

Ephesians 3:9 and the Distortion of Reformed Bibliology

A Refutation of Dr. Jeff Riddle's Defense of the Error of the Scribe of Manuscript 2817

Over the course of the history of the transmission of the biblical text hundreds of thousands of scribal errors have been made. Given the massive amount of writing represented by the hundreds of thousands of hand-written manuscripts that comprise the written history of the Bible (Old and New Testaments), this is surely not a surprise, at least to anyone with the slightest familiarity with ancient manuscripts and the process of hand-copying text. I am quite certain that if that process had to be restarted in today modern man would prove himself to be considerably less adept at the art than those of the past, to be sure (“Wait, where is Control-C?”).

The vast majority of these scribal errors have not come down to us for the simple reason that the vast majority of manuscripts that contained them have likewise not come down to us. Those that have in fact been copied and found a place in the manuscript tradition comprise, by today's estimates, between 400,000 and 500,000 in the Greek New Testament manuscripts as a whole. Given the massive number of pages that comprise the approximately 5,800 catalogued texts, this is a remarkably small number, given the period of hand-written transmission (over 1,500 years). But, as must be pointed out, in reality there are only between 1500 and 2000 such variants that materially impact the meaning of the text, are actually translatable, and, importantly for our purposes, have any claim to being the original reading.

It is this last point that we need to look at in considering the vain attempt by a small number of zealous promoters of the Textus Receptus to establish a singular scribal misreading as the “providentially preserved” text of Ephesians 3:9.

For our purposes we shall pass over the difficulties in defining the phrase Textus Receptus (TR), specifically, the minor differences between the printed editions that appear after the translation of the King James Version of the Bible. We pause only briefly to remind the reader that the most popular and widely available version of the TR, printed by the Trinitarian Bible Society, is really Scrivener's text, which was produced in the late 1800s as a result of comparing the variations between the printed Greek NTs that were available to King James' translators. That is, it is a Greek text whose variant readings between the editions were decided by the editorial decisions of the various committees that translated the version of 1611. It

is, in fact, a Greek text based upon an English translation, a true oddity of history.

Today a very small group of Reformed believers are zealously promoting the theological concept that the TR is, in fact, God's "providentially preserved" text and should be the text that is used for all translational work and for all preaching and teaching in the church as well. These men view themselves as part of the Reformed tradition and as such highly exalt the historical period of the Reformation as a time of great spiritual revival. They attach to this period a kind of supernatural relevance, for the text that came out of that period (which happened to correspond with the late Renaissance period, the rise of European humanism, especially seen in the great Erasmus of Rotterdam, etc.) became the text that was defended by the next generations of Reformed writers and in particular was the text they defended against the onslaught of the Counter-Reformation. This group emphasizes the need for a "stable text," one in which there is no doubt as to all of the original readings. Notation of variation is considered a distraction to teaching and preaching, let alone apologetics. A "final authority" is necessary not merely in the concept of Scripture adequately transmitted in the manuscript tradition as a whole (the majority view of Reformed scholarship today) but in the specifics of every phrase, every word, admitting of no text that requires study and analysis. Further, this means this "providentially preserved text" (PPT) cannot be subject to further examination, or editing. If it could possibly err at any point then the process by which we come to the conclusion that there is a better reading to be had becomes a rationalistic, humanistic impediment to having a truly divine text.

This movement, identified in various ways as textual traditionalism, TR Onlyism, etc., shares the same fundamental drive as the broader King James Only movement. Just as KJV Only writers rail against the NKJV for having textual notes in the margins, the TR Only movement rails against the "reconstructionism" at the heart of the modern textual critical method. Of course, we cannot help but point out that every generation of Christians going back to the earliest centuries has had to deal with textual variation and hence the "reconstruction" of the text. This is just the reality of the methodology of the copying of the text prior to 1948 and the invention of the photocopier. Hand copying produces texts with scribal errors, and hence there must be comparison of texts and canons of reconstruction. Every ancient work is subject to this reality. Indeed, though the printing press greatly reduced the errors inherent in mass production of written texts, there is still a need even then to reconstruct the text of printed editions as well. The point is that the TR itself arose from an editorial process. Manuscripts with differing readings were examined by Erasmus, Stephanus, and Beza, and "reconstruction" was done by them. Erasmus' *Annotations* together with Beza's textual comments in his published works plainly demonstrate that they were both utterly unaware of the

idea that they were being used in some supernatural fashion to produce “the” final and inerrant text of the Greek New Testament. Indeed, Erasmus especially had no such concept in mind, and he often noted variants and almost flippantly left it to the reader to decide. It is very clearly a modern anachronism to read such a concept back into the time period of the origin of the TR.

It is not our intention to write a small book about the issues surrounding the origins of this modern movement, and I have commented upon all of these topics repeatedly on the *Dividing Line* over the decades, and in particular over the past number of years as this small movement has used social media to promote its ideas.

There are a number of readings in the TR that are clearly errors, readings that have, in the opinion of the vast majority of believing Reformed scholars, no claim to represent the original writings of the Apostles. It must be noted that the stated goal and aim of classical textual critical work on the New Testament has been to obtain as close as possible the autographic text, that is, the effort is to know what the authors themselves wrote. We will have to pass over the discussions of the *Ausgangstext* and exactly how to define “original text” or “the autographs,” fascinating and necessary as those discussions are. The point is that this new movement, though rarely paying some kind of lip service, renders the modern textual critical process irrelevant. If, in fact, the TR is the PPT, there is no need for further analysis of manuscripts, collation of manuscripts, etc. If someone wants to do such things, that’s fine, but it is also irrelevant, theologically speaking. If what these men are saying is true, we need no textual critical apparatus. Every manuscript discovered since approximately 1598 is in fact irrelevant and useless. God has given us the PPT, and it likewise seems that in their thinking, the PPT = the autographic text as far as its readings are concerned. There also seems to be an underlying assertion that the PPT has always existed and was generally available to all Christians at all times. I say this because the movement’s primary scholar (at least as it is represented by the 2019 Text and Canon Conference held in the Atlanta area), Dr. Jeffrey Riddle (an adjunct professor teaching New Testament Introduction at Piedmont Virginia Community College), only a matter of days ago commented, in responding to Dr. Elijah Hixson,

I’m all for historical research on the text, but I think believers are better off to stick with the text of the Reformation....The view you present here on the providential preservation of Scripture is not consistent with my understanding of its articulation in WCF/SD/2LBCF 1:8. I also noted this when I read the statement in the introduction to your new book: “Nor do we think that God has preserved the original text of the New Testament equally well at every point in history or at every place in the world” (20)

If Dr. Riddle (initials: JTR) is disagreeing with the statement from Dr. Hixson

regarding the preservation of the original text, then it follows that, in fact, God *has* preserved the original text equally well at every point in history at every place in the world. How exactly this can be squared with the reality that the TR represents only one portion of the Byzantine textual tradition, does not well represent the best and earliest of that tradition, and surely by no stretch of anyone's imagination could possibly be said to have existed, as an identifiable, distinguishable text in the hands of say Athanasius of Alexandria or Basil the Great, we cannot fathom, despite having listened to many hours of presentations by JTR and others such as Robert Truelove.

