

[In] a passage in Mark 2, [...] Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees because his disciples had been walking through a grain field, eating the grain on the Sabbath. Jesus wants to show the Pharisees that "Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath" and so reminds them of what the great King David had done when he and his men were hungry, how they went into the Temple "when Abithar was the high priest" and ate the show bread, which was only for the priests to eat. One of the well-known problems of the passage is that when one looks at the Old Testament passage that Jesus is citing (1 Sam. 21:1-6), it turns out that David did this not when Abiathar was the high priest, but, in fact when Abiathar's father Ahimelech was. In other words, this is one of those passages that have been pointed to in order to show that the Bible is not inerrant at all but contains mistakes. (9)

For if there could be one little, picayune mistake in Mark 2, maybe there could be mistakes in other places as well. Maybe, when Jesus says later in Mark 4, that the mustard seed is "the smallest of all seeds on the earth," maybe I don't need to come up with a fancy explanation for how the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds when I know full well it isn't. And maybe the "mistakes" apply to bigger issues. Maybe when Mark says that Jesus was crucified the day *after* the Passover meal was eaten (Mark 14:12; 15:25) and John says he died the day *before* it was eaten (John 19:14)-maybe that is a genuine difference. Or when Luke indicates in his account of Jesus's birth that Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth just over a month after they had come to Bethlehem (and performed the rites of purification; Luke 2:39), whereas Matthew indicated they instead fled to Egypt (Matt. 2:19-22)-maybe that is a difference. Or when Paul says that after he converted on the way to Damascus he did *not* go to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before him (Gal. 1:16-17), whereas the book of Acts says that that was the first thing he did after leaving Damascus (Acts 9:26)-maybe that is a difference. (9-10)

We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later-much later. In most instances, they are copies made many *centuries* later. And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places. [...] These copies differ from one another in so many places that we don't even know how many differences there are. Possibly it is easiest to put it in comparative terms: there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament. Most of these difference are completely immaterial and insignificant. [...] Even so, what is one to make of all these differences? If one wants to insist that God inspired the very words of scripture, what would be the point if we don't *have* the very words of scripture? [...] It would have been no more difficult for God to preserve the words of scripture than it would have been for him to inspire them in the first place. If he wanted his people to have his words, surely he would have given them to them. [...] The fact that we don't have the words surely must show [...] that he did not preserve them for us. And if he didn't perform that miracle, there seemed to be no reason to think that he performed the earlier miracle of inspiring those words. (10-11)

The Bible, at the end of the day, is a very human book. (12)

Jews could worship God anywhere they lived, but they could perform their religious obligations of sacrifice to God only at the Temple in Jerusalem. In other places, though, they could gather together in "synagogues" for prayer and to discuss the ancestral traditions at the heart of their religion. (18)

[B]ooks played virtually no role in the polytheistic religions of the ancient Western world. These religions were almost exclusively concerned with honoring the gods through ritual acts of sacrifice. There were no doctrines to be learned, as explained in books, and almost no ethical principles to be followed. [...] Beliefs and ethics-strange as it sounds to modern ears-played almost no role in religion per se. These were instead matters of personal philosophy. (19)

Judaism was unique in that it stressed its ancestral traditions, customs, and laws, and maintained that these had been recorded in sacred books, which had the status, therefore, of "scripture" for the Jewish people. (19)

Christianity began [...] with Jesus, who was himself a Jewish rabbi (teacher) who accepted the authority of the Torah, and possibly other sacred Jewish books, and taught his interpretation of those books to his disciples. (20)

Scholars have long suspected that some of the letters found in the New Testament under Paul's name were in fact written by his later followers, pseudonymously. [...] One of these allegedly pseudonymous letters is Colossians, which itself emphasizes the importance of letters and mentions yet another one that no longer survives: "And when you have read this epistle, be sure that it is read in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you have read the letter written to Laodicea". (23)

