vulgate, of Patristic quotations, and of other (unspecified) Greek copies he had met with over the years, which he had compiled in preparation for his revision of the Latin Vulgate. The cursive manuscript Apoc. 1, his only Greek source for the book of Revelation, was scarcely legible in places, and it lacked the final leaf containing the last six verses of the book.

Method:

Erasmus himself later said that the Greek text of his first edition was "not edited, but done headlong;" that is, thrown together hastily. His publisher, John Froben, desired to get the edition out on the market quickly, and so Erasmus obtained what manuscripts he could find on short notice, marked on them a few changes, and gave them as copy to the printer. Most of the changes were made in order to present a text which displayed the Greek readings he had followed in his Latin translation, which he had been preparing for some time, and which appeared alongside the Greek in this edition. These readings were already supported by unspecified Greek manuscripts and other sources mentioned in the appended Annotations. The Annotations show that quotations from the early Latin ecclesiastical writers (called Fathers) were often decisive in his choice of readings, despite lack of support in Greek copies.

For example, Acts 8:37 (And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I

believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God) has almost no Greek manuscript support, but Erasmus inserted it because it was in the Vulgate, with some support from the Fathers, and in the margin of one of his copies. In Acts 9:5-6, the words "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him" are imported from Acts 26:14 and 22:10, and appear in no Greek copy at all here, although they are represented in the Vulgate, with some support from the Fathers.

On the other hand, Erasmus rejected the testimony of the Vulgate in a very important doctrinal passage: in 1 John 5:7-8 the words in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, which express the doctrine of the Trinity more clearly than any in Scripture, are omitted in Erasmus' first two editions. In the book of Revelation he frankly resorted to conjecture in places, supplying Greek words by translation from Latin sources. Some of these factitious readings passed into the later texts of Estienne, Elzevir, and Beza, and are represented in the King James version, e.g., Rev 17:4 filthiness instead of unclean things; Rev 22:18 For at the beginning of the verse, and in the same verse add unto these things instead of add unto them; Rev 22:21 our added before Lord. As may be seen from the examples, however, the degree of corruption introduced by this expedient is very slight.

Format of the first edition:

Publisher's Preface (one page); Dedication to Pope Leo X by Erasmus (three pages); Introduction (23 pages); parallel Greek text and Latin version without marginal notes (548 pages); lengthy appendix of annotations (401 pages).

Reprints and editions:

Erasmus' first edition (1516) has recently been reprinted in a photographic facsimile: Erasmus von Rotterdam: Novum Instrumentum, Basel 1516: Faksimile - Neudruck mit einer historischen, textkritischen und bibliographischen Einleitung von Heinz Holeczek (Stuttgart and Bad Canstatt: Frommann and Holzboog, 1986).

His second edition (1519) differed from the first chiefly in the correction of numerous errors of the press, and in the addition of more notes.

In his third edition (1522) Erasmus inserted the so-called Comma Johanneum in 1 John 5:7, not because he believed it to be authentic, but in order to "take away the handle for calumniating him which had been afforded by his honestly following his MSS. in this passage" (Tregelles, Account of the Printed Text, p. 26. For a full discussion of the pressure Erasmus was under to insert the Comma against his better judgment see H.J. de Jonge, 'Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum,' Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses 56 , pp. 381-389.).

The fourth edition of 1527 gave a generally improved text, in which Erasmus adopted many readings of the Complutensi an Polyglot (see Stunica 1522) for the book of Revelation, and also included a third column giving the traditional text of the Vulgate beside his own Latin version.

The fifth edition of 1535 differed very little from the fourth, except that the Vulgate has been left out, reducing the size of the volume.

Reception:

The first two editions quickly sold out (Erasmus states in a letter that these amounted to 3300 copies). James Lopez de Stunica, the editor of the forthcoming Complutensian Polyglot, criticized Erasmus' text for various faults, and for the omission of the clause in 1 John 5:7-8.

The influential scholars of France followed Stunica in denouncing the edition, although most of their criticism was directed not against the Greek text, but against the innovative Latin translation. Elsewhere it was received more favorably.

A letter of thanks was sent to Erasmus from Pope Leo X, to whom the first edition was dedicated.

Influence:

The second edition (1519) was followed by Martin Luther in his German translation (1522).

The third edition (1522) was used by William Tyndale in his English translation (1526).

The text of the fourth and fifth edition (1527, 1535) was closely followed by Robert Estienne in his influential third edition (1550), which in turn provided the basis for all editions later published by Beza (1565-98), subsequently followed by the translators of the King James version.

The editions of Elzevir (1624, 1633) also derived from Erasmus 1527, as mediated by Estienne and Beza. Erasmus' text therefore became the foundation for nearly all editions and translations of the Greek text published for two centuries afterwards.