

The enterprise of establishing the text of a document, ancient or modern, is familiar in an academic setting and needs no apology. By the same token, the problems faced by those who undertake the particular task which I am seeking to outline today will find many analogies in spite of particular differences within the material in the literature or the historical documents with which many of you are concerned.

The collection of first century Christian material to which we customarily give the name "The New Testament" is a collection whose main outlines are ^{already} to be discerned in the second century but its precise details were not universally agreed until the late fourth century, and that only in the Greek and Latin speaking areas of the church. In the Eastern churches, there were a number of divergences and disagreements in some cases until as late as the eleventh century. Nevertheless, there would have been universal agreement that whichever books were deemed to be fit to figure in the lists of books for public reading (lists to which we give the technical name of Canon) were the central source for defence of doctrine and definition of behaviour and for private edification.

In spite of many changes, especially in the past three centuries, this is still the case. Indeed, one is constantly surprised that theologians whose opinions seem to put them quite outside the bounds of Christian belief and adherence as one might define these in phenomenological terms, still concern themselves with the life and teaching of Jesus or seek to show that their views are ^{justified by} anticipated in the writings of various New Testament authors. ^{Over} the whole gamut of Christian opinion, recourse is still had to the writings of the New Testament: and thus the identity of its true and original text or wording is still an issue of central significance and importance.

While the problem as it affects theology is the central focus of what I shall say today, we should also in parenthesis remind ourselves that these documents also have an importance as evidence in the history of the Greek language, since they are a literary deposit of the language of the first century of the Christian era in a form little influenced by artificial literary canons. ^{This is} a form of the language which has affinities with the vernacular of letters and receipts, of which we know from papyrus sources: but is more closely related to that used in technical works, the language of craftsmen, artisans, practitioners of medicine, and so on. The documents are also an important source for the historian of the period. We find them utilized by students of a number of different historical areas, such as the chronology of the first century, the history of the Jewish revolt of AD 66-72, and various aspects of the social structure of the early Roman empire. There are also important data to be derived from them for the study of ^{the history of} philosophy during the period, and for the history of literary forms in Greco-Roman society. For all of these, of course, it is essential to have a text about whose details the user can proceed without doubt as to its authenticity.

There is a parallel question which I shall not deal with in any detailed way today, a question which the academic mind will immediately observe is not identical but which the popular mind may easily confuse, bemused by the sensationalism of journalism and the media, and by those academics who believe that some purpose is served by invoking sensational ^{present} presentation. From time to time, documents are discovered or interest in them revived, about which the claim is made that here we have the true story of Jesus, or the early church, closer

to historical reality than the New Testament. A recent television series drew attention, as several similar predecessors have done, to the discoveries made now forty years ago at or near an Egyptian site called Nag-Hammadi. A collection of thirteen codices found there, still not completely accessible to any but the Coptic palaeographer, give us in Coptic translation, literature of the early christian groups known as Gnostics. This literature, of which little other was previously known, gives us the opportunity to see these groups as they saw themselves, and not only through the eyes of their adversaries, upon whom we previously relied. This has already yielded rich returns, but most securely for our understanding of the thought of these groups. There has been much analysis, in addition, of the documents, seeking to reconstruct the true history of the early church, often with the implication that the Gnostics were the true Christians and that the orthodoxy which triumphed is aberrant. Scholars will differ in their appraisal of this: for my part, I perceive more imagination than uncovering of neglected fact in these reconstructions. It might also be said that, while the fathers of the church in their accounts of the Gnostics are accused of writing in the light of their own prejudices, their latter day accusers, the defendants of the Gnostics, are frequently those who have been Christians and have thought better of it, and who appear to use the Gnostic documents as a useful means to justify their own agnosticism. But as to the matter most closely linked with the text of the New Testament, materials alleged to take us nearer to the historical Jesus, there is very little, most of it in the so-called Secret Sayings of Judas Thomas, one of the first of these discoveries to be published translated and discussed. Here we have a series of sayings attributed to Jesus, of which a number are parallel to, or byforms of, the sayings found in the Synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is a matter of debate whether these derive from those gospels or come, by a parallel route, from another tradition more directly connected with the Aramaic sayings spoken by Jesus. It is a minority of scholars who defend the latter point of view. In any case there are great difficulties in that we are working in ^a Coptic ^{document}, thought by many to be translated from Syriac (akin to Aramaic but not identical) and making a comparison with parallel sayings preserved in Greek. One thing at least has come from work of this kind: the wording of the sayings in the Coptic documents of Nag Hammadi is influenced ^{Coptic} (by the translations ~~into Coptic~~ of the Synoptic gospels ^{made in about the 3rd c. CE.} in vocabulary and style). There is then at least much to be put on one side before we can ever make a just estimate whether any echo of Jesus's words other than the canonical gospels afford, is to be heard in the Gospel of Thomas.

