Racine, Jean-François

_The Text of Matthew in the Writings of Basil of Caesarea_

Society of Biblical Literature The New Testament in the Greek Fathers 5


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The SBL series devoted to the Greek New Testament in the Fathers (SBLNTGF) has emerged as a major and valuable contribution to the textual criticism of the New Testament, and this, the fifth volume in the series, is no exception. The monograph is a lightly revised version of Racine’s Ph.D. thesis at the University of St Michael’s College under Bart D. Ehrman and Paul J. Fedwick. As its title suggests, Racine undertakes to assemble all the quotations and significant allusions to the Gospel of Matthew to be found in Basil’s corpus of writings (including the disputed treatise _De Baptismo_, whose quotations and allusions are treated separately in appendix B). The choice of Basil is an apt one, considering how fundamental the Scriptures were to this Greek father’s understanding of ministry and the monastic life. (For a recent appraisal, see Andrea Sterk, _Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church_ [2004], 60–61). Racine is forced to confine himself to the First Gospel because Basil’s references to the New Testament are far too numerous to be treated in a single volume. And although Racine does not expressly indicate why he has chosen Matthew over the other Gospels, it is likely he has done so because Basil cites Matthew with more frequency than either Luke or John, while citing Mark hardly at all (see 350). As a result, Racine is able to emerge with a clearer profile of Basil’s version(s) of Matthew than would have been possible with the other Gospels or—one presumes—with the remaining documents of the New Testament.
Racine’s purpose is to examine Basil’s quotations and evaluate them in light of the ancient Greek and Latin manuscripts to determine which of them display the closest affinities with Basil’s text(s) of Matthew. I say “text(s)” because Racine leaves open the possibility that Basil relied on different versions of Matthew over the course of his career.

Racine’s methodology first involves establishing the criteria for what constitutes a direct citation or a “significant” allusion. He adopts four categories: “A citation is a verbally exact reproduction of a passage; an adaptation is a quoted passage in which Basil has modified the text … an allusion is an echo of a Gospel passage that shows conceptual and/or verbal affinities with it. A lemma is the header of a paragraph or of a section” (28). As one would anticipate, most weight is given to the citations and least to the lemmata. Similarly, a longer citation is preferred to a shorter one, since Basil is more likely to have relied on a written text in reproducing a longer passage.

For the texts of Basil, Racine draws on the latest editions available wherever possible. For texts of Matthew, he assembles various witnesses from five textual groups under the following rubrics: Primary and Secondary Alexandrian, Caesarean, Byzantine, and Western. He also includes reference to the text of Matthew found in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, using James A. Brooks’s *The New Testament Text of Gregory of Nyssa* (SBLNTGF 2, 1991). Because Gregory was Basil’s younger brother and also resided in Cappadocia, Racine raises the possibility of similar text-types appearing in their writings.

The bulk of the volume (37–237) is devoted to collating the references to Matthew in Basil. In all, he assembles and assesses over four hundred citations of Matthew. Uncertain citations—those that cannot be attributed to Matthew with certainty—are relegated to appendix A. To contextualize Basil’s citations in relation to the New Testament manuscripts, Racine relies on the method of quantitative analysis developed by Ernest Colwell and Ernest Tune, as well as a method of profile analysis devised by Bart Ehrman in his monograph on *Didymus the Blind and the Text of the Gospels* (SBLNTGF 1; see 223–53). The former involves collating a text with sample manuscripts that represent a broad range of textual possibilities. After factoring in standard deviation and a method of error correction (an innovation introduced by Racine himself), he determines that quantitative analysis reveals that Basil’s text has the closest affinities (78.6 percent) with the Byzantine manuscripts and considerable agreements with the Secondary Alexandrian witnesses (71.2 percent). By contrast, the Western witnesses show the lowest level of agreement: some 40.5 percent. Profile analysis, which compares Basil’s quotations with typical readings of various groups of New Testament manuscripts, confirms these findings: “In each of the three profiles, Basil’s text of Matthew has greater affinity with the Byzantine textual group than any other” (269).
Racine’s conclusions, therefore, are that Basil’s text(s) of Matthew are “in greater agreement with the Byzantine textual group than with any other” (349). This finding is most interesting, since it makes Basil’s text of Matthew the earliest exemplar of the Byzantine text-type and suggests that a form of the Byzantine text-type was extant in Cappadocia in the mid-fourth century or possibly even earlier. Here Racine’s findings mesh with Brooks’s conclusions about Gregory of Nyssa, where he finds that Gregory “is one of the earliest writers whose quotations support the Byzantine text more than any other” (Text of Gregory, 266).

As to the character of the Byzantine text-type, Racine establishes on the basis of ninety-nine distinctive Byzantine variant readings that these variants were the result of editorial work. They were selected with a view to improving the style, clarifying the meaning, or harmonizing the text with other Gospel readings. Thus, most of the Byzantine variants need to be regarded as secondary in comparison to Alexandrian readings. Racine holds that the editors may have occasionally introduced variation (a possibility upheld by Hort but denied by Zuntz; cf. 346–47) but finds that they did not introduce conflation. Racine also determines that Family 1 ($f^1$), which has usually been regarded as a Caesarean witness in Matthew, should now be classified as a secondary Alexandrian witness in Matthew.

Racine also expands on a welcome feature present in some of the earlier volumes (notably that by Ehrman, Fee, and Holmes, The Text of the Fourth Gospel in the Writings of Origen, SBLNTGF 3) by offering a biographical introductory chapter. His discussion furnishes a thumbnail sketch of Basil as “Theologian, Ascetic, and Bishop” (7–26) and contextualizes Basil within the controversies of his day, in addition to offering useful information about his relationships with the other Cappadocians. Racine ably demonstrates that Basil’s use of scripture arose naturally out of the circumstances of his own Bios.

Although it is not without mistakes and grammatical solecisms, Racine’s book is, nevertheless, given the often complicated character of its text, laudably free of serious faults. The only area where it is markedly deficient is in its failure to provide any sort of index. Since, however, this has been an unfortunate feature of all the volumes in the series, we can only hope that future volumes will break with this trend and provide thorough indexes.

That apart, Racine’s book marks a significant advance in the textual criticism of the First Gospel. Just how much of an advance it is can be determined from his appendix C, which offers fourteen pages of readings where Basil’s version(s) of Matthew could be used to supplement the witnesses in the apparatus of the Nestle-Aland, Novum Testamentum.
Graece (27th ed.), and that of the United Bible Societies, *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.). Several of these readings are most suggestive, especially in light of the christological controversies of the fourth century. Basil, for instance, supports the text found in the above versions by retaining “neither the Son” at 24:31. Even though it suggests that Jesus did not know when the end of the world would transpire, Basil’s version retains the clause, though its excision is attested as early as Origen (see Bart Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 91–92).

In sum, therefore, Racine has produced a careful and illuminating monograph, one that sets very high standards for future contributors to the series.