

2-1-1939

## Have We the Original Text of the Holy Scriptures?

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### Recommended Citation

Arndt, W. (1939) "Have We the Original Text of the Holy Scriptures?," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 10 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol10/iss1/11>

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few words of Christian triumph, Christian assurance, looking up to the Lord, the righteous Judge, with all those who are loving His epiphany and awaiting their crowning. Lord, give me a death like this!" (Lenski, *Commentary*, p. 868 f.)

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Our text is in line with the standard Epistle, which speaks of the Gospel ministry, and with the Gospel, which points out John the Baptist as an example of faithfulness. One may speak on *Paul's Exhortation to Faithfulness in the Ministry*. The apostle points out what faithfulness implies, his own example, the glorious crown.—*Fulfil the Ministry*. In spite of afflictions, in emulation of Paul's example, in view of the epiphany.—*Endure Afflictions*. That is part of your calling (sober-mindedness will tell you that, in doing your work of preaching Christ and fulfilling your ministry, you must look for afflictions); you have fellow-sufferers; there is for you a glorious crown.—*What May a Congregation Expect of Its Pastor?* That he fulfil his ministry, suffer afflictions, be ready to depart in view of the glory which he preaches to others.—*Pastor and Congregation Looking for the Epiphany*. Willingly doing their full duty, 5-7; ready to endure affliction, 5, 6; confidently looking for the crown of glory.—While here a pastor writes to a pastor, he himself includes all Christians in v. 8. Hence we may generalize the exhortation and show *Paul as an Example of True Christianity*. In his sober-mindedness, his perseverance to the end, his confident expectation of everlasting glory.—In the introduction briefly picture the past, present, and future of the unbeliever. Theme: *The Past, Present, and Future of a Child of God in the Light of the Gospel*. The past is a record of victories won. The present is a time of sober-minded fulfilment of duty. The future holds for him a glorious consummation of their hope.

TH. LAETSCH

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## Have We the Original Text of the Holy Scriptures?

This question, as our readers will remember, was adverted to in the December, 1938, issue of this journal in an article which discussed the position of the U. L. C. A. with respect to the inspiration of the Scriptures. Prominent theologians of the U. L. C. A., in speaking of the question whether the original text of the Bible must be held to be without error in every detail, have made the statement that the original text of our holy writings is non-existent and that hence insistence on the belief that this text was inerrant

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is not justified.<sup>1)</sup> The force of the argument advanced here against the teaching that the original text of our Bible is inerrant can be easily felt. If the original text has not been preserved, what is the use of debating whether it was truly and fully inspired or not? It might seem that in such a case the whole subject is merely of academic interest and without practical importance. Accordingly, the alleged non-existence of the original text of the Scriptures has often been pointed to by foes of the doctrine of verbal inspiration, although of late it has not been dwelt on as much as a number of years ago. A recent writer, not without a touch of frivolity, puts the argument into these words: "No one can attack a non-existent fortification. The autographs [of the Bible] are nowhere; no man living can prove what was in them, and no man dead has left us any record of what they were like when he read them. The people who condemn philosophy for its assumptions assume that the original autographs were absolutely in accord with eternal truth, to the last jot and tittle. The foes of evolution, because they call it a guess, guess that infinite perfection dwelt in the lost autographs from Alpha to Omega. To question what they say, to deny anything so self-evident as the proposition that our Bible originally existed in complete and flawless accord with all truth, is to proclaim oneself hopelessly lost in hardness of heart and contumacy of mind. What could be more fair?—To admit the need of perfect autographs is to surrender the whole claim of infallibility. All we have is our existing Bible. If it needed to be inerrant, why did God allow it to become errant after having gone to the trouble of getting it all miraculously written out without error? If our salvation depends upon implicit obedience to an infallible revelation, what does God mean by letting the record get corrupt?"<sup>2)</sup>

To begin with, let us inquire whether the position is really tenable that, if the original text has been lost, it cannot make much difference to us whether this text was inerrant or not. A little

1) The U. L. C. A. Commission on Lutheran Relationships, in its report to the recent convention of its Church, said: "The disagreement relates furthermore to a matter of theological interpretation, which, in addition, applies only to a non-existent original text of the Scriptures." Dr. Knubel, President of the U. L. C. A., in his opening sermon at this convention, said: "The crucial difference developed in recent discussions rests in the matter of the verbal inspiration of an original text of the Scriptures (which, of course, does not exist)," etc. Cf. *C. T. M.*, December, 1938, pp. 918, 921.

