Introduction to the Scholar's Toolbox

By Doug Thompson

The basic purpose of this **Toolbox** is to simplify looking up and comparing any passage in any of the four available **historical scribal versions** of *A Course in Miracles* (ACIM). This is achieved by employing a common reference grid based on the familiar scribal chapter and section divisions such that any given reference points to the same place in each of the versions.

Each historical **scribal version** for which source material is available is presented in both **facsimile** and in **e-text** form. A **facsimile** is a photocopy of an original paper manuscript. An "**e-text**" is a transcription of the manuscript in machine-searchable form.

In this first effort, we have not ironed out all the difficulties nor found a way to deal elegantly with the changes in the sequence of the material in the FIP abridgement. However, most of the time over most of the material, the cross-referencing is quite simple, intuitive, and functional.

The spur to this undertaking was the difficulty of locating and checking, any particular passage in the *Shorthand Notes*. Since the
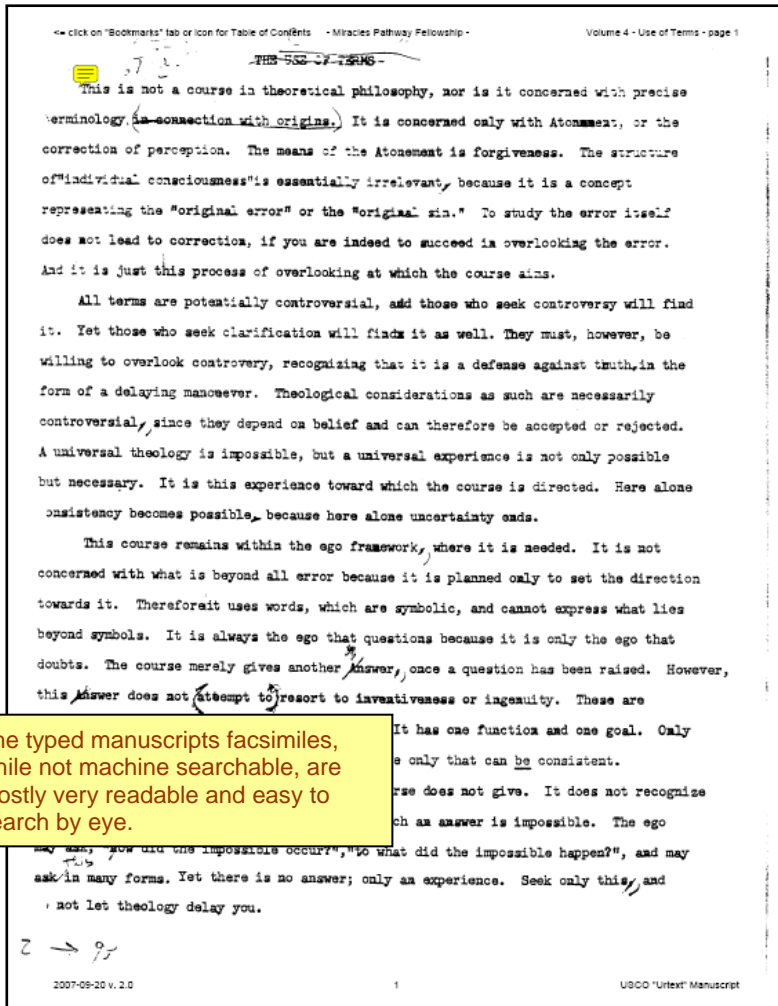
In this 16th century woodcut we can see that we're not the first to develop textual comparison technology!

The technology has changed since the 16th century but the purpose hasn't.