Originally the Christian churches [...] were what we might call charismatic communities. They believed that each member of the community had been given a "gift" (Greek: *charisma*) of the Spirit to assist the community in its ongoing life: for example, there were gifts of teaching, administration, almsgiving, healing, and prophecy. Eventually, however, as the expectation of an imminent end of the world began to fade, it became clear that there needed to be a more rigid church structure, especially if the church was to be around for the long haul. (25-26)

Jesus says, "you have heard it said, 'Whoever divorces his wife should give her a certificate of divorce' [a command found in Deut. 24:1], but *I* say to you that everyone who divorces his wife for reason other than sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." It is hard to see how one can follow Moses' command to give a certificate of divorce, if in fact divorce is not an option. (30-31)

Marcion [...] had come to Rome from Asia Minor, having already made a fortune in what was evidently a shipbuilding business. Upon arriving in the Rome, he made an enormous donation to the Roman church, probably, in part, to get in its good favor. [...] Marcion

was the first Christian that we know of who produced an actual "cannon" of scripture—that is, a collection of books that, he argued, constituted the sacred texts of the faith. [...] Marcion took [...] differentiation between the law of the Jews and faith in Christ to what he saw as its logical conclusion, that there was an absolute distinction between the law on the one hand and the gospel on the other. So distinct were the law and the gospel, in fact, that both could not possibly have come from the same God. Marcion concluded that the God of Jesus (and Paul) was not, therefore, the God of the Old Testament. There were, in fact, two different Gods: the God of the Jews, who created the world, called Israel to be his people, and gave them his harsh law; and the God of Jesus, who sent Christ in to the world to save people from the wrathful vengeance of the Jewish creator God. [...] Marcion's canon consisted of eleven books: there was no Old Testament, only one Gospel, and ten Epistles. [...] Marcion "corrected" the eleven books of his canon by editing out references to the Old Testament God, or to the creation as the work of the true God, or to the Law as something that should be followed. [...] (33-34)

In a frequently cited passage from [Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in Gaul] work *Against Heresies*:

*it is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout the world, and the pillar and ground of the Church is the Gospel ... it is fitting that she should have four pillars.*

In other words, four corners of the earth, four winds, four pillars – and necessarily, then, four Gospels. (35)

Many Christians today may think that the cannon of the New Testament simply appeared on the scene one day, soon after the death of Jesus, but nothing could be farther from the truth. As it turns out, we are able to pinpoint the first time that any Christian of record listed the twenty-seven books of our New Testament as *the* books of the New Testament—neither more nor fewer. Surprising as it may seem, this Christian was writing in the second half of the fourth century, nearly three hundred years after the books of the New Testament had themselves been written. The author was the powerful bishop of Alexandria named Athanasius. (36)

Studies of literacy have shown that what we might think of as mass literacy is a modern phenomenon, one that appeared only with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. It was only when nations could see an economic benefit in having virtually everyone able to read that they were willing to devote the massive resources—especially time, money, and human resources—needed to ensure that everyone had a basic education in literacy. In nonindustrial societies, the resources were desperately needed for other things, and literacy would not have helped either the economy or the well-being of society as a whole. As a result, until the modern period, almost all societies contained only a small minority of people who could read and write. (37)

One of the problems with ancient Greek texts [...] is that when they were copied, no marks of punctuation were used, no distinction made between lowercase and uppercase letters, and, even more bizarre to modern readers, no spaces used to separate words. [...] The words *godisnowhere* could mean quite different things to a theist (God is now

here) and an atheist (God is nowhere); and what would it mean to say *lastnightatdinnerisawabundanceonthetable*? Was this a normal or a supernatural event? (48)

Because the early Christian texts were not being copied by professional scribes, at least in the first two or three centuries of the church, but simply by educated members of the Christian congregations who could do the job and were willing to do so, we can expect that in the earliest copies, especially, mistakes were commonly made in transcription. Indeed, we have solid evidence that this was the case, as it was a matter of occasional complaint by Christians reading those texts and trying to uncover the original words of their authors. (51-52)

Scribes who were associated with the *orthodox* tradition not infrequently changed their texts, sometimes in order to eliminate the possibility of the "misuse" by Christians affirming heretical beliefs and sometimes to make them more amendable to the doctrines being espoused by Christians of their own persuasion. (53)

Far and away the most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple-slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another. (55)

There were other reasons for scribes to make an intentional change – for example, when they came across a passage that appeared to embody a mistake that needed to be corrected, possibly a contradiction found in the text, or a mistaken geographical reference, or a misplaced scriptural allusion. Thus, when scribes made intentional changes, sometimes their motives were as pure as the driven snow. But the changes were made nonetheless, and the author's original words, as a result, may have become altered and eventually lost.