I will not belabor here my motivations for having criticized this movement over the past number of years. I believe it is self-evident why any working apologist would find this movement deeply troubling, for anyone who has worked with Muslims, or Mormons, for example, can recognize the power of a commitment to an a-historical traditionalism when it comes to a scriptural text. It is one of the hardest barriers to overcome. Hence, finding the very same mindset seeking to find a place amongst Reformed men is not only troubling, it requires a response from those of us actively seeking to defend the New Testament against its many critics today (both religious and secular) to call for consistency and hence criticize such thinking even when it appears in our own "camp" so to speak. One cannot criticize the Muslim enshrinement of the Uthmanic Revision as an acceptable Qur'anic *Ausgangstext* when you yourself make the exact same arguments about the TR. If the Muslim is removing his commitment to a particular text from its historical originations so as to avoid difficulties and provide a stable, ultimately defensible text, and the Christian is doing the exact same thing, no progress can be made between the two. Neither will allow their text to be examined (or defended) within the context of its own documented history. The same is true of the believing Mormon who enshrines the Book of Mormon in the same fashion. Apologetic interaction ends, and the hope of demonstrating that God has, in fact, spoken with consistency in a fashion that is knowable is removed from the historical realm completely. Given that Christianity has always claimed that God has worked in history, inspired Scripture in the context of historical events, sent His Son during a particular historical period to a particular geographical location, to accomplish redemption in space and time, the abandonment of the historical field of battle inherent in TR Onlyism is strange indeed.

A Test Text: Ephesians 3:9

One of the clearest errors to be found in the text of the TR is found at Ephesians 3:9. Here the Apostle Paul is discussing the grand purpose of God in Christ, the mystery, wherein one body is being produced in Christ Jesus, Jews and Gentiles

together comprising that body. He speaks of preaching the unfathomable riches of Christ to the Gentiles, and then says, as found in the TR:

καὶ φωτίσαι πάντας τίς ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ Θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

Which can be fairly translated, “to bring to light to all what is the fellowship of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ.” But compare the text as found in the Nestle-Aland 28th edition:

καὶ φωτίσαι ^ο[πάντας] τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ^ο¹ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι ^τ,

Passing by the marked textual variants, our translation would be, “to bring to light to all what is the plan (or administration) of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things.” That is, in context, Paul is speaking of the content of his preaching ministry amongst the Gentiles, the plan or administration of the mystery (that Jews and Gentiles are to be together in one body). He is bringing this to light to all men (Jews and Gentiles), a mystery that had been hidden in the past but now has been revealed, so that, as the following verse indicates, God’s wisdom can be truly seen and made known. The textual data provided by NA28 can be found here:

^ο **NA** 6. 1739. 1881; Ambst Aug | txt **Ⲕ**46 **NA** 2 B C D F G K L P Ψ 33. 81. 104. 365. 630. 1175. 1241s. 1505. 2464 **Ⲙ** latt sy co; Tert |
^ο1 **NA** 614; McionT |
^τ **Δ**ια Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ D2 K L 104. 630. 1241s. 1881 **Ⲙ** syh** | **Δ**ια Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ 0278 | txt **Ⲕ**46 **NA** A B C D* F G P Ψ 33. 81. 365. 1175. 1505. 1739. 2464 latt sy p co

The reader will note that the NA28 does not list the key variant that will be the subject of our examination. In the earliest forms of the New Testament the difference would be seen here (MCT = Modern Critical Text):

TR: ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ

MCT: ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ

The variant is not listed because, given the standards of external attestation used by the NA28, there really is no variant to be noted. That is, there is so little textual data behind the TR reading of ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ that it is not considered relevant. Or, to put it another way, the evidence for the MCT reading is so overwhelming that there is no reason to note the variant. Every regularly cited manuscript of Ephesians in

the NA28 has the same reading, ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ. Every regularly cited church father has the same reading, ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ. Every regularly cited translation into an ancient language (Latin, Coptic, Sahidic, Bohairic, etc.) has the same reading, ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ. There is no evidence that any Christian minister, theologian, or layperson, upon hearing the Scriptures preached, or taught, or read, for the first 1000 years after Paul wrote this epistle to the church at Ephesus (I am aware that it was probably a circular letter, and I am aware that modern scholarship questions its Pauline authorship, but neither issue is relevant to our study at the moment), ever saw, heard, or read anything other than “the administration of the mystery” at this point. This is the universally attested reading of the church into the 11th century.

Let us not rush past this reality. It is a blessing that so much of the New Testament is so perfectly preserved and attested. One of the encouraging realities that has come out of the availability of the CBGM data coming out of Münster is the clear evidence that we know, truly beyond doubt, what the New Testament not only was about when written, but through to this very day. The now computer documented consistency of the manuscripts we possess *over time* is a wonderful testimony. We likewise dare not dismiss the first 1000 years of church history as if it were irrelevant. One thing is for certain, the Reformers surely did not! Any fair reading of Luther or Calvin shows a deep knowledge of, and interest in, the church throughout history. The fact that that church, for 1000+ years, exhibits an unchanging, uninterrupted testimony to the reading of ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ at Ephesians 3:9 cannot be dismissed simply because “well, the Reformation rocked!” It did, but that really doesn’t have any relevance to the point.

Conversely, there is not a single shred of evidence extant today that anyone prior to the 11th century ever even contemplated the phrase, “the fellowship of the mystery.” First, it is a completely different meaning, is it not? The ancient reading is fully understandable: Paul is preaching the riches of the mystery in Christ Jesus, that Jews and Gentiles together, in the sovereign plan of God, are one in the Body of Christ, and Paul is being used to make this known to all. But what is the “fellowship of the mystery”? It really makes little sense. It changes the focus, and is not in any way a synonym for the original reading. There are no sermons, no devotional writings, absolutely positively *nothing* in this time period that supports the reading “fellowship.” If we were living in the year 1100 there would not be the slightest question as to the reading of this text. None.

And yet today we have men insisting that the universal, consistent reading of all Christian sources for the first millennium at Ephesians 3:9 are, in fact, in error, and do not provide us with the PPT. How can this be? Obviously, it is because the

printed edition of the Greek New Testament known as the TR has fellowship rather than administration. And why?

A good bit of useful discussion took place about this after JTR posted the article we will examine and refute below. The discussion involved Dr. Elijah Hixson, JTR, and various commentators on JTR's blog. The discussion broke into two threads, one identifying a *single* manuscript from the 11th or 12th century that contains the reading "fellowship" (2817, which, likewise, it seems was used by Erasmus as one of this very few manuscripts for the formation of his first edition) and a second thread in which JTR attempted to cast doubt upon the reading of manuscript $\mathfrak{P}46$ at this point. I addressed the abuse of $\mathfrak{P}46$ using high resolution images on the Dividing Line of 11/21/19, showing that the original reading was, in fact, "administration," not "fellowship."