2) *Do Fundamentalists Play Fair?* By William Mentzel Forrest, 1926, p. 55 f. We are quoting from the first edition. Somewhere we read that the book was revised and that important changes were introduced. Let us hope that the passage cited is among those that were altered for the better.

reflection must show that such a view is untenable. The celebrated *Epistle to Diognetus*, written by an unknown author in the second century of our era and listed among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, came down to modern times in one manuscript only. This manuscript was kept in the library of Strassburg, and in 1870, when this library burned down, it was destroyed. Fortunately the manuscript had been copied several times before its destruction.<sup>3)</sup> Everybody can see how important the nature of this now non-existent manuscript was and how much depended on whether or not it actually contained the precise words of the author. If it was a faithful reproduction of the original, the copies which we now have give us the words of that early Christian writer; if not, then the faithfulness of our modern copyists has at best merely reproduced a faulty transcription and has perpetuated scribal errors. Similarly, if the original manuscripts of the holy writers were inerrant, then it was at least possible for scribes to transmit an inerrant message to posterity. If the original was not inerrant, no amount of faithfulness on the part of the copyists could give it this quality. If the original writings were (and not merely contained) the Word of God, then the copies transmit to us the Word of God in the degree in which they are faithful to the original. If the original manuscripts were not, but merely contained, the Word of God, accuracy of transcription did not avail to render that divine which was not divine. Yes, a great deal depends on the nature of the original.

It is usual in discussions of this nature to begin with saying that the autographs of the holy writers no longer are known to exist. This, of course, all who have made a study of the subject have to admit. The original manuscripts of the New Testament, to speak of them in particular, probably consisted of papyrus sheets,<sup>4)</sup> which were fragile and, when handled much, would quickly become defective. The hope has been expressed that perhaps, since the last hundred years have brought us many interesting, valuable finds, some archeologist, digging in the sands of Egypt, will happen upon an autograph of one of our New Testament books.<sup>5)</sup> But since the days of that arch-deceiver Constantine

3) Cf. *The Apostolic Fathers*. With an English translation by Kir-sopp Lake. Vol. II, p. 349. In the Loeb Classical Library, 1917.

4) We know this positively concerning 2 John. Cf. 2 John 12: διὰ χαρτου καὶ μέλανος, with paper (i. e., papyrus sheet), and ink.

5) "There is little hope that we shall ever see an autograph copy of any book in the Greek New Testament. Casper René Gregory (*Canon and Text of the New Testament*, p. 512) felt that the last leaf of Mark's gospel, which was probably torn off [?], may yet be found. 'I regard it nevertheless' as one of the possibilities of future finds that

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Simonides, who about eighty-five years ago sold to an overjoyed English merchant three "autographs" of New Testament books, those of Matthew, James, and Jude, a fraud which was quickly detected, people have found it necessary to be very cautious.<sup>6)</sup> While it is not impossible that one or the other original manuscript of our Biblical books will be recovered, it is altogether improbable that this will occur.