Another recent debate which ^{made} a few passing newspaper headlines on its first publication, but has not had the succès de scandale of the documents from Nag Hammadi, is that initiated by the American scholar Morton Smith, in his claim to have discovered a lost letter of the second century ^{writer} Clement of Alexandria, in which excerpts of a "secret gospel of Mark" were quoted, and allusion made to a gospel of Mark yet more secret again, too outrageous for quotation. ~~He~~ Smith made his discovery available to his colleagues in 1973 in a massive book of just over four hundred and fifty pages, including three photographs of the ^{complete} original manuscript. This itself was rather unusual, being written on the end papers of a seventeenth century printed book, which contained a famous edition of the epistles of the second century martyr Ignatius. The hand of the excerpt from the previously unknown letter of Clement, ^{is} dated, after consultation with a number of scholars (Smith names nine), as from about AD 1750, plus or minus about fifty years. Smith claims to have discovered this in the library of the monastery of Mar Saba, some distance from Jerusalem in 1958 while making a catalogue of mss. and early printed

books. He spent the fifteen years between this and the publication partly in consulting many scholars to whose opinions he refers in his discussions and analyses: the full text of their replies to his enquiries are not given, however. It seems to me significant still that Johannes Munck and Walther Völker, two leading authorities on Clement of Alexandria, and A.D. Nock, a scholar of world stature in the study of Hellenistic literature and religion, all maintained the conviction that the document was not a letter of Clement, but a later confection. Smith stated their views in summary: but accepted that of the rest (none of them of the stature in these fields of the three named) which supported his own opinion. But the gravamen of the discovery is the fragment of the secret gospel of Mark: this is found in the body of the letter in answer to an enquiry which Clement ~~seeks to a~~ has received. ~~These appear to be~~ ^{It} additions to Mark ch. 10 of passages which have a very close affinity with the gospel of John, especially the account of the raising of Lazarus unique to that gospel, with some other items, especially of vocabulary, with affinity with miracle stories in Matthew and Luke. Smith was of the view that we have here evidence of the existence of an expanded version of Mark, into which had been inserted, not episodes dependent on the other canonical gospels, but from a "single earlier gospel" upon which both Mark and John had been based. This lost gospel reveals Jesus as practising secret initiation ceremonies with overtones of homosexual practices: this is a thesis, entertained, I believe, by no one else but Smith, which he sought to develop and to place in its historical setting, in his later book, "Jesus the Magician", a work of which pages 201-266 of this earlier book give the gist. The libertine strands in early Christianity, against which Paul inveighs, and authors of other New Testament documents such as the epistle of Jude, are the survivals of the effect of this kind of teaching: early Jewish Christianity suppressed the teaching, but while Paul's teaching of freedom from the Law, was a compromise between these two. What shall we say to these hypotheses? Firstly, the existence of libertine teaching in early Christianity is plain for all to see: there are many possible explanations, and most of them do not derive so much from reading conclusions into the text as Smith practices. Secondly, should we accept the document, namely the letter of Clement upon which so much eisegesis has been practised, as authentic? I have doubts, and can report that to my certain knowledge, a leading Clementine scholar, the Australian Eric Osborn, is quite opposed to its acceptance. It is a pity that Munck and Nock had both died before the final work was achieved: I do not know the date of Völker's death. Even Smith admits that they might have changed his mind! The form in which the document was found gives rise to questions: would an eighteenth century monk or other scholar write without a single itacism? I have not studied ^{by hand} scholarly mss. of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: but can vouch for the fact that liturgical and hymnographic mss. of that period are marred by many itacisms. It would further more be quite probable that the exemplar from which this lost document was transcribed into the end papers was itacistic to some degree in its orthography. Only one scholar has charged Smith with forgery: but might not an earlier forgery have taken place? There are some strange antecedents in the history of patristics. Thirdly, even if the document is authentic, what do we make of the expanded Mark which it contains? Harmonies of the canonical gospels were the vogue of the day in the second century, and even later (admittedly in remoter parts of Christendom) we find the gospel history being summarized in harmonistic form. The case most intimately known to me, in a Georgian source, has in fact a Markan outline, and Johannine inserts. We need to ponder all these things, before we rush with Smith over a precipice which we might avoid.