<https://youtu.be/T9rhDSG358U?t=2369>

Indeed, this was a particularly troubling aspect of Riddle's comments, as there truly is no reason whatsoever for any doubt as to $\mathfrak{P}46$'s reading at this point, and the attempt to smuggle the reading from 2817 into this, the earliest extant source of Paul's writings, is, in my opinion, reprehensible and damaging as well.

Dr. Hixson provided some interesting background for 2817, a catena manuscript (i.e, not a normal "text" manuscript as most minuscules would be) that may be related to two others (both of which contain Ephesians 3:9 but which do not contain the reading fellowship but which both have the reading found in all previous manuscripts). If 2817 is, in fact, related to the two other manuscripts, and they do not contain this unique reading, this would be strong evidence that 2817 contains a reading that is unique to itself, a one-off scribal error, rather than a reading that is being derived from an earlier source. We will have more to say about singular readings below.

It is very useful that 2817 was identified, but let us make sure we remember something at this point. 2817 is irrelevant to the TR Only position. The reading is not true because it is found in 2817. All textual data is, in the final analysis, irrelevant to this position. The TR is the PPT because it is the PPT. Period. History really has nothing to do with it. This can be clearly seen in the fact that if we were to take the time (and I am tempted to do so, but have far more pressing projects—though I would encourage someone less committed to traveling and debating and preaching and speaking to invest the time!) we could, in all probability, find some reading in 2817 (depending on its total content) that differs from the TR. Will JTR

or Robert Truelove militate for a change in the TR to match 2817? Of course not. Since the argument *begins* with the TR it will always *end* with the TR, since it is the PPT. The arguments for any one reading in the TR, textually speaking, do not have to be consistent with the arguments for any other reading in the TR, for one simple reason: the TR's establishment of the PPT is not based upon textual criticism, manuscripts, or history. It is a theological assertion based upon (in my opinion horribly errant) theological assumptions. So the identification of 2817 can provide "cover" so to speak, but once you truly understand what is being promoted, it does not matter. Any reading of the TR is "correct" because any reading of the TR is correct *by definition*. JTR could have gone golfing rather than discussed 2817 with Elijah Hixson: the promotion of TR Onlyism is not relevant to textual critical arguments or sources. Hence, even when proponents engage in such arguments (inconsistently I would argue), they can use argument X for text A, and non-argument X for text B, and argument opposite of X for text C, and smile the whole time, because consistency of textual critical argumentation is *irrelevant* to TR Onlyism. I have emphasized this reality for years, and will continue to do so out of simple necessity. TR Onlyism is an anti-apologetic.

So with this rather long introduction, I turn now to Dr. Riddle's article. I would like to keep this next section brief, however. Dr. Riddle has chosen to be as personally disrespectful to me as he possibly can be. Though we are both ordained ministers in Reformed Baptist churches, he refuses to even use my name, instead choosing to call me "the PIA," that is, the popular internet apologist. The fact that I have taught for decades at the undergraduate and graduate levels, both inside and outside the United States, have written more than twenty books, many of which are used as text books in English speaking schools in the United States and overseas, and have engaged in moderated, public debate with leading critics of the NT, including Bart Ehrman, John Dominic Crossan, and Shabir Ally (Muslim), has no impact upon Dr. Riddle. Though he has not, to my knowledge, published a single book, he has served as an adjunct teaching at a community college, and has written more than twenty book reviews, and 8 published articles. As such I feel I must give him his due, cite him openly and fairly, etc. But he feels no such compulsion, and I will leave it to him to explain the disrespect he feels he must express toward me.

I will put Dr. Riddle's materials in block quotation form as I respond to his claims.

A popular internet apologist (PIA) has recently suggested that Ephesians 3:9 is a "blatant error" in the TR, and, therefore, this poses a supposedly insurmountable "defeater" for the Confessional Text position.

I had provided a full discussion of Ephesians 3:9, its history and the manuscript

evidence, on the preceding edition of the Dividing Line. That can be found here (time indexed): <https://youtu.be/rERx82SVO9I?t=2810>

Further, given the nature of the TR Only position, there can be no “defeater” argument. That is, it is not a rational argument, so, there can be no defeater. I am simply concerned to communicate to those who have not embraced the position that it is an argument without historical or logical content.

Is this, in fact, the case? Is defense of the TR, in general, and the TR reading in Ephesians 3:9, in particular, completely irrational?

Dr. Riddle’s attempt to hide the irrational nature of his presuppositional pre-commitment to the TR is laudable, if unsuccessful. His goal in this article is to do “damage control,” in essence, and to give his small cadre of followers some comfort and “reason to believe,” even if there is no real reasoning to be found. When you are defending the indefensible you look for any possibility that your position might have some grounds, even if you cannot provide evidence for it. This entire article is a study in providing this kind of “comfort.”

Dr. Riddle, rather than facing squarely the simple fact that there is no evidence, of any sort, from any source, for the first 1000 years of the existence of Ephesians as a literary text, even *suggesting* that “fellowship” was even *known* as a reading at Ephesians 3:9, let alone that it was, in fact, the original reading, chooses to frame the issue in a set of five questions and responses.

First: What is the supposed “blatant error” in the TR of Ephesians 3:9?

The controversy in Ephesians 3:9 involves the TR reading η κοιινωνια του μυστηριου, “the fellowship of the mystery” (as translated in Tyndale, Geneva, KJV). In the modern critical text the reading is η οικονομια του μυστηριου, “the plan of the mystery” (ESV) or “the administration of the mystery” (NASB).

The controversy here is really about one single word:

TR: η κοιινωνια

MCT: η οικονομια

Thus far, no controversy.

We can immediately see that the words are very similar in form to one another, and we can see how there might easily have been scribal confusion between the two words. One has 8 letters and the other 9 letters. Every letter in κοινωνία appears in οικονομία, except one: *omega*. Both words end in *iota alpha*.

Actually, both terms are feminine nouns, both end in *iota alpha*, and both contain *iotas* and *omicrons*, etc., but this would be true of many other terms as well. But the reason this is a “blatant error” is due to the utter absence of any evidence of the TR reading for 1000 years after Paul dispatched the epistle to the church at Ephesus.

Second: Why is it argued that the MCT reading is superior to the TR reading in Ephesians 3:9?

A friend shared a FB post from the aforementioned PIA which begins:

There is no evidence to my knowledge (manuscript, patristic, versional, inscriptional) within the first 1000 years of church history of anyone reading Ephesians 3:9 as "the fellowship of the mystery" (ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ μυστηρίου). The reading is unquestioned: it is "the administration/plan of the mystery" (ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου).

We should note that this argument against the TR reading is entirely based on the external evidence.

There is no reason to invoke internal evidence on a reading that has no evidence in the first millennium, and almost none in the second, but such an argument could be easily mounted. The phrase Η ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΥ is fully understandable in the context of Paul’s argument in its context. However, Η ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΥ makes very little sense in this context and in fact distracts from the centrality of the plan and purpose of God (Paul’s point) and moves the focus to some kind of fellowship or experience of the mystery of Jews and Gentiles in the one body.