Doug in "The Lab" proofreading

1972 *Hugh Lynn Cayce (HLC)* version was first published on the net in January of 2000, and it be-
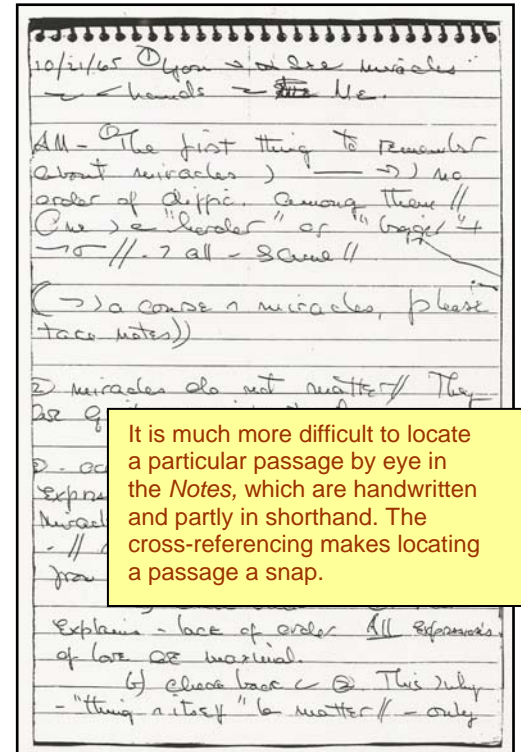
came obvious that there were many differences from the later FIP abridgement, people have wondered "just what is different?"

While debate has raged about "how important" the differences between respective versions are, the truth is that nobody even knows what all the differences are! No complete *Catalogue of Variant Readings* has been compiled. Certainly many, maybe even most of the differences involve minor punctuation or word changes. But large amounts of material have also been removed. Roughly 60,000 words were omitted. Such a massive abridgement is difficult to view as a "minor difference." Much of the early material is only available in "facsimile" form as photocopies of the original handwritten or typed pages, which are not machine searchable. Just find-

The typed manuscripts facsimiles, while not machine searchable, are mostly very readable and easy to search by eye.

Typical of the typed manuscripts, this is page 1 of *Use of Terms*

It is much more difficult to locate a particular passage by eye in the *Notes,* which are handwritten and partly in shorthand. The cross-referencing makes locating a passage a snap.

This is the first page of chapter 1 in the *Shorthand Notebooks*

ing a passage can be a very tedious undertaking. While searchable e-texts of the *Urtext* have been in circulation for some time, their quality is erratic. It is easy enough to find a passage in a searchable e-text, but you still have to check the facsimile to ver-

ify accuracy. Lacking any references to the manuscript page numbers, that checking was very difficult in earlier e-texts.

The arrival of the *Notes* compounded a difficult situation. Reading Schucman's handwriting is challenging and the quantity is vast. Sure, it's possible, with patience, to locate a passage but it was so difficult that most people found it impractical.