If, then, the autographs have been lost, with what right can anybody say that the original text is still in our possession? In endeavoring to give an answer, we come to a remarkable and heartening chapter in the history of modern discoveries and research. While many features of our present-day civilization are disgusting and fill us with alarm, the great number of discoveries in our era bringing to light ancient Bible manuscripts is faith-strengthening, proving that the Word of the Lord endureth forever. It is simply astounding how many manuscripts have within the last fifty years been found and made available for scholars. While half a century ago experts spoke of our possessing two thousand manuscripts of the New Testament, E. v. Dobschuetz, in his revision of Nestle's *Einfuehrung in das Neue Testament*, issued in 1923, gives the total of New Testament manuscripts now known to be extant as 4,083.<sup>7)</sup> Since that time a considerable number of manuscripts have been added. Very remarkable, too, is the proximity of the date of some of our recently found New Testament manuscripts to the time when the sacred writings were composed by the evangelists and apostles. In the Chester Beatty Papyri to which the world of scholars was introduced in 1931 we have some New Testament documents which come from the early part of the third century. A few years ago a papyrus fragment was found in the John Rylands Library in England containing several verses of John's gospel and written, according to the opinion of competent scholars, as early as 125 A. D. If John, as is usually assumed, died about 100, we see that there are but twenty-five years intervening between his era and the year when this papyrus was produced.<sup>8)</sup>

Let the reader ponder how different the situation is concerning manuscripts containing the works of our renowned classical Greek

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we receive this gospel with its own authentic finish.' But the brittle papyrus would not last outside of the dry sand of Egypt and the ashes of Herculaneum." A. T. Robertson, *Studies in the Text of the New Testament*, p. 25.

6) Cf. A. Pott, *Der Text des Neuen Testaments*, second edition, p. 14.

7) Page 85 (4th edition). V. Dobschuetz says that at the time of writing the count stood somewhat as follows: 32 papyrus fragments, 170 uncials, 2,320 minuscules, and 1,561 lectionaries.

8) Cf. S. A. Cartledge, *A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament*, 1938, p. 23. Cf. also C. T. M., 1937, p. 212, and especially p. 503 ff.

and Latin authors. On this subject A. T. Robertson says: "There is but a single manuscript that preserved the most of the *Annals* of Tacitus. Only one manuscript gives the Greek *Anthology*. The poems of Catullus come to us in three manuscripts later than the fourteenth century A. D. The best-attested texts, like those of Sophocles, Euripides, Vergil, and Cicero, can only count the manuscripts that give them by the hundreds, and these are from 500 to 1,600 years after the autographs were written. The manuscripts of Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Sophocles, and Thucydides are 1,400 years after the death of the authors. Those of Catullus and Euripides are 1,600, those for Plato are 1,300, and those for Demosthenes are 1,200. Only Vergil has one manuscript in the fourth century and two in the fifth."<sup>9)</sup>

Considering the facts just mentioned and, in addition, the existence of old translations of the sacred texts, some going back to 150 (Old Latin) and 175 (Old Syriac) A. D., and besides the help furnished us in works of early Christian writers who have quoted the New Testament, it must be admitted on all sides that we have a tremendous amount of material (much of it of the highest excellence) at our disposal as we endeavor to determine what the apostles and evangelists originally wrote. Since the textual problems pertaining to the Old Testament are comparatively simple, we do not make special mention of them in this discussion. Perhaps an article treating especially the text of the Old Testament can soon appear in these columns.

But there are so many variant readings, we are told. It is often asserted that the great number of *variae lectiones* makes it impossible for us to ascertain the original text of the New Testament. The difficulty is merely apparent. The words of Westcott and Hort introducing their celebrated edition of the Greek New Testament still hold, although written more than fifty years ago: "With regard to the great bulk of the words of the New Testament, as of other ancient writings, there is no variation or other ground of doubt and therefore no room for textual criticism; and here therefore an editor is merely a transcriber. The same may be said with substantial truth respecting those various readings which have never been received, and in all probability never will be received, into our printed text. The proportion of words virtually accepted on all hands as raised above doubt is very great, not less, on a rough computation, than seven eighths of the whole. The remaining eighth therefore, formed in great part by changes of order and other trivialities, constitutes the whole area of criticism. If the

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9) *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 1925, p. 69 f.