Let’s begin with some analysis of the Greek manuscript evidence, which is generally the most important.

Among current extant Greek manuscripts, of all eras, the Majority reading is indeed η οικονομια. In fact, the external evidence is so overwhelming that the NA28 does not even list any variants at this point in its critical apparatus.

The NA28 is nowhere near exhaustive, and there are numerous readings, especially those that appear in the later minuscules that are not listed. But the fact is indeed clear: the Greek manuscript tradition has one reading, and the TR reading, even in a single minuscule, is a clear interruption without ancient evidence.

Bruce Metzger, however, offers the following comments on this variant in his *Textual Commentary*, Second Edition (1994): “The Textus Receptus, in company with a scattering of late minuscules, replaces *οἰκονομία* with the interpretive gloss *κοινωνία* (hence AV “fellowship”). The true reading is supported by p46, all known uncials, almost all minuscules, all known versions, and patristic quotations” (535).

In other words, the earliest, widest, and fullest evidence, all says the same thing. This is correct, of course.

Though Metzger, unsurprisingly, dismisses the Greek ms. support for the traditional reading as confirmed only by “a scattering of late minuscules”, he does, at least, acknowledge that this reading is present in the Greek ms. tradition.

The reader should remember that there are hundreds of thousands of variants in the Greek ms. tradition that are not to be found in the TR. In fact, there are many variants with greater manuscript evidence than the TR reading at Ephesians 3:9 that are, likewise, not to be found in the TR. This leads us to the “fatal flaw” of the TR Only movement, a problem that they have yet to admit, let alone face:

The TR Only Movement uses arguments for individual readings in the TR that are mutually exclusive of one another. That is, it uses one argument to support Ephesians 3:9 (one minuscule is enough—you don’t need translations or early fathers), and then another to support 1 John 5:7 (look! Maybe Cyprian referred to it, possibly, and it is in tons of later Latin manuscripts), and then another for Revelation 16:5, and another for Revelation 14:1, and another for the longer ending of Mark, another for the Pericope Adulterae, etc. and etc. Each argument will take a different form since the outcome is already fixed: the text of the TR is the goal, therefore, the arguments used for inclusion of texts/readings, or exclusion of texts/readings, can be varied and even contradictory. There is no concern about this as the final outcome is already a given. As a result, there is no coherent, consistent textual methodology that can be identified that would produce the text of the TR. Hence, again, the TR is treated as an artifact not *of* history but *beyond* history and hence historical grounding.

This brings up an important related point, which the intrepid PIA seems always to overlook in throwing out random objection passages to the TR like this one.

There is, of course, nothing “random” about this passage. It has been noted even by Edward F. Hills as a text where the TR has next to no support, historically.

Namely, those who prefer the TR readily and openly acknowledge that it is an eclectic text. It is not based on the Majority text. Many of its readings are found in the Majority text (like the traditional ending of Mark), but some are based on a minority tradition. The PIA seems completely oblivious to this point.

Given that Dr. Riddle assiduously avoids listening to my comments or doing any first-hand study of the opposition, it seems rather disingenuous to accuse me of being “oblivious” to this point. Every person who has followed my criticisms of his position knows I am anything *but* oblivious: the very fact that the TR uses differing arguments for differing readings is part and parcel of my repeated argument that the movement cannot put forward a consistent, coherent textual critical methodology. He who refuses to listen to the other side may wish to be a bit slower in saying someone else is “oblivious” to things.

It seems particularly odd for the PIA to reject the TR reading at Ephesians 3:9 based on the fact that it is not the Majority reading since, supposedly, he is not himself an advocate for the Majority text but, instead, embraces an eclectic method (reasoned eclecticism). We might call the TR “providential eclecticism.”

It is not odd at all, of course, and this kind of argumentation indicates that Dr. Riddle is not accustomed to taking his arguments into the public square. Of course, I have never claimed to be a Majority text advocate, though at least that position can make an historical argument for its position. I have never claimed to be a Byzantine Priority advocate, though again, those promoting that view can at least attempt to make an historical argument. The issue with the reading “fellowship” at Ephesians 3:9 is that the reading is unknown for 1000 years after the writing of the book. Unknown in Greek manuscripts until a single text that happened to be used by Erasmus. Unknown in every sermon or theological treatise written by Christians for 1000 years. Unknown to every translation, whether Latin or Sahidic or Coptic or Bohairic, etc. My objection is that it is a singular reading in a singular manuscript that has no right to claim to be the original. Hence, those who are making the claim *should* be the ones providing positive evidence.

But let’s consider this phrase “providential eclecticism.” What could this possibly mean? As it turns out, it must mean that “whatever the TR says is providentially what God intended it to say and therefore is the final word because of the Reformation.” And this, of course, is why the TR position cannot ever find a place in serious Christian study of the Scriptures.

Side Note: There is another variant in Ephesians 3:9 that involves the prepositional phrase at the end of the verse, “through Jesus Christ.” In this case the Majority text and the TR both include the phrase while the MCT rejects it. If the PIA supports the Majority text in the case of the “fellowship/plan” variant, why not accept it here also? Why not follow the Majority text in passages like Mark 16:9-20?

This side note is mainly a distraction from the fact that Dr. Riddle cannot provide positive, consistent defense of the TR reading of Ephesians 3:9, but let’s play the game. The variant is very straight forward. The Byzantine tradition has the added phrase “through Jesus Christ” after “God, who created all things,” hence, “who created all things through or by Jesus Christ.” A thoroughly orthodox statement, fully in line with Pauline Christology, to be certain. The textual data pits the earliest texts (Ⲑ46 Ⲙ A B C D* F G P Ψ 33. 81. 365. 1175. 1505. 1739) and translations (including the Latin) and patristic citations vs. the later Byzantine text and some later uncials (D² K L). The reasoning for not including the words comes from a combination of the external evidence and the fact that there would be no reason for its excision if, in fact, it was original. Here we have a variant that does not impact meaning, locally or more widely, for the role of the Son as Creator is firmly witnessed by a wide number of texts. And in this particular text the assertion is not then expanded upon by the Apostle, and the meaning does not change whether it is present or not.

Of course, the attempt to posit inconsistency on my part here is vacuous. The issue with the TR and the reading “fellowship” is not a matter of holding to the Majority Text position to begin with: this is a very surface level attempt to distract from the reality that the TR posits a “providentially preserved” reading that history itself did not preserve, providentially or otherwise. It is Riddle who is proposing that the *original reading* was “fellowship,” and the onus is upon him to provide that evidence.

Furthermore, the PIA expresses great confidence in the new CBGM, despite the fact that in the NA28 it favors a reading in 2 Peter 3:10 based on NO extant Greek mss.! There seems to be a problem with consistency.

