

"Let women be silent in church" - can textual criticism help to solve a question of church order ?

Tonight, instead of giving a talk in the wide ambit of early Christian origins and Biblical studies, which have been the content of my lecturing since coming to the North-East, I am presenting to you an account of work in my own specialist field. This lies in the discipline which is called Textual Criticism, in which my entire research activity has taken place. I have chosen this primarily for practical reasons. For some time past, I have found that my stamina has decreased, with the result that I can give less time to preparation of papers than I could. This, together with my late wife's illness, was the cause of my ceasing to offer lectures under WEA auspices. But I am very happy that a small group of friends would like to hear me again. So I shall give you a "peep behind the scenes", taking a topic on which I happen to be at work at present, with a paper in view.

Textual criticism is the discipline which concerns itself with the transmission of the text or wording of the New Testament. It is concerned with changes which we may observe in the text, and also with the places in the text where the wording has remained unchanged. It ranges over thousands of Greek manuscripts, and about a score of ancient translations, together with the evidence which quotations in Christian writers of the early centuries provide of the text as they read it and expounded it in their day. Wide ranging as it thus is, it must concern itself basically with details, and to this aspect of the data it must give constant and careful attention.

I think that I have been fortunate to practice this craft in the setting of English universities where both academically and socially one is in constant touch with colleagues whose expertise lies in widely different fields. So, one is often learning of analogies which illuminate one's own work. It was in the setting of lunch-hour conversation that I learned of the relatively new discipline within the department of Chemistry, called Materials Science. That name, like all technical terms, is not immediately self-explanatory. Surely all the natural sciences are dealing with "materials". The name specifies a branch of chemistry of which the object is to produce elements and compounds of such purity that they may be used in the setting of any experiment without the risk that the drawn conclusions should be rendered void by contamination arising from the accidental presence of some catalyst or reactant. It deals in minutiae, but is essential to the progress of vast fields of chemical science. My own field I perceive as the analogy within theological study of materials science within the fields of chemistry or metallurgy. We deal in minutiae, but at any and every point at which theology derives from or reflects upon the wording of scripture, these investigations of ours are essential for the validity of the argument. And again, by analogy, just as chemistry may bear upon diatetics or pharmacology, so textual criticism may have a bearing upon practical issues which confront the church from time to time.

It has accordingly been of interest to observe, browsing in journals which had lain practically unopened since their arrival in my home, papers and reports of books in which scholars have sought clarification of the verses 34 and 35 of

chapter 14 of the first letter of Paul the apostle to the Corinthians. Here the apostle instructs that the Corinthian church follow the practice of all the churches in that women must remain silent in worship, seeking clarification if they require it from their husbands at home. This is a practical question in those churches which still seek a strictly scriptural basis of their order of life and worship should or may still enforce the teaching which presents itself in these verses of the fourteenth chapter. These churches are not very numerous here and their impact is limited to their function as what sociologists call "sects", that is self-contained social groups, very closely cohesive and in various degrees separated from the rest of society. In America, on the contrary, with a very different history behind them, they are extremely strong, and have thrown great effort from the conservative side into current debates, both in society and in the churches. Another difference between the two countries is that, in America, these kinds of church have in the latter part of this century established themselves in fields of learning so that their research and contributions are not outside the general debate. (It is also the case that extreme radicalism is also represented institutionally in the United States in a way that is not the case here).

The textual evidence of the New Testament reveals to us that there was considerable fluidity in the text in the early centuries. This became clear as soon as Greek manuscripts became available to scholars in Western Europe from the sixteenth century onwards. Whatever kind of evidence was examined, whether Greek mss., or the earliest translations into such languages as Latin, Syriac or Coptic, or the quotations of the fathers of the church and other writers, it was found that up to the fourth century, two main varieties of text were to be discerned, and that, from that point on, a third type of text began to appear and to become more and more dominant. In its nature, it is often a conflation of the distinctive wording (or, readings) of the two earlier. (The situation is different in the case of the book of Revelation). As nearer to our own date, earlier manuscripts have been brought to light, it has been found that the two earlier varieties both go back to the earliest period to which written evidence reaches back, that is, the beginning of the second century. We may extrapolate into the first century arguing by inference, but we have up to the present, no manuscript evidence.

Many of the instances of this are such that only a very technical presentation could make this clear. There are however a number of striking instances of variation in the early material which can show the situation in silhouette. Two instances taken from the gospels are firstly the absence at the end of St. Mark's gospel of twelve verses describing some resurrection appearances, the chapter as it stands having only the visit of the two women to the tomb of Jesus. Some ancient evidence presents such a textual complexion, while other evidence almost as early has the twelve verses and there is some additional variation. Secondly, and perhaps best known, is that between chapters 7 and 8 of St. John's gospel, there is the story of the woman taken in adultery and Jesus's ruling about the treatment appropriate to be meted out. But this passage is completely absent in some of the earlier ancient evidence and present elsewhere. The later text which began to appear in the fourth century has the longer texts in both these cases. The argument is whether the longer forms are later developments, or whether they are original and have been excised. In either case, why did the development or the excisions

take place?