An interesting illustration of the intentional change of a text is found in one of our finest old manuscripts, Codex Vaticanus (so named because it was found in the Vatican library), made in the fourth century. In the opening of the book of Hebrews there is a passage in which, according to most manuscripts, we are told that "Christ bears {Greek: PHERŌN} all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). In Codex Vaticanus, however, the original scribe produced a slightly different text, with a verb that sounds similar in Greek; here the text instead reads: "Christ manifests {Greek: PHANERŌN} all things by the word of his power." Some centuries later, a second scribe read this passage in the manuscript and decided to change the unusual word *manifests* to the more common reading *bears* – erasing the one word and writing in the other. He then added a scribal note in the margin to indicate what he thought of the earlier, second scribe. The note says: "Fool and knave! Leave the old reading, don't change it!" [...] Obviously it is the change of a single word: so why does it matter? It matters because the only way to understand what an author wants to say is to know what his words – all his words – actually were. (Think of all the sermons preached on the basis of a single word in a text: what if the word is one the author didn't actually write?) Saying that Christ reveals all things by his word of power is quite different from saying that he keeps the universe together by his word!(55-56)

### *The Woman Taken in Adultery*

The story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery is arguably the best-known story

about Jesus in the Bible; it certainly has always been a favorite in Hollywood versions of his life. It even makes it into Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, although that movie focuses only on Jesus's last hours (the story is treated in one of the rare flashbacks). Despite its popularity, the account is found in only one passage of the New Testament, in John 7:53-8:12, and it appears not to have been original even there.

The story line is familiar. Jesus is teaching in the temple, and a group of scribes and Pharisees, his sworn enemies, approach him, bringing with them a woman "who had been caught in the very act of adultery." They bring her before Jesus because they want to put him to the test. The Law Of Moses, as they tell him, demands that such a one be stoned to death; but they want to know what he has to say about the matter. Should they stone her or show her mercy? It is a trap, of course. If Jesus tells them to let the woman go, he will be accused of violating the Law of God; if he tells them to stone her, he will be accused of dismissing his own teachings of love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Jesus does not immediately reply; instead he stoops to write on the ground. When they continue to question him, he says to them, "Let the one who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her." he then returns to his writing on the ground, while those who have brought the woman start to leave the scene-evidently feeling convicted of their own wrongdoing-until no one is left but the woman. Looking up, Jesus says, "Woman, where are they? Is there no one who condemns you?" To which she replies, "No one, Lord." He then responds, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more."

It is a brilliant story, filled with pathos and a clever twist in which Jesus uses his wits to get himself-not to mention the poor woman-off the hook. Of course, to a careful reader, the story raises numerous questions. If this woman was caught in the act of adultery, for example, where is the man she was caught with? Both of them are to be stoned, according to the Law of Moses (see Lev. 20:10). Moreover, when Jesus wrote on the ground, what exactly was he writing? (According to one ancient tradition, he was writing the sins of the accusers, who seeing that their own transgressions were known, left in embarrassment!) And even if Jesus did teach a message of love, did he really think that the Law of God given by Moses was no longer in force and should not be obeyed? Did he think sins should no be punished at all?

Despite the brilliance of the story, its captivating quality, and its inherent intrigue, there is one other enormous problem that it poses. As it turns out, it was not originally in the Gospel of John. In fact, it was no originally part of any of the Gospels. It was added by later scribes.