The term “canard” must have been coined just for instances like this. Again, Riddle has no idea, actually, what my views on the CBGM actually are, what work I’m doing in the field, etc., and, to be honest, I doubt it would matter even if he did. I do not accept conjectural emendations, as he knows. He has been corrected on this in the past, but, again, he seems to monologue, not dialogue, so correcting his misapprehensions does not seem to enter into his considerations. What I *have* said is that certain elements of the CBGM (such as pre-genealogical coherence) have already demonstrated the tremendous consistency of the NT manuscript

tradition over time, and hence is valuable apologetically in the face of the radical skepticism that has become rampant over the past decade. But I truly doubt Dr. Riddle even understands the CBGM and, of course, given his PPT position, why would he invest the considerable time it would take in the first place? We already have the PPT, the rest is a waste of time!

I wish to note that thus far nothing of positive value in defense of the TR's reading has been offered.

Third: What about the Greek manuscript evidence for Ephesians 3:9?

When the PIA proclaims that the TR reading does not appear in any manuscripts in the course of over 1,000 years of church history that initially sounds quite overwhelming.

But we should remember the wisdom of Solomon, who said, "He *that is* first in his own cause *seemeth* just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him" (Proverbs 18:17).

Solomon did not have in mind 21st century men pretending that a singular reading in a single manuscript that was used by an editor who was not even overly concerned about the text he was initially editing (all sources agree Erasmus was focused upon his Latin text, the Greek was not primary in his thinking) is actually the "providentially preserved" reading that was initially written by the Apostle Paul.

This leads us to another major problem with the PIA's analysis of this textual variant at Ephesians 3:9: His analysis (or failure to provide sufficient analysis) of the Greek manuscript evidence regarding this reading.

Given that Dr. Riddle gives no evidence of having listened to the initial presentation I made on the textual data on the *Dividing Line*, this kind of statement is another canard. When you refuse to do your homework about the other side, you have no basis for pretending otherwise.

To begin, can we ask the PIA to list for us the minority of minuscules (acknowledged by Metzger) which include the TR reading, along with their suggested dates in order to verify that none of these appear before the eleventh century? If the PIA cannot list these, does this indicate that he has offered this challenge without first doing a proper analytical study of this variant?

Dr. Riddle had no idea that Erasmus had 2817 when he wrote these words. He did not know what manuscripts Metzger had reference to. Neither did Dr. Hixson. Dr.

Riddle has no idea what other minuscules Metzger was referring to, either. Hence, to follow his reasoning, he should not comment on this variant, or any other variant, until he possesses exhaustive knowledge of all manuscripts from personal examination. Of course, no one has that level of knowledge. The challenge stands since, of course, it is Riddle who is making the claim (I know, it is a theological claim anachronistically pushed back upon the historical data, but in the end, he is still claiming that Paul wrote “fellowship” rather than “administration”), and must bear the burden of proof. His system has no place for proof, and in fact rejects its necessity, but that is why he should not even be engaging the historical text to begin with, and is surely being inconsistent here.

Even if he can substantiate his claim, would he not agree that even late mss. sometimes contain the earliest readings? On this see David Lanier’s chapter “Dating Myths, Part Two: How later manuscripts can be better manuscripts” in *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism* (110-131).

First, it is Gregory Lanier, not David. Second, this specific chapter notes nearly 2000 differences between the TR and the Byzantine text/tradition (p. 114). The chapter is on the value of the Byzantine tradition as a whole, not a defense of unique readings in the TR, especially one like Ephesians 3:9. I have not asked Gregory Lanier, but I am highly confident that he would find Riddle’s citation of his chapter highly inappropriate in light of his purpose, that is, to defend a singular reading from a singular manuscript against the entire Byzantine tradition.

Again, we are not denying that the TR reading is a late minority reading at this point, but this does not mean *ipso facto* that it is a “blatant error”?

If the history of the text is our concern, of course. Singular late readings without patristic or versional support should not be made the standard of theological orthodoxy, nor should systems of theological assertion be created to defend them. Dr. Riddle and I have different goals in the study of the text of the New Testament: my theologically derived goal is the original apostolically-originated reading of each passage. His is a “stable” text, an unquestioned text, whether that text comes only from the 11th or 12th century, or from the Apostles. The vast differences in our goals must be understood. I would argue that the Reformers rejected Riddle’s position as it was embraced by Rome in the form of the Latin Vulgate.

To continue, we might ask for specific information about the earliest Greek manuscript evidence for Ephesians 3:9. When we look more closely, in fact, we find that the total early Greek manuscript evidence for Ephesians 3:9 is extremely thin.

Here begins the element of this article that should truly trouble anyone seriously

concerned about the over-all defense of the New Testament as a whole. Just as Muslims must attack the textual tradition of the New Testament so as to provide “room” for the Qur’an as a revelation from God, and Mormons likewise assert textual corruption so as to make room for the *Book of Mormon* and the other LDS works, when you have a text that is not itself derived from history (the TR), but is instead created by theological reasoning (the Reformation was a great move of God’s Spirit, the gospel was plainly proclaimed with clarity, therefore), you must make room for it by denigrating any “competition” for your proposed standard text. Whether he intends to do so or not, Riddle’s position fundamentally comprises an attack upon the value and historicity of the ancient text of the New Testament. Given that he does not believe that ancient text is actually directly relevant to the PPT, how else could it be? Whenever that ancient text differs from the PPT, its value must be denigrated. This is why I have said Christian apologists working in the defense of the NT text need to be aware of this movement, for its positions mirror those of our opponents on a number of issues. This is an inadvertent result, of course, but a real one, nonetheless.

A quick check of the INTF online *Liste* for Ephesians 3:9 reveals that there are only 6 extant Greek manuscripts containing this verse that are dated pre-AD 800.

Let’s put this statement in context, especially in comparison with any other work of antiquity. Let’s use, as a convenient round number, the year 50 for the origination of the epistle to the church at Ephesus. $\mathfrak{P}46$ is the earliest manuscript witness we have, which is normally dated, again conveniently, to ~200. Hence, we have not just a fragment, but an amazingly complete manuscript within 150 years of the writing of the original. And not just of this book, but a collection of books attributed to the same author by contemporaneous writers in the second and third centuries. I am unaware of any other contemporaneous work with as early attestation as Ephesians, or as wide attestation in the early centuries after its writing. To underestimate the importance of this truth is to engage in the most egregious form of hyper-skepticism.

In my debate with Bart Ehrman on this topic in 2009 I asked him about a similar expression of skepticism he had made on the *Unbelievable* radio broadcast in London. In response Ehrman boldly asserted that we have far earlier attestation for the New Testament than for any other book of antiquity. In a later debate Ehrman was asked what it would take for him to believe that the Gospel of Mark we possess today is truly accurate, and his response embodied a stunning hyper-skepticism in demanding notarized copies of the gospel dating to within months or years (I have heard he later retracted the statement). The point is that Ehrman’s skepticism oddly echoes Riddle’s, and both go against the consensus of Christian scholarship for quite some time. We know why

Ehrman promulgates skepticism, and likewise, Riddle. One no longer believes, the other believes in a text that is not to be placed in the primitive church or connected directly to the Apostles, but comes about by “providential preservation” connected with a theological understanding of the Reformation period. Both must minimize the value of the earliest text in connecting us directly to the time period immediately following the Apostolic period.