We might fill the lecture with such examinations, but must turn to the problems of the

text of the components of the canonical scriptures. As we emphasised at the beginning of, these were gathered together into the complex of the New Testament in its final form only in the fourth century. At first the gospels circulated separately, and in the course of the second, came more and more to be treated as a corporate unity. The harmonization to which we have referred bears evidence to this, as does the appearance of manuscripts of the four gospels in the third century. The Acts of the Apostles, apparently written as a second volume of Luke's gospel, appears together with the four gospels in one third century manuscript. ^{NUMBER OF 16 MSS?} The Pauline epistles must have been gathered together into one corpus by the end of the first century, as quotation and allusion show, apart from the letter to the Hebrews: this makes no claim to be by the apostle Paul, and for a long time was not treated as scripture in some areas. The corpus of the Catholic or General epistles on the other hand is shown by the manuscript evidence to be a thing of shreds and patches, which took almost as long to grow as the Canon itself. The book of Revelation was early accepted in the West, but for as long and longer looked on with suspicion in the Eastern churches.

~~Inevitably,~~ Given the history which this outline reveals, textual variation was inevitable: by the time that Christian exegetical scholarship emerges in the third century, we find that variations are known. Sometimes we are made aware of the wealth of materials lost to us, when an author such as the Alexandrian Origen treats as the authentic text a reading of which we possess little manuscript attestation, and as a second, ~~less~~ well attested form of words ~~that~~ which we know in the majority of witnesses. This he does in respect of ~~two~~ ^{many} readings in the epistle to the Romans ch. 3, vs. 5. At vs. 18 of ch. 13 of the Revelation, the number of the beast is 666: ^{however} one extant ms. reads 616, and two manuscripts now lost or unidentified, ~~with~~ with some Latin and Armenian attestation. While the influential second century theologian Irenaeus supports 666 as the authentic reading (he says it goes back to those who knew the apostle John face to face), the alternative, so weakly attested in our evidence, is important ~~for~~ enough for him to spell out at length his objection to it, amazement at its acceptance by anyone, and ^{an} explanation as a scribal error carelessly repeated.

Living in a culture where transmission was by manuscript, the early Christian writers understood the origin of variant readings in accidental error. But they did not make recourse to this explanation alone when they encountered variation on which they considered that they should comment. Sometimes they deal with variation, especially if it gives rise to problems of exegesis doctrinal in nature, by the stratagem of claiming that heretics have deliberately altered the text in the interest of their erroneous teaching. A thorough investigation of these suggestions, published in 1925, came to the conclusion that in general, such charges prove baseless upon examination, with the clear exception of the second century Marcion. Even in his case, the majority of the changes made by him, have left little or no trace in our many mss. of the gospel of Luke and the Pauline epistles, which constituted his scripture. When variation of text is encountered in the quotations made by heretical writers, it is because they, like orthodox writers quoting such variants, had read such readings in the manuscripts before them. Another approach to the problem in this period is to treat both readings as possessing possible edifying content and expounding them both accordingly, as Origen does in the passage in Romans referred to.