The need is of course for that *Catalogue of Variant Readings*. With it one will be able to look up any reference in any version and immediately see exactly what is different in other versions. The preparation of the *Catalogue* is a big job and it is unlikely to appear any time soon. There
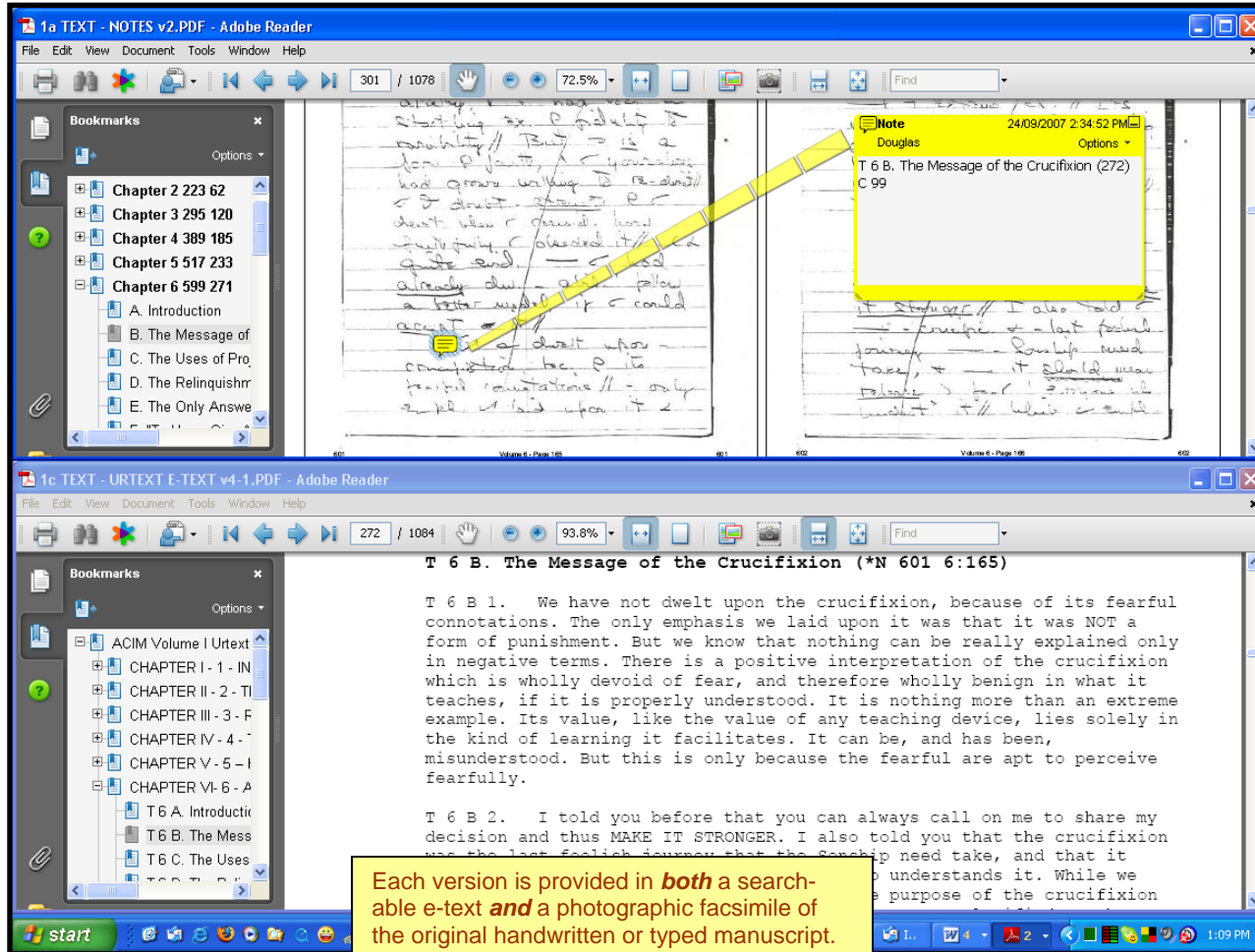
Each version is provided in **both** a searchable e-text **and** a photographic facsimile of the original handwritten or typed manuscript. All with the same reference grid, all easy to compare side by side.

is a more substantial discussion of this in the full *Release Notes*.

A cross-referencing system which provides the same chapter and section breaks for all versions is a step toward that *Catalogue*. With common referencing one can at least narrow one's search! Cross-referencing to the FIP version's ear-ly chapters is problematic because some material is rearranged. So a 1,2,3 sequence in the original can end up in FIP as a 1,3,87,4, sequence, for example. Also, in some sentences almost every word has been changed, even where the meaning is largely preserved. In the earlier versions however, there is very little resequencing and thus cross-referencing is quite simple with a very few exceptions.

By retro-fitting the basic chapter and section grid of the *HLC* to the earlier typed and handwritten materials, we have an "instant" cross-referencing system. By putting it all in "bookmarked" PDF files with the same reference bookmarks, it becomes very simple to line up any two or even three versions side by side *at the same relative point* on a computer screen so as to see at a glance what, if any differences, exist between those versions.

The *Scholar's Toolbox* includes the most accurate copies of some key ACIM primary source materials ever to be published. There are points where accuracy and completeness falls short of our ultimate

goal. The e-texts for instance are not all 100% accurate. They are just vastly *more* accurate.