See this table:

Early mss. containing Eph 3:9	Mss. estimated dates by century
P46	III
01	IV
02	V
03	IV
04	V
06	VI

So, according to the INTF date estimates, there are 0 mss. pre-AD 225, and there is only one ms. pre-AD 300 (p46). The earliest ms. we have of Ephesians is at best c. 250-300 years after the letter was written.

If P46 is dated to 200 it would be approximately 150 years, not 250-300 years after Paul wrote Ephesians. Why inflate the numbers (just like skeptical scholars do)? Because both have the same goal, but for exactly opposite reasons! A truly amazing thing to observe. But once again, note the perspective behind the words is eerily similar to what we would expect from a Muslim or agnostic, surely not a Calvinist!

To push a little further regarding the early mss. evidence, I took a look at James R. Royse’s chapter on “The Early Text of Paul (and Hebrews)” in Charles E. Hills & Michael J. Kruger, eds., *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford University Press,

2012, 2014): 175-203.

Royse notes that there are only 20 extant mss. (19 papyri and 1 majuscule) from the Pauline corpus that are plausibly date before AD 350 (175).

He provides a table of these mss., most of which are highly fragmentary (Table 10, 176-177).

Of these 20 mss. only 3 have any portion of Ephesians:

Mss. with Ephesians	Date according to Royse	content
p46	c. 200	all
p49	III	Eph 4:16-19, 4:32-5:13
p92	III/IV	Eph 1:11-13, 1:19-21

Once again believing scholarship would be, “and amongst these incredibly early witnesses we have three witnesses to the text of Ephesians, all demonstrating that Ephesians, as a literary body, was circulating in the same form in which we possess it today, just as the consistency of translation into other languages, and citations from contemporary writers, indicate.” But I would also point another reality out: let’s say **Ⲣ49** contained Ephesians 3:9 and it read just as **Ⲣ46** does. Would this in any way impact Riddle’s position or arguments? No, because the reading of Ephesians 3:9 and this foray into the earliest manuscripts is actually irrelevant to the TR Only position. It would not matter if we had ten manuscripts of Ephesians 3:9 that we could date to AD 80: this position is not based upon manuscript evidence. It only addresses the evidence to sow skepticism about it so as to point the reader to a theological “solution” that comes 1,500 years later.

Regarding p46 Royse describes its textual quality as “free” (Table 10, 177). Later Royse says the text of p46 is “basically Alexandrian, but it often supports readings found in D F G and even the occasional Byzantine reading (such as Eph. 5:9)” (181). Royse suggests “one aspect of a scholarly concern for the text” of p46 is found in its “corrections” (181).

He adds: “These number 183, of which possibly 109 are by the scribe, 56 are by the second hand, 14 by the third hand, and 4 by the fourth hand” (181-182). He also notes that it contains 639 “singular readings”, adding, “The overall tendency to omit is clearly evidenced in these numbers” (183). Royse adds that another important aspect of the p46’s copying is “a tendency to harmonize to the content” (183).

Riddle does not explain why he includes this information, so I will not invest too much time other than to point out that it seems it is his intention to sow further skepticism as to the importance of $\mathfrak{P}46$ or at least its veracity at Ephesians 3:9. He provides no interaction with Royce’s over-all theory regarding singular readings, etc.

So, to sum up, let’s break down the Greek ms. evidence for this variant at Ephesians 3:9 for the first three centuries of early Christianity:

In the first century (up to AD 100): no extant Greek mss. support η κοινωνία, and none support η οικονομία.

In the second century (up to AD 200): no extant Greek mss. support η κοινωνία, and none support η οικονομία.

In the third century (up to AD 300): no extant Greek mss. support η κοινωνία, while one ms. supports η οικονομία.

Again, for those familiar with the ancient text of the New Testament, this was a waste of a few lines of text, at best. This is plainly intended to influence not those familiar with textual criticism but those who are not, and to push them toward acceptance of an extra-historical methodology based upon a theological presupposition.

We readily acknowledge that there is no early Greek ms. support for the TR reading η κοινωνία, but we also recognize that there is almost no early Greek manuscript evidence for the MCT reading of η οικονομία.

This is simply not a meaningful statement and is meant to equivocate between a reading unknown to history for over a thousand years with that found consistently not only in the manuscripts, but in the translations into other languages, and in all church writers. It seeks to create doubt where there is no doubt, and again, all for the service of a text that would not see the light of day until 1,500 years after the original of Ephesians 3:9 was written.

Yes, η αποκομια is the reading found in the five early uncials and became the Majority reading, but this does not mean that the modern critical method can prove it is the original reading, and, in fact, contemporary text critics would be loathe to say that they can do any such thing, given the evidence.

Hyper-skepticism based upon theological imperatives drawn from tradition. Riddle ignores the translations. Riddle ignores any and all other sources (patristics, sermons, etc.), creeds, councils—anything that would remind his readers of only one reality: until manuscript 2817 there is simply no evidence that anyone had ever seen the reading he is teaching is the PPT at Ephesians 3:9. Please realize that the same kind of skepticism could be leveled at *every single word in the New Testament*. It could be leveled at every word that experiences a singular reading variant in a manuscript written at any time in the second millennium in direct parallel with Ephesians 3:9. This is not meaningful argumentation, historically speaking. It is rhetoric written in defense of a theological conclusion drawn from the Reformation pretending to be textual critically relevant.

This illustrates a key point in my lecture presentations at the T & CC which has been completely ignored by the PIA in his responses so far: the fact that we have very little early manuscript evidence for the NT. So little, in fact, that it makes the entire “reconstruction” method suspect.

I remind the reader that Riddle has refused to actually interact with, cite, refer to, etc., any of the hours of interaction I have posted, actually. But once again we have further evidence of the issue here: Riddle is identifying a later traditional text as the PPT and hence the standard, therefore, the earlier manuscripts which are vitally important to the historical connection of the texts Erasmus had in hand to the Apostles themselves must be denigrated and minimized! This is the minimization of the most vital data we possess to defend the apostolic origination of the New Testament texts in service of his own idiosyncratic position.

As Wasserman and Gurry state in an illustration I shared in my final lecture at the T & CC, the evidence from the extant NT mss. is more like a “watercolor” than a “topographical map” of the NT and you would not want to rely on it to “find your way out of the forest”!

This is a very obvious misuse of the citation from Wasserman and Gurry, and I hope to have Dr. Gurry expand upon this in the near future.

Aside from the overall shift from modern to postmodern methodology, this acknowledgement of the meager and often fragmentary early Greek NT ms. evidence (including the papyri!) is a major reason that the stated goal of contemporary text critics

is not to find the “original autograph” but merely to approximate the “initial text” (Augsangstext) of the first few centuries.

