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The Living Text of the Gospels represents an important new departure in Gospel studies and textual criticism. David Parker offers a way of reading the Gospels which treats seriously the fact that they first existed as manuscripts. Through an analysis of the different forms of a number of key passages, he demonstrates that the Gospels cannot be properly understood as texts without taking into consideration their physical existence as manuscripts, printed books and electronic text. In conclusion, he argues that the search for an original text of the Gospels overlooks the way in which the early church passed down its traditions.

It is an approach that challenges many of the assumptions of New Testament scholarship. But, at the same time, it does not assume any prior knowledge of the discipline, and can therefore be used as a unique alternative to traditional primers of New Testament textual criticism.

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And generally let this be a rule, that all partitions of knowl-
edges be accepted rather for lines and veins than for sections
and separations.

Francis Bacon, *Of the Advancement of Learning* 2.9.1

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Preface

This book offers a different way of reading the Gospels. It is a way which treats seriously the fact that they are manuscripts. We use the verb ‘to pen’ as a description of authorship. The Gospels were ‘penned’ for a millennium and a half. The reader is invited to see what the consequences are of starting with that fact.

The way in which this undertaking has been set out is to bring together things which are too often kept separate. In the first place, the book has been written as an exploration of the textual criticism of the Gospels. The attempt has been made to assume as little, and to explain as much, as possible. The approach is a practical one, introducing the discipline by the study of examples. It follows that the information is generally provided in order to illuminate a specific point. As a result, some of the material included in the established handbooks of the discipline is absent here. The reader who wants to find out more is directed towards them.

The book has been written with the growing conviction that, once the present approach has been adopted, much else in our understanding of the Gospels requires revision. What I have written differs from many introductions (I mean introductions generally, not those in this discipline) in that it is not a summary of the current state of affairs. Instead, it attempts to find new departures. Recent developments in biblical criticism have brought new challenges for textual criticism. There are even those who view it as a peculiarly obsolete aspect of western imperialism in its guise of the historico-critical method, as a dead member of a moribund body. I hope to convince one or two such individuals that textual criticism is ahead of them and not behind them.

But current fashions in New Testament studies are not as

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significant as certain other contemporary developments. The technological revolution is of more far-reaching significance. It has changed for ever our relationship to the manuscripts and printed books in which the Gospels have hitherto been reproduced and read. Because we are on the threshold of a new age, I have done no more than try to catch a glimpse of what lies ahead. But this new dawn has thrown its own light over the landscape which I survey.

I have, therefore, attempted to write a book which will both describe the subject and offer new ways of looking at it.

It will be found that the focus of the chapters varies. Sometimes my concern is with New Testament studies and in particular with textual problems; sometimes with the use of passages in the early church and later; sometimes with the light that textual criticism can shed on biblical interpretation in contemporary life, sometimes with theological problems. I draw attention to this fact not in order to justify myself, but to encourage the reader not to decide in advance what is likely to be found in a book on textual criticism.

One subject of considerable interest has been totally omitted. The question of the non-canonical Gospels is an important one today, and there are places where it might have been usefully discussed here. But I determined to fix only on the canonical texts, on the grounds that because of their use in the church, both in the past and today, their textual history has been quite different from that of other, non-canonical, Gospels, and their theological significance evidently much greater.

One of my goals has been clarity. I have therefore tried to restrict the footnotes to a minimum. Apart from the obvious one of citing sources, there are three kinds of occasion on which I have included them. The first is where I am using someone else's ideas, and might give the appearance of their being my own. The second is where it seems likely that the reader may wish for more information than I have space to provide, and so needs to be directed to a source. The third is where I have wished to include detail which was not essential to the argument; such material is banished to the obscurity of a learned footnote.

I conclude these preliminaries by expressing my gratitude to those who helped me. In particular: Mark Goodacre, who read and commented on Chapter 7; Peter Harvey, who read the whole book

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and helped me to work out what I meant to say; my father, T. H. L. Parker, who also read the whole book, pointed out the places where I had not written what I meant to say, and offered many other helpful suggestions.

Parts of Chapter 5 and a few paragraphs of Chapter 12 are reworked from two articles in *Theology*. I am grateful to the publishers for permission to use the material.

And finally, a word of grateful and affectionate homage to the two men who encouraged and directed my youthful steps in New Testament textual studies: Matthew Black († 1994) and Ernst Bammel († 1996).

Abbreviations and frequently cited works

Aland, <i>Liste</i>	K. Aland (ed.), <i>Kurzgefasste Liste der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments</i> , Arbeiten zu Neutestamentliche Textforschung 1 (2nd edn, Berlin and New York, 1994)
Alands, <i>Text</i>	K. and B. Aland, <i>The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism</i> (2nd edn, Grand Rapids and Leiden, 1989)
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhundert (Berlin)
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
Jerome, <i>Letters</i>	Jerome, <i>Letters and Select Works</i> , ed. W. H. Fremantle, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 6 (Oxford and New York, 1893)
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
Metzger, <i>Text</i>	B. M. Metzger, <i>The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration</i> (3rd edn, New York and Oxford, 1992)
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
PBA	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>

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List of abbreviations

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- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| SNTSMS | Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas
Monograph Series |
| Westcott and Hort | B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort (eds.), <i>The
New Testament in the Original Greek</i> , Vol. I,
<i>Text</i> , Vol. II, <i>Introduction</i> (Cambridge and
London, 1881) |