The problems are not entirely unique to ACIM, and the field of primary textual scholarship has developed a number of tools for tackling these general problems and rendering large collections of handwritten paper documents into organized, referenced, and searchable data-bases which allow either the casual or professional scholar to locate the particular information which may be of interest with relative ease.

Some of those tools have been applied to the ACIM materials here such that, one can locate any given passage in any or all volumes, usually in a matter of seconds, and see for one's self just how it is rendered in each.

In addition, some minimal basic documentation related to the origin, provenance, nature and identity of each document is provided. Each time one of these documents has come to be available, it has arrived without accurate or adequate documentation (usually without any) and often with little or no indication of provenance. Those obtaining copies had to largely guess as to just what it was, where it came from, and where it fit in the history and how it related to any other document. I've attempted to sort the verifiable facts from the "guesses" and provide as accurate and factual information about each as I

can. I can't promise always to be correct, but I can promise to be honest and to rectify any errors brought to my attention.

Of course, due to the lack of access to the basic research data, I have almost certainly erred in some cases. I have attempted to be conservative, document sources, and affirm only that for which there is good evidence. However, the conclusions drawn can rarely be better than the data from which they are drawn.

Not only do we find it difficult to obtain copies, it has proven difficult to get accurate information from those who might be presumed to know. Various published sources do not always agree with each other or the documentary evidence. Some published reports may actually be mistaken as the reliability of the evidence is not uniform.

The evidence is also fragmentary in some cases, and while it genuinely does seem to point to a particular explanation, as new evidence shows up, interpretations based on partial evidence will sometimes be clarified or shown to be simply mistaken.

Elimination of these areas of uncertainty will take a great deal of research and in time the picture will likely become much clearer. What's here is accurate to the best of our ability within the limits of the evidence and source materials and resources currently available.

This collection, then, represents progress toward the goal of accuracy and completeness. It does not represent achievement of that goal.
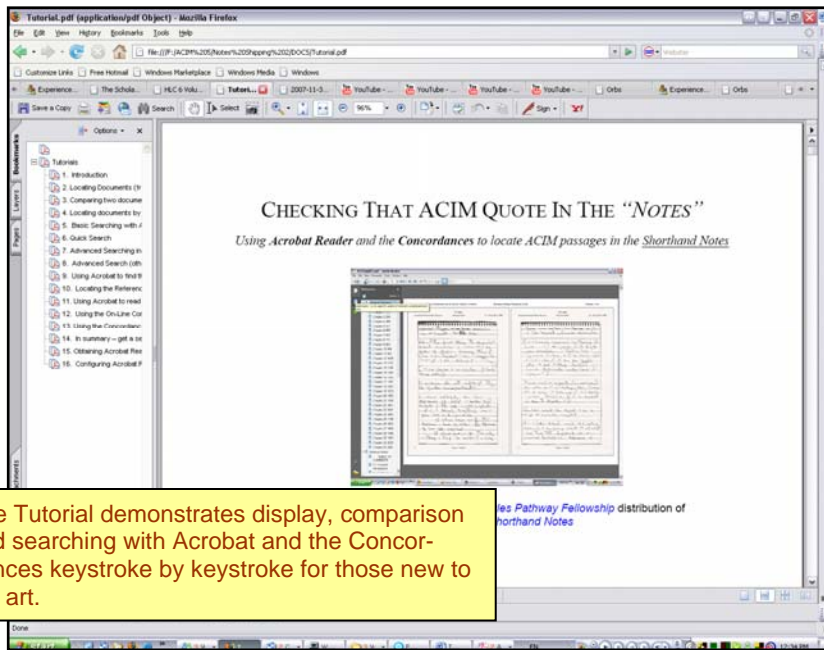
It is my sincerest hope that the availability of this material with its cross-referencing tools will hasten and facilitate more rapid progress toward the goal of understanding and making accessible this most remarkable body of literature.

For those unfamiliar with the use of *Adobe Acrobat* or *Acrobat Reader,* a ***Tutorial*** has been provided which outlines some very elementary techniques for getting two documents on one screen, or if you have dual monitors, (recommended) two screens for easy side-by-each comparison.