I would direct the reader to any number of fine discussions of this topic (including the frequent references to this subject in Hixson & Gurry’s M&M, referred to above). Riddle’s simplification is an over-simplification, and many believing textual critical scholars have not, in fact, abandoned a focus upon the autographic readings.

This makes the PIA’s declaration that the TR reading at Ephesians 3:9 is a “blatant error” all the more inconsistent with the current academic method he supposedly embraces.

I repeat myself to point out that Riddle has not even attempted to provide an actual argument from history for the TR reading at this point, nor can he, given his position. If it is his intent here to argue that modern textual critical theory simply cannot identify an error or mistake, he has failed, badly, in his task.

Fourth, what about the versional and patristic evidence for the variant at Ephesians 3:9?

I briefly note in passing that the previous discussion had to be separated out from versional and patristic materials so as to aid in the creation of the skepticism Riddle must create to promote his TR Onlyism.

Though we have noted that the key evidence should generally be the Greek mss., we should also address the PIA’s charge that the versional and patristic witnesses to this textual variant also serve as a “defeater” for the TR.

Regarding the versional evidence, we should note several key things to keep in mind:

First, the PIA never provides any specific examples from the versions for our comparison and analysis.

Given that there is a unified witness of all such materials, listing them repeatedly would be a waste of space. I noted a number of the early translations, however, on the *Dividing Line*, to which Riddle is averse to listening. But it is almost humorous to observe this kind of argumentation: “Yes, no manuscripts have our reading, and no versions represent our reading, but you should have to list all of them anyway!” And all of this, again, is only a smokescreen, since Riddle’s position is not derived from historical considerations to begin with.

Second, the versions were generally produced later and do not provide earliest or direct

evidence for the text.

How is this even a meaningful sentence? Produced later than what, the original? Yes, all translations of a document into foreign languages do come after the original is written. This is a cogent observation indeed. But later than, say, 2817? No, not at all. The point is that there is a broader body of evidence in the first millennium than Riddle wants to admit, and that body stands opposed to his theologically derived PPT.

Third, study of the versions also requires more detailed linguistic analysis and comparison. One thing that should be pointed out is that the Greek words η κοινωνία and η οικονομία might have some possible overlap in meaning, so that either word might have been rendered by the same term in the receptor language. Though η κοινωνία is usually rendered as “fellowship” in English, the lexicons remind us that it also has the sense of “association”, “generosity”, or a “gift” given as a “sign of fellowship” (cf. Phil 1:5, etc.). Likewise, the lexicons remind us that the the noun η οικονομία also has the meaning of “stewardship”, as it is used in near context at Ephesians 3:2 where Paul speaks about the οικονομία of the grace of God which has been given to him for the Ephesians.

More obfuscation. There is no semantic overlap between the two readings. If Riddle wishes to obscure things in this fashion, I challenge him to provide readings from the Latin, Bohairic, Sahidic, Coptic, Armenian, etc., where terms are used in the translation of Ephesians 3:9 that could represent either ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ or ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ. It is clear that the Latin witnesses against Riddle’s PPT, unless he wishes to argue that *dispensatio* and *communicatio* are semantically related or synonymous!

A thorough study of the versional evidence would require an examination of how each receptor language rendered the Greek terms η κοινωνία and η οικονομία, and whether they generally used two distinct words for each term (as in Latin) or whether the same word was ever used for both terms. If the latter is the case, then it is possible that a version would not, in fact, provide definitive evidence as to which Greek word undergirds the version.

Consider well this kind of argumentation, and what it means on a scholarly level. No manuscripts in the first millennium read as Riddle desires them to read. No versions witness to the presence of the reading he does not just prefer, but theological demands. So how do you get around the mountain of facts that stand against your reading? Here, you actually propose that if there is *any* way to stretch the meaning of “plan” to where in *any place at all* “fellowship” might be the same

term in the receptor language, voila! “that version would not...provide definitive evidence as to which Greek word undergirds the version.” It might have been the PPT! Who knows? One term describes this kind of reasoning: desperation. But again, the TR Only position does not require historical evidence, so this is just a side issue anyway.

Regarding patristics, we can raise similar concerns. Most importantly, no specific examples are given. How many times do we find references to Ephesians 3:9 in the church fathers? How do we know if the citation was a direct quotation or a paraphrase? Was the father citing from the Greek text or from a translation?

The reader should be familiar with the argumentation by now: no evidence can be found for the PPT in the first millennium, hence, all information that supports the universal reading must be made suspect. If this was a truly scholarly argument, Riddle would be doing what he must do: provide positive evidence. The onus is on him, but he will not bear it, for his system actually says he does not need to! The PPT is the final authority, hence, what Christians did or not read at Ephesians 3:9 prior to the TR is, in the final analysis, irrelevant.

Fifth, why did the Protestant Reformed embrace and affirm the TR of Ephesians 3:9 rather than the Majority reading?

There can be little doubt that the Protestant Reformed knew that “fellowship” was not the Majority reading of the Greek mss., but they consistently recognized this as the true text.

Riddle’s final point takes us back to the historical mythology that lies behind his position: the idea that the great Reformers, or “the Protestant Reformed,” made a specific, knowledgable textual decision for the particular text known as the TR over against other textual traditions and forms. It has been my criticism of this movement for years that to attribute such a knowing decision to the Protestant divines of the 16th and 17th centuries is foolish in the extreme. This is due to a simple reality: the historical context in which they lived did not provide them with sufficient knowledge of manuscripts and their readings to make such a knowledgable, purposeful decision. We live in an age of instant global communication. We possess knowledge that did not exist only sixty years ago, let alone four hundred years ago, regarding the ancient text of the New Testament. We carry in one hand editions such as the Nestle-Aland 28th edition, which, by its ingenious citation methodology, provides a literal library of information in a single volume. We have collected manuscripts, collated them, catalogued them. The believing scholar today has access at his desk to a universe of information utterly unknown to the Protestant Reformed of the 16th and 17th centuries. They lived

before a catalog of manuscripts existed. There was no way to see what the ancient witness was, what the majority witness was, etc. They often erred even when doing their best, at times saying “all Greek manuscripts” had one reading, when in fact the reading was just the opposite. They cannot be faulted for this. It was the reality of the age in which they lived.

When we come to our text, Ephesians 3:9, how many of those living in the days of the KJV translators had access to 1/100th of the information we have today? 1/1000th? How many of even the most learned men could actually examine manuscripts with any knowledge of how the ones they might have in one given library compared to those in another city, or another country far away? When Riddle claims these men knew “fellowship” was not the majority reading, does he prove this with citations? Who knew this? Who could do anything more in that day than take a wild guess? The fact is, *no one knew what a majority reading was, nor could they, and claiming otherwise involves a historical naïveté that is truly embarrassing.* Where did any one man, let alone the entire group as a whole, put into writing his examination of multiple manuscripts of the Greek New Testament at Ephesians 3:9? Where is the discussion of the majority and minority readings? Did Erasmus write to Bombasius about Ephesians 3:9, as he did the *Comma*, and ask Bombasius to examine the Vatican codex at that point? And what if he had, and had discovered that Vaticanus read differently than his single manuscript? What if he had adopted the majority reading? Would this not become the PPT?