The matter could not be approached in a scientific way until the evidence was collected. This was facilitated only by the invention of printing.* The earliest editors, humanists such as Erasmus and theologians such as Theodore de Beze were already aware in the sixteenth century of the

* Several editions of the Greek N.T. were made, with little textual variation, and all based on late mss. available in the 16th century. From a publisher's list 1633 we are able to explain

variety of readings in some verses: in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the collection of data proceeded with every increasing pace. England saw the publication of the Polyglot Bible, edited by Brian Walton, ^{later} Bishop of ^{Christ} London, in 1655-7 (containing the whole Bible) with the Hebrew or Greek text, as the case was, flanked by all ancient translations till then known, printed in their own scripts, each with a Latin translation: and in 1707, the New Testament edited by John Mill, presented the variant readings of almost a hundred manuscripts, together with the evidence from the ancient versions and the fathers' quotations. Mill in fact gathered about ten thousand variant readings, causing to some great scandal and alarm. (Others who attempted theoretical explanations of variation, and cast doubt upon the soundness of the text of the Greek New Testament came ^{under the censure of} ~~into ill odour with~~ their church authorities: this happened to both the Catholic Richard Simon and the Protestant John James Wetstein. But in spite of small changes the basically late medieval text of the Textus Receptus continued to be printed.)

It was the nineteenth century which saw advances ^{leading} ~~which led~~ to a consensus which ^{has} taken a hundred years to be broken. In the first place, due in large part to the travels and discoveries of the German Constantine Tischendorf, many manuscripts of greater antiquity than those known earlier were discovered: and his discoveries stimulated editions of previously known manuscripts which had not yet been adequately published. (Tischendorf's most striking discovery was the Codex Sinaiticus (which has been this nation's property since 1933, bought from the Soviet Union): amongst the ancient mss. which became better known, was the Codex Vaticanus, which has been in the library of the Vatican at least since 1475 when it figures in a catalogue. These are both manuscripts of the fourth century. Many other mss. of the fifth and sixth centuries were either discovered or received adequate scholarly edition in the nineteenth century. Similarly, editions of early translations, especially into Latin, Coptic and Syriac, became better known and better edited, and there was a corresponding advance in the study of the works of the early Christian writers, both orthodox and heretical, and of their quotations from the New Testament. Thus, a considerable, and increasing volume of data was available, especially in a succession of editions of the New Testament by Tischendorf, and in the work of the Englishman Tregelles, both of whom, following the pioneering work of the German philologist Carl Lachmann, also attempted to give texts nearer to the original than the editions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.) This was the background of the work of the Cambridge scholars Westcott and Hort. They began to collaborate on an edition of the text of the New Testament, in 1853: ^{the results of} their work became available in private to the Company of Revisers of the English New Testament between 1871 and 1876, and at length) Their work was published under the title, The New Testament in the original Greek, in 1881. Until very recently, its influence upon editions of the Greek text, translations into many languages, revisions of older translations in West European languages, and indirectly, upon all questions of the history of early Christianity and the exegesis of the New Testament books, has been almost universal.

Their methodology is an attempt to justify their choice of readings by establishing a history of the transmission of the text. Readings had been chosen and judged original on the basis of their internal evidence: such choice and judgement ^{was} ~~was~~ based on consideration of the intrinsic probability of a given reading, in relation to the thought, style, and so on, of the author, and of the transcriptional probability, that is, the probable changes that scribes will have made in their copying. ~~To justify the text thus established~~ The text thus established proved to follow very

closely the codex Vaticanus, especially when that manuscript was supported by the codex Sinaiticus. To justify this, Westcott and Hort developed their methodology. It would be, I believe, an interesting exercise to trace the antecedents of this in the philosophy of the day. I think that Hegelian views might be found to have been influential (while some years a research student who had been reading Hort's biography, noted that he was deeply interested in the theories of Darwin, and suggested that evolutionary notions may also have been at work.) An historian of ideas might find this a fruitful field. I do not know of any study of it yet.) But now to an outline of their method itself. *[Handwritten: That I have announced]*