In the Acts of the apostles, the situation is even more dramatic, and in the catholic epistles, much less. The book of Revelation was always a bone of contention in the early church as since. The consequence of this was that it was often transmitted in mss. which were not otherwise biblical in content, and we do not find upon analysis a threefold division, but a fourfold. To say this much is rather a simplification. But let us go on to the letters of St. Paul, which must be our main concern, because of my own choice of topic.

The pattern of the Pauline text in our mss. and other witnesses is complex, yet in a distinct way from what we find in the gospels. The same basic tripartite self-ordering of textual types may be seen but there are differences in detail. There are a number of places where the complexity of Paul's thought has led to alterations or accidental changes. That the magnificence of Paul's thought and the power of his expression is not altogether hidden is evidenced by the fact that it is often the passages which can still be read aloud so well and which move us so deeply, in whatever translation, that prove on acquaintance with the Greek to be those where corruption of the text is to be observed and is often very difficult to resolve with absolute certainty. Other variations which we are surprized to find, in a group of letters generally addressed to congregations in particular cities are that in two of them, namely Ephesians and Romans, the place name is absent in ancient witnesses. Some mss. will have a gap after the preposition "in" in the introductory greeting, where others have the name. Another type of variation is the feature of transpositions, a striking example being that the doxology of Romans which we will find where we might expect it, at the very end (viz., of ch. 16), in many mss. but after chapter 14 in many others, and in our oldest near-complete ms. after chapter 15.

It is by the presence of this feature that textual criticism has been brought into the current debate. In chapter 14 of the first letter to the Corinthians, the main discussion is of the question of speaking in tongues and the orderly practice of this in public worship. Into the discussion, and towards its close, appear the words of which I have already reminded you, about the silence of women. Then the text reverts to the question of orderly worship. This is the order in which all but the professional textual critic will know the passage, for it is the order in the text of the late middle ages and in the earliest papyri known to us. Here is a case in fact in which the later text which appears from about the fifth century onwards often follows one of the alternatives professed by the texts of the earlier centuries. In a small group of witnesses however we find a transposition of these verses (34 and 35) from that point in the chapter to a point (as we should say) after vs. 40.

This is attested by four groups of evidence. Firstly in a family of related mss. which give us a Greek text of St. Paul's epistles with a Latin rendering, two of them giving the texts facing one another, the third giving the Latin text as an interlinear above the Greek. Then we know the commentaries of three Latin authors, respectively of the fourth, fifth and ninth centuries : each is appropriating his predecessor's work, and follows the same order, which in the case of chapter 14, gives verses 34 and 35 after verse 40. This kind of joint witness is common

throughout the corpus. So too is the third which is that of two manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate. This was in its origin a revision of the earlier Latin version of the Bible to bring its text into line with the Greek as known and approved in its day. The work had been undertaken by St. Jerome, but the latter part of the New Testament was not his work. Since copies of the earlier Latin versions survived, copies of the Vulgate were not infrequently contaminated by readings from these earlier sources. But the fourth attestation is of some surprise. A Greek manuscript of the twelfth century also gives the verses in the final position in the chapter.

The section or pericope in chapter 14 clearly interrupts the thought of its context. It has been moved to the end to correct his problem, but that this is an attempted correction is shown by the fact that the original opening words "as in all the assemblies - or, churches - of the saints" have been left behind. They make sense neither with verse 33 nor with verse 36. Recent scholarship has generally reached the conclusion that the section is an early interpolation, probably reflecting some later situation. The scholars entertaining such a conclusion range in their theological position from the agnosticism of Günther Zuntz, a classical scholar, who died earlier this decade, to the committed membership and ministry in the Assemblies of God of Gordon Fee, an American, in my view amongst the most outstanding textual scholars the United States have produced, and also a commentator on scripture. It would appear that before the end of the first century, in addition to the early textual corruption due in part to some obscurities in Paul's style, there also took place a certain amount of glossing of the letters, some instances perhaps even by Paul himself. (Z. p.16f.)