The core comparison tool is the referencing system which is common across all versions where those versions are similar. If you write down the reference for a passage from any one version, looking it up in any other should be reasonably easy. See the **Main Menu** both for details on the referencing system and for access to the Tutorial.

Some concerns have been expressed about the mark-up, re-arrangement of pages and otherwise "alteration" of the primary source material. To some it seems like desecrating and messing with an archaeological dig.

Rest assured that "originals" have been kept in pristine condition, unaltered from the way I received

CHECKING THAT ACIM QUOTE IN THE *"NOTES"*

Using *Acrobat Reader* and the *Concordances* to locate ACIM passages in the *Shorthand Notes*

The Tutorial demonstrates display, comparison and searching with Acrobat and the Concordances keystroke by keystroke for those new to the art.

them. The first thing I did with each item that arrived was to copy it and put the "original" in a safe place. So what I am "messing with" are not the archaeological artefacts, but only "images" of them. Copies of that "original unaltered" material are available to anyone wishing them.

The only use made of the original paper copies, and much of this arrived on paper, was to scan the several thousand pages into PDF files. Where I needed a paper copy to work with, I printed the scan.

This material can be thought of like the photos of the Mona Lisa in an Art Gallery catalogue. It's not the original copy that is being tagged and labelled and even re-arranged, but copies, and the purpose is largely to *map* that original in a coherent manner to enhance its accessibility.

The copies on this CD are of far lower quality than the best copies I posses. The *Notes* alone fill five CDs! But I found that I could get a "useful" representation at lower resolution onto a single CD so that is what I have done. The complete five CD set of high resolution scans is available by mail order on the MPF website. The quality of all the images here is not the best. The quality of the best images I have is not the best that exists. I have at best copies of copies of copies. Not even copies of originals.

I certainly look forward to the day when scholars can examine the originals and high quality photographic facsimiles of those originals are readily available for anyone to examine.

All I've managed is "some sort of copy" of most of the relevant material, but I still don't have all of it.

If anyone reading this has access to other material or better quality copies of anything here, PLEASE let me know. This compilation will be updated as new or better material becomes available.
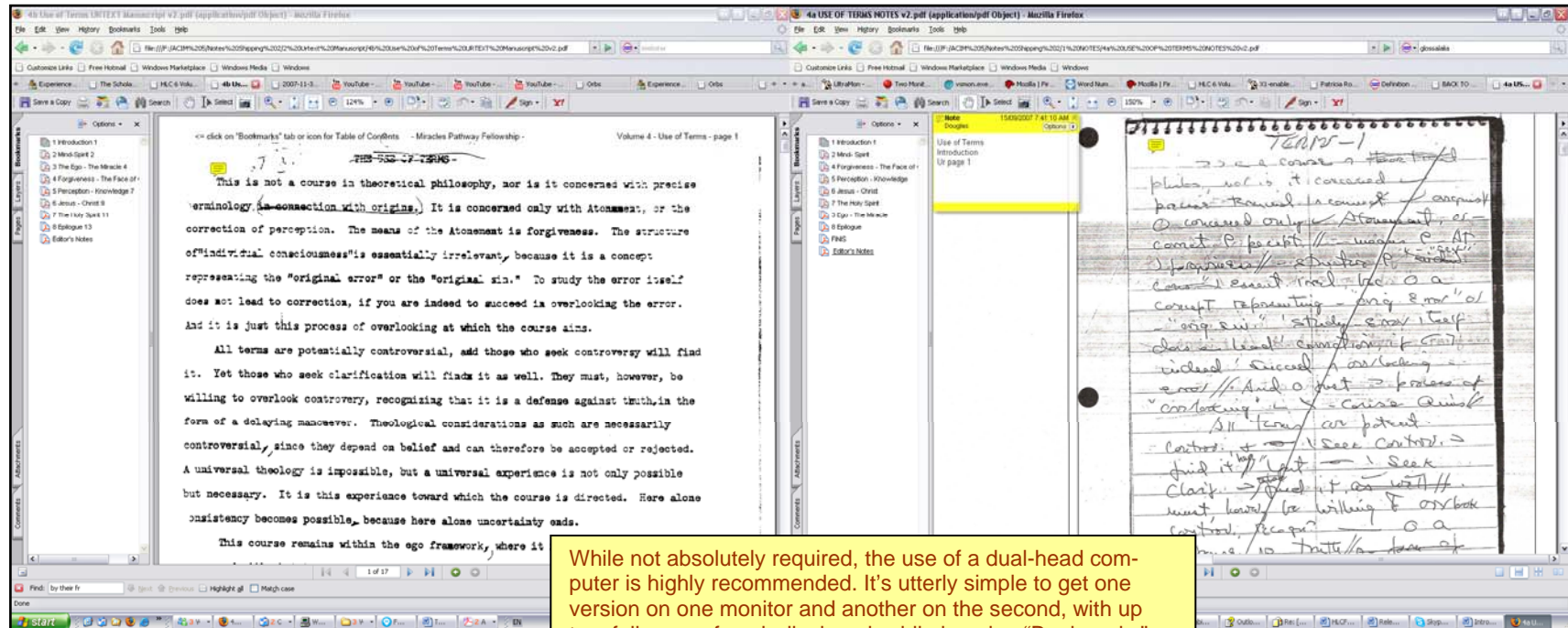
While not absolutely required, the use of a dual-head computer is highly recommended. It's utterly simple to get one version on one monitor and another on the second, with up to a full page of each displayed, while keeping "Bookmarks" and "Toolbars" open for easy navigation. This makes side by side comparison a snap.

