

BOOK REVIEW: *Textual Optimism*
(Kent D. Clarke)

W. LARRY RICHARDS
Andrews University

The basic thesis of Clarke's evaluation of the upgrading of "certainty" in the rating of variants by the editors in UBS⁴ over the three previous editions is not only overly optimistic, as the title of his book suggests, but also is methodologically inconsistent and devoid of delineated criteria for making these optimistic judgments.

As a background to his investigation of the ratings within the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament (UBS), Clarke provides in chapter 1 a helpful overview of the textual tradition behind the four editions, beginning with the contributions of Westcott and Hort and continuing with key developments since their time. Of particular value is the specific information lying behind each of the four UBS editions as well as helpful information as to how the UBS text and the Nestle-Aland text eventually ended up being the same. Clarke tabulates in two columns some important differences that remain between the UBS and Nestle-Aland critical editions (68-9).

In chapter 2 the author focuses on the differences of the rating in UBS⁴ as compared to the first three editions, providing many charts (drawn from several appendices) showing the number of modifications in UBS⁴ with the previous editions. The massive amount of statistical data bears out Clarke's contention that UBS⁴ represents the text of the Greek NT as far "more certain" than the previous editions. His first chart, for example, shows that UBS⁴ has approximately four times as many A readings as were given in the previous UBS editions (514 to 136 or less). Correspondingly, UBS⁴ shows a significant decrease in the number of C and D readings: 27 percent of the total in UBS⁴ as compared to 58 percent in UBS³ (the first two editions differ slightly from UBS³).

This results in the number of B readings remaining nearly the same in all four editions, and this is to be expected, for while many of the former B readings have been elevated to A status in UBS⁴, many of the former C and D readings have also been elevated, leaving us with approximately the same number of B readings. But whereas the *percentage* of B readings is the same, the readings comprising the new totals are quite different. What used to be a four-step rating system (A-D) has now become a three-step system (the D rating now makes up just one percent in the UBS4 as compared to nine percent in the previous editions (91).

As is often the case with statistics, the data often tell us more than one story, and that seems to be the case with the many charts and appendices provided by Clarke. I cite two examples, taken from the data given in the

appendices.

1. Clarke provides his statistical evidence based on all of the readings within the UBS⁴ edition even though he points out that this fourth edition includes 284 *new* readings not found in the earlier editions, and *excludes* 273 readings that are found in the earlier editions. Thus, it would seem that statistics which are designed to support the contention that the UBS⁴ editors provided a “more certain text” over that of the previous editions would be more indicative of a major editorial shift to certainty if only the *readings found in all four editions* were compared. Additions and deletions among the four editions obviously affect the statistics based on comparisons.

2. From the Gospels, I found 41 reading in which one or both of the first two editions was “more certain” than the rating given in the UBS^{3/corr}, whereas in only five places did the UBS³ show higher rating than that given in either one or both of the first two editions. That is to say, one could conclude that UBS³ was *pessimistic* when compared to at least one of its predecessors (Clarke cites Elliott for making that very observation), and that, therefore, UBS⁴ has, at least in part, turned in the direction of the more optimistic text found in UBS¹ and UBS²!

Of the 36 readings open to comparison with the previous three editions (five of the 41 readings UBS⁴ are among the 273 readings deleted in UBS⁴) within the Gospels, we find that UBS⁴ has retained eleven of the UBS³’s “pessimistic” readings. What this tells us, though, is that the UBS⁴ in 31 percent of the readings has a more cautious rating in the Gospels (the 11 out of 36) than we find in one or both of the first two editions!

Clarke repeatedly asks why the UBS⁴ editors did not account for these major shifts toward certainty, holding that the explanation given in the introduction to the fourth edition for the changes is insufficient. But more, he believes that the shifts were made as a result of flawed methods and logic. Major proof for this comes in his analysis of the only two texts in UBS⁴ that were given a three-step upgrade (D to A): Luke 19:25 and Acts 2:44. His point is that if the committee could make such a major upgrade in these two places where, upon analysis, Clarke concludes they should not have, how can we trust their judgments elsewhere? (155 fn and 176).

Clarke uses a rather complicated statistical tool (for non-statisticians), the Chi-square, to establish the fact that these upgrades did not occur by chance but were deliberate on the part of the committee. The text would be more readable if these Chi-square statistics had been placed in an appendix, giving in the text the results only. It took me a considerable amount of time to digest these data and I am still not sure I understand the tool itself, nor do I believe I need to in order to appreciate the results.

(As a matter of interest to me, for years I felt that the ratings in UBS¹⁻³ were often too cautious, frequently making my own upgrades in the classroom, and, interestingly, doing so on precisely the same grounds used by Clarke to draw his negative conclusions about the optimism of the editors of UBS⁴, namely, “the recognized principles of New Testament textual criticism” [14].)

The questions raised by Clarke are important apart from the fact that

one may not agree completely with his conclusions.