The article which has given rise to my deeper investigation of this problem appeared in print at the beginning of the year. Its author had already published another article three years before, seeking to bring other text-critical data to bear upon this passage. He shares the view is that it is inauthentic and a later addition to the text. However, it is a conjectural position, an emendation of the text in any of its extant forms. This is a legitimate part of text-critical procedure, but one which in the New Testament is rarely resorted to. This is because, in comparison to many ancient works, we have great richness of materials at our disposal, and it is generally considered that the earliest ascertainable form of the text, if not the original form, should be accessible to us in the data which our materials provide. This is why textual criticism used to be called "Lower criticism" because it belongs to the preliminary stages of study, the examination of documents. To pursue the matters which it does not solve requires other techniques of literary and historical content. Because these build on the foundation laid by "lower criticism", they are often (once, regularly) classified as "Higher Criticism".

The article to which I refer needs correction since its author has given himself an impossible task. He wishes to prove from various data that we can show that the stage before that which certain mss. show contained a text in which this passage was completely absent. This author is far from the theological viewpoint sometimes called "fundamentalist" (a term, by the way, almost denuded of precise meaning through overuse). He shares however a common feature of thinking with fundamentalism. To put it very simply, just as they repose complete and

unsophisticated confidence in documents, trusting what is written down, he seeks to convince his readers by an appeal to objectivity, in the form of a demonstration

A. which points without opportunity for cavil to a text in immediate direct line of ancestry in which this pericope was not to be found.

B. of the absence of something written. He wishes to prove that a text of the Pauline letters existed in which no such prohibition of female enquiry stood at any point. He evidently cannot understand the acceptability of conjecture, seeking concrete evidence

B2. which in his view points without opportunity for cavil to a text in immediate direct line of ancestry in which this pericope was not to be found.

Whether he is self-taught or insufficiently taught I do not know. My enquiries have only revealed that his daily bread is earned not in an academic or pastoral office, but in some branch of the multiform "computer industry". His address is in Washington State which as Americans agree is "out in the sticks". He has not had access to several essential works. I conclude that he is interested in textual criticism only insofar as it will solve this conundrum for him. He argues his case without sufficient background. There is an adage which the English scholar of a hundred ago, F.J.A.Hort enunciated "knowledge of documents must precede final judgement of readings".

He reproduces a photocopy of the page of the Greek ms. of Naples on which the transposed passage is found. He notes certain points from the ms. presentation but completely neglects others. These if taken into account would explain the data on which he has built another case. He seems to think that the scribe has copied a ms. which lacks verses 34 and 35. Upon reaching a point for reflection (perhaps the end of the section) he realizes that the section is missing, and adds it, with an indication by signs in the margin of the place which it should occupy.

We are of course quite unable with the data at our disposal as presented by him. We would need at least to study the ms. for the whole epistle, and ideally, the whole manuscript, which runs from Acts, through the Catholic and Pauline Epistles, to Revelation where unfortunately it ends at ch.3 vs.12, having lost the rest of its leaves. It might have contained the name of its scribe, the date of its completion and the place where the work was done, since such details are sometimes found in manuscripts. However, looking simply at this single leaf (and only one side of it), we can see that he has corrected it. The reading in his text is known in most Greek mss. of the medieval period, in the Latin side of one of the Greco-Latin bilinguals and in the commentary of Ambrosiaster. He gives in the margin, as the reading "in others" (viz. other mss.), the reading known in one of the two groups of early witnesses. This configuration of his exemplar and the source of his corrections would tally with the following explanation of the place of vss.34,35 as we find it here. He had a ms., descended from the early type of text to which the Greco-Latins are related. Its text had been heavily corrected to the medieval majority text but the pericope "let women be silent" had remained at the end of chapter 14.

The standard of his correction if his work was a manuscript (or mss.) of the other early text-type. From this he derived the marginal correction in vs. 19 and for the transposed text, he had added in the margin the signs which we see in the photograph. This would tally with the assessment of the ms.'s text which was made by the German scholar von Soden early this century, and it would explain all the data. It is remarkable that only one ms. of this type should be known ; but many mss. were destroyed from the twelfth century onwards which may explain many gaps in our knowledge of many problems other than this.

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1. the reason for the paper.

Payne's work of mixture of enterprize and ignorance. Its motivation seems to be / an instance in radicalism of a motivation more often associated with a fundamentalist position. A text must be adduced to assert a truth. In this case, there must be at least an argument grounded in observable data to support the notion of original absence of the passage assumed to be a gloss. This leads to the strange congerie of argument found here.

2. the argument. two members. (a) the text cannot have been obtained from another ms.

(b) the marginal annotations show this.

3. weaknesses.

(a) non-existence of mss. with this "transposed text" asserted on erroneous grounds. History of mss. and of the cultural background never mentioned (presumably not known).

(b) interpretation of marginalia. problems.

4. other evidence. The rest of the reproduced text has not been analyzed. Such analysis shows a more plausible understanding of the data.