

INTRODUCTION

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

With our conference this year we want to treat the topic of »New Testament Textual Criticism«, which is a very foundational topic in the study of the New Testament. In Germany, New Testament Textual Criticism today is dominated by the research approach of the Institut fuer Neutestamentliche Textforschung (INTF) of the University of Muenster, which has recently edited and published the great critical edition (Editio Critica Maior, or ECM) of the Book of Acts.¹

However, from a historical point of view, Wuerttemberg used to be a bit more independent from Muenster in this foundational area of research. With *Johann Albrecht Bengel* (1687–1752) there existed an independent research institute for New Testament textual variants during the 18th century in the abbey of Denkendorf. Unfortunately, nothing is left of this research institute today. The meticulous work of Bengel with Greek New Testament manuscripts resulted in the publication of a critical text edition in the year 1734, which listed and evaluated many up to then unknown textual variants of Greek manuscripts for the first time.

Bengel acquainted himself with the then still new area of textual research when studying in Halle under *August Hermann Francke* (1663–1727), a Pietist father, who had begun an orphanage by relying on God's provision. Out of this orphanage grew the Franckesche Stiftungen, which later on supervised the first Protestant missionaries that were sent out to Tranquebar in South-East India. In 1702 August Hermann Francke issued an edition of the Greek New Testament by *John Fell* (1625–1686), bishop of Oxford, to which he added an introduction.²

The following guide-lines from the Latin introduction of Francke shall serve as an introduction to todays' lectures, which will be held by Prof. Elliott, one of the current specialists in this field of study. Francke formulated the following guide-lines for treating textual variants in the Greek New Testament:

1. New Testament textual research is a philological and theological science, which one cannot carry out coldly (and unattentively).³
2. The greatest danger is to wander around without a sacred reading.⁴

3. A sanctified life according to the will of God has to be kept in sight as aim and guideline for all evaluation.⁵
4. New Testament Textual research should serve the edification of others and not oneself.⁶
5. The knowledge of the original languages of the Bible is necessary, which few people really master.⁷
6. The thread of Apostolic style, which is infused by the love of God's truth, has to be followed in all its windings like a heavenly stream.⁸
7. Scripture is to be explained and confirmed by scripture.⁹

In the same year, Francke authored a tract on Christ as the core of sacred scripture. In this tract he explained how the New Testament is founded upon Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament. And in this context he defined the style of the apostles in greater detail as follows:

[...] in their [the apostles'] common idiom you will notice, that everywhere they aim at the Old Testament and seek out its innermost foundation through the spirit of wisdom, so that in many instances a single word sees through the entire Old Testament, as Luther says.¹⁰

According to Francke, it therefore is necessary to follow the red thread of Apostolic style, which aims at the Old Testament and sees through it, in order to be able to evaluate textual variants in the New Testament. And even then, there is not always a simple and definite solution to the question of the original reading of the Greek text. Yet, this does not need to cause affliction, if one keeps in mind that Jesus

Christ himself is the living word of God, to which each written record of the New Testament, that has been handed down to us, gives witness.

In light of this fact, we endeavoured to treat the difficult topic of Textual criticism this year, which of course has developed significantly since the time of Francke. In our search for a well-known representative of a comparable philological and theological approach, which Francke recommended, we came across Prof. Elliott from the University of Leeds.

Prof. Elliott, today Professor Emeritus of New Testament Textual Criticism at the University of Leeds, began his academic career with studying and teaching Biblical Hebrew before continuing his studies with a dissertation on the Greek text of 1–2 Timothy and Titus in Oxford. Since then he remained faithful to his dissertation topic by publishing many influential articles on New Testament Textual Criticism of which the most relevant ones are found in his 2010 volume *New Testament Textual Criticism: The Application of Thoroughgoing Principles – Essays on Manuscripts and Textual Variation* (Supplements to *Novum Testamentum* 137) published by Brill.

We thus have a highly renowned and internationally teaching specialist on New Testament Textual Criticism before us today and we are very happy that Prof. Elliott is able to be part of this conference and share with us some of his insights and solutions to New Testament textual variants, which he found during his long academic career in which he engaged with this topic.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See bibliography at the end of this volume.
- 2 <https://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/id/PPN656089202>.
- 3 Fol. 23 (Praefatio nova, 3).
- 4 Fol. 22 (Praefatio nova, 2).
- 5 Fol. 22, 24 (Praefatio nova, 2, 4).
- 6 Fol. 23 (Praefatio nova, 3).
- 7 Fol. 26 (Praefatio nova, 6).
- 8 Fol. 29 (Praefatio nova, 9).
- 9 Fol. 47f (Praefatio nova, 27f).
- 10 A. H. Francke, *Öffentliches Zeugnis von dem Worte Gottes* (Halle: Verlag des Waisenhauses, 1702), 111.

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