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principles followed in the present edition are sound, this area may be very greatly reduced. Recognizing to the full the duty of abstinence from peremptory decision in cases where the evidence leaves the judgment in suspense between two or more readings, we find that, setting aside differences of orthography, the words in our opinion still subject to doubt only make up about one-sixtieth of the whole New Testament. In this second estimate the proportion of comparatively trivial variations is beyond measure larger than in the former, so that the amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation is but a small fraction of the whole residuary variation and can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text. Since there is reason to suspect that an exaggerated impression prevails as to the extent of possible textual corruption in the New Testament, which might seem to be confirmed by language used here and there in the following pages, we desire to make it clearly understood beforehand how much of the New Testament stands in no need of a textual critic's labors.<sup>10)</sup> Whoever has occupied himself a little with the study of our New Testament manuscripts has discovered that such discrepancies as exist between our various copies are for the greatest part divergences due to scribal errors, which are at once detected. If a person, inviting friends for a gathering, writes on one card "Thursday" and on another "Thurday," everybody will see that a slip has occurred, and nobody will say that the text or meaning of the invitation is in doubt. It is precisely this category to which most of the variant readings in the field of our New Testament manuscripts belong.

"But," says our unrelenting critic, "there are, after all, some variant readings that are not mere lapses of the pen. With respect to them at least you have to admit doubt." No, we reply, even there the reverent, careful New Testament scholar can reach certainty. He has a tremendous amount of manuscript material, he has furthermore well-established canons, or rules, of textual criticism, and he can arrive at results which for him no longer belong to the sphere of doubtful matters. It may be that he cannot convince everybody else that his conclusions are right, but as far as his own questions are concerned, he can definitely answer them. Let him work patiently, prayerfully, and one after the other of the texts where variant readings troubled him will come to stand before him in undimmed clarity.

Finally it may not be superfluous to say that here, too, the path we have to travel is narrow and the gate to it strait and that we are

10) *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. The text revised by B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort. Introduction and appendix by the editors. (Vol. II.) 1882, p. 2 f.

not taken to the skies on flowery beds of ease. God could have done for us what Joseph Smith fraudulently asserted had been done for him as a new prophet and the herald of Mormonism: He could have given us the sacred Word on gold plates, safely deposited in a specified spot. He could have entrusted such plates for safe-keeping to the officials of the Congressional Library in Washington to be inspected and copied by anybody that desired to do so. But that is not God's way of dealing with us. Just as Paul had his thorn in the flesh and stated that he would boast of nothing but his weakness, so we have our difficulties as we travel toward our goal in the unseen world, and one of these is the absence of a text of the Holy Scriptures certified to us with mechanical and mathematical accuracy. But realizing that nothing in our Christian faith, from the belief in the existence of God to the ardent conviction as to the reality of the glories of heaven, rests on mathematical, scientific demonstrations, but that everywhere we walk by faith and not by sight, we shall not be unduly perturbed but thank God for having given us the more sure Word of prophecy written inerrantly by His holy men as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, even though the copies that we have were produced by fallible men.

W. ARNDT

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### The Institutional Missionary and the Divine Service

The institutional missionary is engaged in a special mission endeavor, which is not only very difficult but also requires much experience and training. He deals chiefly with people confined in public institutions, the afflicted, sick, dependent, and the unfortunates, trying to win them for Christ. He is not only a missionary-preacher but also a pastor and spiritual adviser. It is essential and most desirable that such a mission-worker be a properly trained and duly called and ordained pastor of the Church, assigned by her to do mission-work primarily at public institutions. He should be a man of varied and wide pastoral experience, who has proved his worth as a parish pastor, a man of good, sound judgment, of pleasing personality and winning ways, and a person who shows great patience with the people he is privileged to serve. As a representative of a great Church in this particular work he should be free from an inferiority complex in his contact with the executives and the *personnel* of large institutions. To gain and hold the confidence and the respect of the superintendent and the chief executives of an institution is of vital importance. Enjoying the good will of the authorities that be is a great asset to the missionary and to his work. He will