Scot McKendrick and Orlaith A. O'Sullivan, eds. *The Bible as Book: The Transmission of the Greek Text*. New Castle, Del. and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, in association with the Scriptorium: Center for Christian Antiquities, 2003. xii, 260 pp.; \$60 (US) / £40. ISBN 1584560827 (US); 0712347275 (UK).

This volume has come about as a result of a conference dedicated to the celebration of the work of Eberhard Nestle. One of the sponsors of that conference, and of the publication of this volume, was The Scriptorium: Center for Christian Antiquities, in Grand Haven, Michigan. A leading figure in the establishment of The Scriptorium was Dr Bastian Van Elderen, who is mentioned in the preface. Professor Van Elderen died of a heart attack on 1 August 2004. It is appropriate to remember him in this review, because of the role that he played in its coming into being and out of personal gratitude for the role he played in my own education, including the supervision of my doctoral dissertation. After his retirement, Van Elderen continued to devote himself to archaeology and to research on the textual tradition of the Greek text of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

The contributors to the conference and to this volume represent the best in scholarship in the areas of research into textual history. The fact that they represent a spectrum of age, experience, faith, and theological background only adds to the seriousness with which the field needs to take up the challenges that are offered in the articles.

Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece*, which first appeared in 1898, was a conflation of readings from three other published editions of the Greek New Testament. It gradually became more sophisticated in its inclusion of variant readings, and today in its 27th edition, has become the most widely used Greek text of the New Testament. Its strength is that it presents a text which represents current scholarly opinion (orthodoxy) with a fairly rich sampling of evidence from the manuscript tradition.

The strength of the Nestle "Testament" is also its weakness. While the Nestle text gives the scholar a good taste of the text tradition, sufficient to make one aware of the fact that the text has a varied history, it could create the illusion that all the information is at hand, and that it has been adequately evaluated. The charge of eclecticism is brought to the fore in Elliot's contribution, but it has not escaped the attention of others. What the series of articles in this volume makes clear is that the ordering and evaluation of the textual tradition is

anything but complete, and that there are many challenges to the reigning orthodoxies.

Two of the articles give an overview of Nestle's work. Warren Kay's article is specifically directed to an overview of "The Life and Work of Eberhard Nestle." Michael Holmes's article, "From Nestle to the *Editio Critica Maior*," also describes the significance of Nestle's work in light of his concern for a re-evaluation of the minuscules in establishing both the original text and the history of the text. Holmes's article could be profitably read by those embarking on a study of textual criticism, in order to develop a respect for the need to re-examine established views, within a continuing respect for the established "canon." The painstaking labour that has produced two sizeable volumes of a limited text (Luke and James) gives one an appreciation of how daunting the task of textual criticism is, and how much a gift the handbook format of Nestle's "Testament" has been for students, preachers, and budding theologians.

The articles in this volume display a thoroughgoing technical expertise in the practice of textual criticism, and are not written for the faint of heart. These are experts in a challenging field. It is possible, however, for someone like me, who has used textual criticism as a subsidiary tool, but has never made the study of the history of the text my first priority in scholarship, to read with profit and excitement the various critiques and challenges that are thrown out. For instance, I have developed a new appreciation for the sheer complexity of the task of evaluating the interrelatedness of the various manuscripts. Though it may appear logical that later manuscripts are more likely to have been corrupted than earlier, since the tradition has been exposed to more hands for a longer period of time, new attention is being given to the possibility that older and more original traditions have been taken up in later manuscripts.

One must also become aware that the text represents not just a history of copying, but also reflects the theological discussions of the periods in which the manuscripts were being copied, and also intervening periods. In other words, while the text may be the basis for theology, it is also very likely that theology influenced the shape of the text. This can be particularly valuable for the less scholarly study of the text in the kind of pre-reflection that goes into sermon making. I have often wanted to argue with texts that I am studying for a lecture or a sermon.

Given the present status of classical studies in our universities, and even in seminaries, the task of ordering the textual history of the New

Testament or the Septuagint may, for some time, be too large for the limited number of available scholars in the field to handle. However, these articles do a very good job of laying out the challenges that await those inspired to study the ancient manuscripts, both biblical and non-biblical. The greatest strength of this volume, reflected in the vast majority of the articles, is that not only is the state of textual criticism mapped out, but the problems and challenges are laid bare.

A young scholar with a flare for languages, a sense of history, some organizing ability, and a love for the text of the Scriptures, has more than enough to whet the appetite in this volume. The scholar has the challenge not only of finding the original text, but learning something of how that text has functioned in the life of the synagogue and church. Anyone entering the field of textual studies would do well to read this volume as a marking of the state of textual studies at the crossroads.

TOM OOSTERHUIS
University of Alberta