General Caveats

Much of the material in this compilation is in an "unfinished" state, and is some way from "fully proofed, annotated, verified and authenticated."

In many cases it is "preliminary" rather than "conclusive" work. It's a vast amount of material to process and the objective here is to gather what is available and organize it enough to make it readily accessible for further study. That has taken years. There are many lifetimes worth of work yet to be done.

For example, a huge amount of proofing work has been done, many thousands of hours' worth over the past five years, but much more remains to be done. Reaching "complete proofing" which means at least ten passes on each page, may take several more years. While the benefits of "complete proofing" are obvious, the value of partly proofed material is much greater than that of entirely unproofed material or nothing at all!

We know many would rather not wait until it is all finished. If the "unfinished" nature of some segments is going to be a cause of distress for you, please delete this material and wait a few years.

As for verification and authentication, it is necessary to apply a different standard here than in most fields of textual scholarship.

We don't have the original primary source documents. Although we have reason to believe they do exist, we're not allowed to see them. Authentication and verification is a tedious but straightforward process of comparing a copy to "the original." When the original is kept in a vault and no one is allowed to see it, the best we can do is attempt indirect verification. The level of certainty can never be as high as we'd like, but it is the best which we can do at this time. Further research will no doubt enhance the quality.

For instance a major issue concerns the identification of the "*Urtext*" manuscripts. If all the original typed manuscripts were available it would probably be child's play to at least recognize their chronological sequence. We are told by Wapnick that there was the original *Thetford Transcript,* called the *Urtext* followed by two retypings of the *Text* and one re-typing of the other volumes by Schucman, followed by the *HLC*, followed by the

FIP *Abridgment*. We have the *Abridgement,* and the *HLC* without any question as to authenticity. And we have an older typed manuscript which consists of the *Text*, *Workbook*, *Manual*, *Use of Terms*, *Psychotherapy*, *Song of Praye*r and *Gifts of God* volumes. Of those only the *Psychotherapy* manuscript really looks like it might be the *Thetford Transcript,* the *Song of Prayer* is indeterminate, while all the others appear to be later retypings.

It's not for lack of wishing to verify and authenticate, nor for a lack of knowing how, the issue is lack of access to the physical objects which alone can make verification and authentication certain.

Our only "witness" who is really in a position to know is Wapnick, but his information cannot be corroborated by textual evidence. He says it's the *Thetford Transcript* but the physical evidence says it is a later retyping.

