I’ve been trying in the posts of this thread to explain why textual critics are often thought not to be expert in the wide range of topics that other New Testament scholars are well versed in. They are instead frequently seen as technicians who do the really hard, dirty work that no one else is either that interested in doing or knowledgeable about, even though some of it (not all) is thought to be necessary and important as a kind of preliminary exercise. But it’s to be done by others.

I, on the other hand, was long intrigued with textual criticism, from my early college days. When I went to Princeton Seminary (already knowing Greek) and took a course with Metzger on palaeography (the study of ancient handwriting in the manuscripts and related topics) I was thrilled. In that course we learned how to “collate” manuscripts. I thought I’d died and gone to heaven.

Collating manuscripts, for most people, is no fun at all. It involves taking a manuscript – that is, a hand written copy – and comparing it word by word with a printed text, to see where it differs. You make a note of every single difference. And then you do it with another text. And another. And pretty soon you have lots of data, indicating what all the manuscripts have as their texts, at every point.

At the time, around 1980 or so – there were, practically speaking, only two ways to have access to Greek manuscripts of the New Testament: some (very, very few) were photographed and printed on books, and others (more) were available on microfilm. And so I learned how to do collations, using both media.

When I got the hang of reading manuscripts both in the more ancient uncial script (which looks kind of like our capital letters, uniformly made, and relatively easy to distinguish) and in the later minuscule script (which looks more like cursive writing, where letters are small case, written together, with numerous ligatures – that is, the letters taking different forms when combined with certain other letters; this is hard to get a handle on at first), and started collating manuscripts, I thought that this was the real deal, hard hitting scholarship, not the soft-core stuff that my colleagues in New Testament studies were doing. They were interpreting texts. Not that hard, I thought. I was *collating manuscripts*!!!

I wanted to devote my life to....

THE REST OF THIS POST IS FOR MEMBERS ONLY. If you don’t belong yet, YOU STILL HAVE A CHANCE!!!

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