Their predecessors had already demonstrated that witnesses to the New Testament text could be divided into groups by the criterion of their attestation of particular sets of variants. (Westcott and Hort) identified four groups: the majority of Greek manuscripts, the later versions and later Fathers have a text which WH called "Syrian"; one Greek manuscript, the Codex Bezae, preserved in Cambridge, the Old Latin (i.e. antedating Jerome's Vulgate), the Old Syriac (i.e. antedating the Peshitta version), Irenaeus (second century Greek writer) and the Latins Tertullian and Cyprian, have a text for which their name is "Western text": a few Greek manuscripts, with quotations in the Alexandrians Origen (third century) and Cyril (fifth century) have a text called "Alexandrian": but other quotations of Origen, with Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, together with the version in the Bohairic dialect of Coptic, attest the fourth text, whose value in their eyes Westcott and Hort showed by their name for it of the "Neutral" text.

Their Syrian text, which we should call "Byzantine", they demonstrated as later than the others by the existence within it of many readings, which appear to be conflated from readings characteristic of the other groups; and by the fact that such a text is not known before the time of the Antiochene preacher and exegete, later patriarch of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, who died in 407. The Alexandrian is a scholarly revision, based on the Neutral, but with some readings adopted from the Western text. It did not figure largely in their theories, being regarded, because of its solely Alexandrian attestation, as a local and locally confined product. WH considered that the choice in establishing the original Greek text lay between the Western text and the Neutral text. The latter name reveals their decision. The patristic attestation for the Western text is earlier than that for the Neutral text by about half a century. This Westcott and Hort admitted: but they then fell back upon their internal criteria. They perceive in the Western text "a disposition to enrich the text at the cost of its purity by alterations or additions taken from traditional and perhaps from apocryphal or other non-biblical sources" and also, "fondness for assimilation"... "Its most dangerous work is 'harmonistic' corruption, that is, partial or total obliteration of differences in passages otherwise more or less resembling each other". A further factor was the nature of the attestation of the Western text: there was one Greek manuscript only, namely the codex Bezae, which presented the text as a unity, although distinctive readings were to be found scattered in a number of (minuscule) manuscripts (that is, manuscripts) written in cursive script from the ninth century on. The rest of the attestation was versional, mainly Latin. There was no doubt however that early fathers appeared to quote the New Testament in this form. Thus, WH had to accept its antiquity. They put down its rise (they do not envisage a single recensional act of creation for it) to a "vigorous and popular ecclesiastical life, little scrupulous as to the letter of venerated writings... in comparison with supposed fitness for immediate and obvious edification". However there were a small number of cases where the inclination of this text to addition was not followed, but addition was found

in the Neutral text. The most important of these were additions in the Lukan passion narrative. In omitting these, WH implicitly conceded that there might be corruption even within a text which in general they thought so pure ~~the~~ as to give to it the name Neutral.]