How do we know this? In fact, scholars who work on the manuscript tradition have no doubts about this particular case. [...] The story is not found in our oldest and best manuscripts of the Gospel of John; its writing style is very different from what we find in the rest of John (including the stories immediately before and after); and it includes a large number of words and phrases that are otherwise alien to the Gospel. The conclusion is unavoidable: this passage was not originally part of the Gospel.

How then did it come to be added? There are numerous theories about that. Most scholars think that it was probably a well-known story circulating in the oral tradition about Jesus, which at some point was added in the margin of a manuscript. From there some scribe or other thought that the marginal note was meant to be part of the text and so inserted it immediately after the account that ends in John 7:52. It is noteworthy that other scribes inserted the account in different locations in the New Testament – some of them after John 21:25, for example, and others, interestingly enough, after Luke 21:38. In any event, whoever wrote the account, it was not John.

That naturally leaves readers with a dilemma: if this story was not originally part of John, should it be considered part of the Bible? Not everyone will respond to this question in the same way, but for most textual critics, the answer is no. (63-65)

Starting in the fourth century [...] copies of scripture began to be made by professionals; this naturally curtailed significantly the number of errors that crept in to the text. Eventually, as the decades grew into centuries, the copying of the Greek scriptures became the charge of monks working out of monasteries, who spend their days copying the sacred texts carefully and conscientiously. This practice continued on down through the Middle Ages, right up to the time of the invention of printing with moveable type in the fifteenth century. The great mass of our surviving Greek manuscripts come from the pens of these medieval Christian scribes who lived and worked in the East (for example, in areas that are now Turkey and Greece), known as the Byzantine Empire. For this reason, Greek manuscripts from the seventh century onward are sometimes labeled "Byzantine" manuscripts. (73)

The first major work to be printed on Guttenberg's press was a magnificent edition of the Latin (Vulgate) Bible, which took all of 1450-56 to produce. In the half century that followed, some fifty editions of the Vulgate were produced at various printing houses in Europe. It may seem odd that there was no impulse to produce a copy of the *Greek New Testament* in those early years of printing. [...] Scholars throughout Europe [...] had been accustomed for nearly a thousand years to thinking that Jerome's Vulgate was *the* Bible of the church (somewhat like some modern churches assume that the King James Version is the "true" Bible). The Greek Bible was thought of as foreign to theology and learning; in the Latin West, it was thought of as belonging to the Greek Orthodox Christians, who were considered to be schismatics who had branched off from the true church. Few scholars in Western Europe could even read Greek. (76)

[A]n enterprising Dutch scholar, the humanist intellectual Desiderius Erasmus, both produced and published an edition of the Greek New Testament, receiving the honor, then, of editing the so-called *editio princeps* (= first published edition). [...] It appears that Erasmus relied heavily on just one twelfth-century manuscript for the Gospels and another, also of the twelfth century, for the book of Acts and the Epistles – although he was able to consult several other manuscripts and make corrections based on their readings. For the book of Revelation he had to borrow a manuscript from his friend the German humanist Johannes Reuchlin; unfortunately, this manuscript was almost impossible to read in places, and it had lost its last page, which contained the final six verses of the book. In his haste to have the job done, in those places Erasmus simply took the Latin Vulgate and translated its text back into Greek, thereby creating some textual readings found today in no surviving Greek manuscript. And this [...] is the edition of the Greek New Testament that for all practical purposes was used by the translators of the King James Bible nearly a century later. [...] Erasmus's editions [...] became the standard form of the Greek text to be published by Western European printers for more than three hundred years. (78-79)

[T]he main manuscript that Erasmus used for the Gospels contained both the story of the woman taken into adultery in John and the last twelve verses of Mark, passages that did not originally form part of the Gospels. [...] There was one key passage of scripture that

Erasmus's source manuscript did not contain, however. This is the account of 1 John 5:7-8, which scholars have called the Johannine Comma, found in the manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate but not in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts [...]

*There are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, and these three are one; and there are three that bear witness on earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three are one.*

It is a mysterious passage, but unequivocal in its support of the traditional teachings of the church on the "triune God who is one." Without this verse, the doctrine of the Trinity must be inferred from a range of passages combined to show that Christ is God, as is the Spirit and the Father, and that there is, nonetheless, only one God. This passage, in contrast, states the doctrine directly and succinctly.