For a fuller discussion, click on "*The Urtext*" from the main menu, or click HERE.

In such an environment where we cannot simply "look at the originals" or for that matter simply provide facsimiles of them, we cannot be entirely certain what the copies we have managed to secure really are. We can study and analyse and evaluate and examine and speculate and debate, as we have done, but we cannot be sure. The best we can do is a "best guess" with the proviso that as more data becomes available, it is almost certain that some of our guesses will be proven incorrect.

The "best guess" is the best that we can do.

A similar problem pertains to the e-text copies which have been prepared for much if not all of the *Notes*. Pretty decent quality transcripts do exist, transcripts which, while not perfect, are a million times more useful than nothing, but those in possession of them do not feel at liberty to make them available. Thus, instead of providing a searchable, readable e-text for the whole of the *Notes*, the best we can do is provide the *Notes* themselves with the fragmentary e-texts we've prepared. While it is possible to read them, and with practice read them fairly readily, without practice the material is largely inaccessible to the student.

Should we then devote energy to their transcription? Should we duplicate the huge effort already undertaken, which would be a complete waste of time? Or should we wait for the work that has already been done to be made available?

On the assumption that it will become available, I've transcribed only a few segments of particular personal interest.

Despite the lack of a complete transcript for the *Notes* we do have, in the so-called *Urtext* manu-

script, about 95% or more of a complete transcript for the *Notes*. So again, it would be better to have 100% fully proofed, but 95% in need of proofing is a good deal better than nothing.

Among the most pressing issues is that of creating a universal reference system such that every passage in ACIM can be given a unique identifier that is the same in all versions. Without that, "cross-referencing" between versions will forever be clumsy, inefficient and confusing. Yet just to do that, just to design an effective, workable system, requires that we at least have access to the complete body of the scribing, and we do not yet have that. We have , at a guess, better than 95% of it, but we can't be sure and we are sure we are missing some potentially important pieces.

While we can make guesses about that remaining material, until we see it we can't really determine what the requirements for a referencing system for it will be. Again, we can guess, and our guesses might even be quite good, but we can't do more.

Our problem would be so much simpler if the material simply had been destroyed. Where source material does not exist then you try to reconstruct it from surviving clues and that is all anyone can expect. Where the material is known to exist but is kept secret, primary textual scholarship is completely stymied. It's like this: the scholar goes to the library to verify a quote and when he gets there he finds armed guards blocking the library doors. All he can do is wait for them to leave and do what he can do without that crucial verification.

This compilation is much of "all we can do" without access to the primary source material. Certainly there are more things that can be done. We can finish the proofreading work and at least produce first class e-texts of all the manuscripts we do have legible copies of. We can produce an e-text of the *Notes* also, or try to shake loose the ones that already exist.

While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and provide clear indication when we know material has flaws, there are almost certainly mistakes and shortcomings of which we are unaware at release time.

There is always a tension between "delaying release" while material is further refined and "releasing what we have" so that others can take advantage of material which may be useful and that is otherwise unavailable or inaccessible to them. On the one extreme one can delay release forever because no human product is ever "perfect." On the other, you can release material recklessly, falsely representing it by failing to disclose known weaknesses.

The e-texts, for instance, most notably that for the *Urtext Text* lacks more than a single proofing pass on our part in several chapters. Proofing is a slow process, we've done a huge amount of it, but we feel than a 95% accurate e-text is of far greater use than no e-text at all. Would it be better to delay the release for months while we do more proofing or release it now with these caveats?

The source material for our e-text of the *Urtext* was released years ago. We have corrected thousands of errors in it. That release offered no indication that it was anything less than thoroughly proofed though, in fact, a number of chapters weren't the *Urtext* at all, they were the *HLC*. The two versions are close but surely the publishers knew of their own lack of proofing. By saying nothing of known shortcomings many people mistakenly assumed they could trust the material to be accurate. By putting in no cross-referencing information at all, not even the original manuscript page numbers, it was extremely difficult for anyone to actually check any particular quote. As a result, few did check.

