

COMMUNICATIONS

BIBLICAL CRITICISM

TO THE EDITOR OF *TRADITION*:

Rabbi Kapustin has done Orthodoxy a service in his attempt to indicate an acceptable attitude towards Biblical criticism. His position with regard to textual criticism follows Hoffmann when he tells us that the Masoretic text is "as old as Holy Scripture itself."

But Rabbi Kapustin must know that our oldest Masoretic texts date from medieval times. Furthermore, he cannot be unaware of the discovery in the Dead Sea Scrolls of *Hebrew* texts differing from the Masoretic ones. He must know that these scrolls are approximately one thousand years older than our oldest Masoretic texts.

Of these Dead Sea Scrolls both Hebrew Isaiah scrolls exhibit variants from the Masoretic text. Even the Hebrew University Scroll which is much closer to the Masoretic text than the St. Mark's Monastery one has a three page list of vari-

ant readings (Suknik, *Otzar ha-Megilot ha-Genuzot* [Jerusalem: 5715] pp. 28-30).

Modern scholars have refuted the methods previously used to explain away Septuagint variant readings. They have demonstrated that the Septuagint translators did not always translate to suit their fancy but instead *followed Hebrew manuscripts* which had other, and sometimes clearer, readings than the Masoretic text (Skehan in *B.A.S.O.R.*, #136 [1954]).

In these Dead Sea Scrolls we can see the Masoretic text in the making. By inspection, Hoffman's position is untenable.

Which text did the individual Prophet actually write down? As matters stand today we can never be certain. Whenever a variant is reached it is then subject to discussion.

A position such as the one espoused above has little effect on Orthodoxy's key dogma in the

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sense that whereas Torah is still *min ha-Shamayim*, *Sofrim* are not.

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RABBI KAPUSTIN REPLIES:

There is no inherent contradiction between the position taken in the article and the well known information contributed by Mr. Brunswick. The general reliability of the Masoretic text as maintained by tradition cannot be shaken either by a few variants found in manuscripts older than our Masoretic text — most of them of an orthographical nature — or by the reasonable assumption “that the Septuagint translators did not always translate to suit their fancy.” Even granting that the Septuagint “followed Hebrew manuscripts which had other, and sometimes clearer readings than the Masoretic text” does not justify the general preference of the Septuagint over the latter, nor has such a sweeping suggestion been made in recent years. The Septuagint problem is still with us.

For our position it is irrelevant whether or not the Masoretic text could be “improved” by some well authenticated variants from older manuscripts or versions. After all

it is well known that there are some differences in the Masoretic tradition itself and also in some talmudic renderings of biblical quotations, in which case the Masoretic tradition takes preference (see Hoffman *op. cit.* and H. Ehrentreu, *Minchah Tehorah* p. 119 ff.). “Which text did the individual prophet actually write down?” We would agree that “whenever a variant is reached it is then subject to discussion.” Yet Hoffmann’s position as quoted in the article is not untenable at all. “Even if we had to concede that in certain places the text has not remained inviolate, we must, on the other hand, concede that we are lacking all means to restore a text written under *ruach ha-kodesh*. Every conjecture, no matter by how many exegetical and historical and critical arguments it may be supported, does not offer us even the probability that the Prophet or the writer of Holy Scripture wrote in this form and not as in the text before us.” On the premise granted by Mr. Brunswick that “Torah is still *min ha-Shamayim*,” textual conjectures become methodologically impossible in the sense that no degree of certainty or even probability can be ascribed to them. They may furnish interesting material for speculation.