With such a pattern of explanation and the resultant text scholarship worked for many decades. At Cambridge WH was the prescribed text still in the early 1950s. Commentators still used, even after that, the terminology of 1881, with some small modification. But there had been, since the early years of this century, stirrings amongst those whose prime concern was textual study. Other witnesses to the Western text were discovered, ^{widening} ~~extending~~ the view of its geographical extent. Other variants, other than the omissions of the Neutral additions in the passion narrative, began to commend themselves and to be defended in notes and papers, though rarely admitted into editions. At the end of a lengthy process, marked by other discoveries, and interpretations, two new explanations appeared. The first is called the theory of local texts. This postulates that it was not only in one text that good readings might be found: but that each major patriarchal see of the early Christian world preserved a distinct form of text in which original readings might be discerned. Thus there was no form of witness which should be altogether rejected as worthless even if one text had a particularly high proportion of good and original readings. This was a theory which did more justice to the ~~fact~~ data than Westcott and Hort's had done: but it had weaknesses, not least the attempt to define a specific form of text preserved in the see of Caesarea. Also in the hands of many editors seeking to establish a new text of the NT, it could easily degenerate in practice to criticism by majority vote. How many texts of ancient sees support this variant, how many do not? Follow the majority! The second development which the mid century saw was in effect though perhaps not in its genesis an attempt to counteract this rather wooden use of an historical explanation of the incidence of good readings. This is the rise of editing by rational eclecticism. This, as its name indicates, chooses between variants not on the grounds of their attestation, but of their intrinsic value. There were various factors which might lead to corruption of the original: most important amongst these are changes due to fashions in Greek style, ~~which might be applied in the centuries~~ changes due to doctrinal clarification, changes necessary to rectify grammatical aberrations of the original, and yet others which have an explanation in the accidents of copying. Much illuminating work has been done, especially in the area of changes due to fashions of Greek style: the canons of Atticism, ^{second century movement} which sought to bring Hellenistic prose into conformity with the style of classical antiquity, may be shown to have had a clear influence upon forms of verbs, choice of vocabulary, and so on, in a number of instances. But this method too has latent possibilities of overuse. Are we to choose, utilizing such criteria, any variant which appears to show freedom from the corrupting influence? We must exercise caution. ^{from wherever mss. since it came?} For instance, in John 19.29, the sponge filled with rough beer which is given to assuage the thirst of Jesus, is placed on hyssop Greek (h)yssopo. This denotes a small bush with highly aromatic leaves used in sacrifices, with stalks not more than twenty centimetres in length. How then could it bear the load described or reach the crucified victim? A conjecture was made by the sixteenth century ^{German} classical scholar ~~that~~ Camerarius that this word was a corruption of the word (h)ysso, the legionary's ^{pilum or spear-throwing Roman spear} pilum. It was later found that two mss., 476 (XI c)^x and 1242 (XIII c)^{xx}, have this very reading. Should it then be accepted, as in fact the NEB translators have done? Professor George Kilpatrick, one of the pioneers of rational eclecticism has in fact examined this possibility. Its

plausibility is considerably diminished by the fact that the word denotes the weapon of the legionary. At the time in question, however, the troops stationed in Palestine were auxiliaries whose weapon was not the pilum but the hasta, a weapon in fact mentioned in the adjacent verse 34, as the weapon with which the side of the dead Jesus was pierced. For the understanding of the difficult hyssop of the majority of mss., then we must apparently resort to its symbolic allusions to sacrifice and purification, rather than to a literal search into its underlying botany.

Both modern approaches to the problem, local text theory and eclecticism, emphasise that readings acceptable on rational grounds may be found in all definable text types: readings formerly thought to be characteristic of the majority text of the late medieval period have been approved by the eclecticists. Moreover, since the beginning of the century, there has been a continual stream of discoveries of papyri, which often antedate the parchment manuscripts upon which earlier theorists had to rely for their fund of attested variants. Thus, many readings have now been shown by sheer weight of archaeological fact to date before the end of the third century. A combination of argument from early attestation with argument on intrinsic grounds is found in the Greek New Testament which now dominates the academic field, its dominance achieved by great entrepreneurial skill on the part of the founder of the institute for New Testament textual research in Muenster, Kurt Aland. He will not follow an eclectic method but reserves his approval for variants attested by manuscripts which generally have acceptable readings. Readings attested in early papyri have prior claim as acceptable. Their criteria for judging between readings, otherwise than by these external factors of attestation, are little different from those of earlier scholars. They stress many purely mechanical accidents of transmission, by similarities of letters and so on: and lean, when these fail, upon literary revision as a cause of corruption, harmonizing, dispersing ambiguities, polishing style.