Had that minimal cross-referencing been provided, making it easy for the end user to check the accuracy of any given quote, and had a brief caveat pointing out that the accuracy wasn't that great been provided, a great deal of confusion could have been avoided.

In other cases we are including material such as the HLC/FIP variant reading catalogue, the CIMS edition e-text of the *HLC,* Whitmore's *"Original Edition"* the FIP e-text and other material which we did not produce, which we know is far from "perfect" and in some cases which we know has been falsely advertised as being far more accurate than it is. Despite these "flaws" the material is of scholarly and historical interest and since it is available, we chose to include it for those who might find it useful.

Difficulties presented by the ACIM Primary Sources

"The problem" with the ACIM primary source material is threefold. The most obvious problem is that there is an enormous amount of material, over six thousand pages all told, when all the versions of all the documents which are currently available are added up. The production of a highly accurate e-text of all of that is a big job. Simply becoming familiar with it takes years.

Secondly, most of it was made available in the form of paper copies, about 3,500 pages of which are

handwritten with varying – and sometimes very poor – legibility. None of it arrived in searchable computer text files and where volunteer efforts have generated searchable "e-text" copies, those have not had the degree of accuracy we'd like. Each word of each line of each page is deserving of careful attention but with so many pages, that is a big project.

A third problem is that obtaining copies at all – in any state – has often proven exceedingly difficult and in some cases remains impossible as those who possess the originals have been less than eager to permit scholarly inspection. Some have even initiated litigation to prevent or suppress dissemination. While much evidence indicates there were at least two typed versions created prior to the *HLC*, only one has surfaced. Not only has it been difficult to obtain any sort of copy, it has been difficult – sometimes impossible – to verify the identify, accuracy, completeness and in some cases even the original page sequence of the copies we have been able to secure. The legibility and sequence uncertainties often severely hamper progress and certainly detract from the confidence we can have in the results at some points.

If the available sources were "the best" in existence, we'd consider them very good indeed. There aren't really many gaps that appear significant. However, without access to the "best evidence that exists" we're really just guessing there, **we can't be sure**. The problem arises in that there are uncertainties we know **could be cleared up easily** sometimes in just a quick glance at the originals which we know do exist.

To cite just one example, there are only a very few words which are entirely illegible in the available primary sources. That's a *good* thing, there are very few entirely uncertain readings. Quite likely that word is legible in the original. In some cases a few words are missing simply because the original was misaligned in the photocopier. Determining what that word is would take a few seconds with access to the original.

I have participated in discussions lasting months as people try to guess or deduce what an illegible word might be. This is largely a waste of time. The best such inquiries can do is come up with a good guess. But no guess is ever as good as "verification" from inspection of the original which, obviously, would be much easier and more reliable than the best of guesses.

So, not having access to that evidence, uncertainty remains. It's akin to having a quiz with the answers at the end of the book. You take the quiz but aren't allowed to check the answers. If there **were** no answers, you'd just deal with that and accept that "guesses" were the best that was available. But

knowing that there *are* answers you're not allowed to check, well *that* is a problem for scholars.

Any scholarly work on this material suffers in reliability, thoroughness and rigour, and thus ultimate quality due to the lack of access to the original documents, regardless of the skill and competence of the scholar.

The lack of authenticated, verified, fully reliable primary source material continues to discourage serious ACIM scholarship. Even the best scholarship, if restricted to the use of second-rate and uncertain sources, will remain "second-rate scholarship." No conclusions derived from the evidence can be much better than the evidence from which they are derived.

Only uncertain conclusions can be drawn from fragmentary data. Accuracy and completeness remain, then, goals to which we aspire, and not achievements we have accomplished. We can say that to the best of our knowledge this is the *most* complete and *most* accurate published collection of ACIM sources we know of. We can say that we know of rather little that is likely to be significant which is entirely unavailable. But we must also say, without access to all the data, we can't be sure of that.