On what basis did the Reformed men affirm “fellowship” here as the true reading, over against the Majority Greek ms. tradition? We do not know.

Assuming what he has yet to provide a single reference for, Riddle presses bravely on to admit, “We do not know.” He cannot even begin to demonstrate that “Reformed men” affirmed anything intentionally or knowingly or after any kind of serious examination, but he then has the temerity to plainly state, “we do not know.” We do not know because, of course, there was no such “decision.” A single scribe made an error in a manuscript Erasmus had access to and Erasmus promulgated the mistake. The “Reformed men” of the next 200 years would be truly surprised to have this error credited to them as the “providentially preserved text” when they had no earthly idea that the entirety of the first millennium church preserved a different reading.

But desperation forces you to great lengths, as the next section indicates. Having provided nothing but skepticism about the earliest sources, versions, and patristic writings, and having admitted he doesn’t have a clue why “Reformed men” adopted the fellowship reading, we then come to the “mystery, missing

manuscripts” theory of textual criticism:

It is certainly possible that they had access to Greek mss. which are no longer available to us.

Those who scoff at this notion (like the PIA), should consult Jacob W. Peterson’s recent contribution to Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Gurry, eds. *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*. Peterson’s chapter three is titled “Math Myths: How Many Manuscripts We Have and Why More Isn’t Always Better” (48-69). In a section on the loss of manuscripts, Peterson notes, “Another factor affecting our manuscript count is loss” (54). He notes that even in the INTF *Liste* 136 mss. are listed as “Besitzer unbekannt” or “owner unknown”, adding, “there are a number of ways this happens, ranging from accidental to illegal” (54). He also observes, “Manuscripts are lost through more natural causes such as fires, floods, and insects” (55). Manuscripts 1257-1259 from a school in Izmir are listed as “burnt” (55). Manuscripts like 241 and 2039 were damaged or destroyed in the firebombing of Dresden in WW2 (55). Peterson adds that “numerous early manuscripts, such as 062, catalogued in Damascus, Syria” are listed as “owner unknown” (55).

Then consider that Peterson is only addressing manuscripts that were once known by modern scholars and appear on the current *Liste* that have been lost or destroyed. What about all the ones that were never catalogued or photographed in modern times?

The PIA does not seem to acknowledge the fact that the printed editions of the TR may serve as witnesses to mss. that are no longer extant.

Or the scribe of 2817 made an error. Which is more likely? Mythological manuscripts that just happen to have readings utterly unknown in the first millennium of Christian history, or that the scribe of 2817 made a one-off error that was followed by Erasmus and never checked by anyone else? Remember, Erasmus knew he had many errors in his first edition and even instructed the printer for the second edition to fix the errors in the book of Revelation by reference to another printed text without knowing that printed text had actually used his own first edition. As a result, errors were promulgated in the text of Revelation for centuries.

But please consider well what JTR’s argument entails. Any reading in the TR, no matter how weakly attested, or if not attested at all, can simply be credited to M&Ms: Mystery Manuscripts. Of course, JTR cannot identify them, cannot tell us

what was in them, but, they *might* have contained the TR reading, and therefore, evidence! And once again we have clear proof that this is not textual criticism, it is not historically grounded, but is simply wishful thinking offered in defense of a traditional text.

In the end, we can only be sure that in the providence of God the reading “the fellowship of the mystery” was that preserved in the TR. It was the Greek text that became the basis for the Protestant translations of Europe that brought the Reformed faith to the masses. It was the text studied, taught, and preached in the Reformation and Post-Reformation eras, and it remains the preferred text of Scripture embraced by countless thousands of faithful churches and Christians today.

And, therefore, the goal of textual criticism, the goal of the study of believing scholars, that of providing to us the words of the Apostles themselves, is dismissed, and tradition is offered to us in its place. Just as the Vulgate was promoted by Rome at the time of the Reformation, now the Reformer’s children adopt the same methodology.

So Calvin would write in his commentary on Ephesians 3:9: “The publication of the gospel is called a *fellowship*, because it is the will of God that his purpose, which had formerly been hidden, shall now be shared by men.”

Does JTR offer us any evidence that Calvin had any idea whatsoever that the consistent reading of all manuscripts and versions for the first thousand years read differently? If he does not, how can Calvin’s words be relevant?

Conclusion:

It is only in the modern era that “Reformed” men have abandoned the traditional text for the modern reconstructed text. In so doing they have embraced a religious epistemology that abandons stability, continuity, and consistency.

Rome argued the same. By abandoning the text that God had used for over a thousand years for the modern text polluted by the heretics (the Greeks), these radicals embraced a religious epistemology that abandoned stability, continuity, and consistency. And, of course, those radicals were? The Reformers.

We do not believe, in the end, that it is irrational or irreligious or irresponsible to embrace the traditional Protestant text of the Christian Scriptures, rather than the ever-changing, every-evolving modern critical text based on an empirical method with origins in the Enlightenment (“Enlightenment Text-Onlyism”).

I.e., we have failed to provide any meaningful argumentation so we have used skepticism and mythologically missing manuscripts to defend a tradition rather than do the hard work of giving to the church the words of the Apostles, which, in the case of Ephesians 3:9, is not hard work at all, actually.

A summary was then provided that is not relevant to our review. However, one comment JTR made in the comments that followed functions well to finish off our refutation and review:

I'm all for historical research on the text, but I think believers are better off to stick with the text of the Reformation.

Is JTR “all for historical research on the text”? What relevance could it possibly have? He has the TR. He has what he identifies as the PPT. What possible good could come out of such research? Finding further evidence against TR readings would be irrelevant. Finding further evidence in support of TR readings would likewise be irrelevant. Why? Because JTR is not doing textual criticism. He has abandoned the historical field of battle. He is not seeking to connect the TR to the Apostles. He is presenting a theological conclusion of recent origination as the sole ground of confidence in the text of the New Testament. We would all do well to recognize this effort for what it is, and what it means.

It is my hope that this refutation and review will help those who have been confused by the mixture of theology and history presented by Riddle and others to see this movement for what it is: a theological abandonment of the centuries old commitment to believing textual critical study of the manuscripts of the New Testament. Likewise, I hope many will see the true danger found in the hyper-skepticism Riddle promotes regarding the earliest manuscript evidence, for this is not just an abandonment of apologetic practice, but an actual attack upon it. Riddle's TR Onlyism is incapable of mounting a defense of its own claims outside of the narrow parameters of a particularly imbalanced version of Reformed theology; it is certainly incapable of bringing this argument into the field of inter-religious debate and dialogue.

The original reading of Ephesians 3:9 is not in doubt. Those who promote an error derived a thousand years after Paul wrote the letter do so in the service of tradition and to the damage of serious Christian scholarship and apologetics.

JRW