But Erasmus did not find it in his Greek manuscripts, which instead simply read: "There are three that bear witness: the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three are one." Where did the "Father, the Word, and the Spirit" go? They were not in Erasmus's primary manuscript, or in any of the others that he consulted, and so, naturally, he left them out of his first edition of the Greek text.

More than anything else, it was this that outraged the theologians of his day, who accused Erasmus of tampering with the text in an attempt to eliminate the doctrine of the Trinity and to devalue its corollary, the doctrine of the full divinity of Christ. In particular, Stunica, one of the chief editors of the Complutensian Polyglot, went public with his defamation of Erasmus and insisted that in future editions he return the verse to its rightful place.

As the story goes, Erasmus – possibly in an unguarded moment – agreed that he would insert the verse in a future edition of his Greek New Testament on one condition: that his opponents produce a *Greek* manuscript in which the verse could be found (finding it in Latin manuscripts was not enough). And so a Greek manuscript was produced. In fact, it was produced for the occasion. It appears that some copied out the Greek text of the Epistles, and when he came to the passage in question, he translated the Latin text into Greek, giving the Johannine Comma in its familiar, theologically useful form. The manuscript provided to Erasmus, in other words, was a sixteenth-century production, made to order.

Despite his misgiving, Erasmus was true to his word and included the Johannine Comma in his next edition, and in all his subsequent editions. These editions [...] became the basis for the editions of the Greek New Testament that were then reproduced time and again by the likes of Stephanus, Beza, and the Elzevirs. These editions provided the form of the text that the translators of the King James Bible eventually used. And so familiar passages to readers of the English Bible – from the King James in 1611 onward, up until modern editions of the twentieth century – include the woman taken in adultery, the last twelve verses of Mark, and the Johannine Comma, even though none of these passages can be found in the oldest and superior manuscripts of the Greek New Testament. They entered into the English stream of consciousness merely by a chance of history, based on manuscripts that Erasmus just happened to have handy to him, and one that was manufactured for his benefit. ( 81-82)

[M]ore than fifty-seven hundred Greek manuscripts have been discovered and catalogued. [...] These fifty-seven hundred include everything from the smallest fragment of manuscripts – the size of a credit card – to very large and magnificent productions, preserved in their entirety. Some of them contain only one book of the New Testament;

others contain a small collection (for example, the four Gospels or the letters of Paul); a very few contain the entire New Testament. There are, in addition, many manuscripts of the various early versions (=translations) of the New Testament. These manuscripts range in date from the early second century (a small fragment called P<sup>52</sup>, which has several verses from John 18) down to the sixteenth century). (88)

[E]xample in 1 Cor. 5:8, Paul tells his readers that they should partake of Christ, the passover lam, and should not eat the "old leaven, the leaven of wickedness and evil." The final word, evil, is spelled PONĒRAS in Greek, which, it turns out, looks a lot like the work for "sexual immorality," PONEIAS. The difference in meaning may not be overwhelming, but it is striking that in a couple of surviving manuscripts, Paul explicitly warns not against evil in general, but against sexual vice in particular. (90)

[I]n Cor. 12:13, Paul points out that everyone in Christ has been "baptized into one body" and they have all "drunk of one Spirit." The word *Spirit* (PNEUMA) would have been abbreviated in most manuscripts as **PMA** which understandably could be – and was – misread by some scribes as the Greek word for "drink" (POMA); and so in these witnesses Paul is said to indicate that all have "drunk of one drink." (91)

Sometimes accidental mistakes were made not because words *looked* alike, but because they *sounded* alike. This could happen, for example, when a scribe was copying a text by dictation [...] as sometimes happened in scriptoria after the fourth century. If two words were pronounced the same, then the scribe doing the copying might inadvertently use the wrong one in his copy, especially if it made perfectly good (but wrong) sense. This appears to be what happened, for example, in Rev. 1:5, where the author prays to "the one who releases us from our sins." The words for "released" (LUSANTI) sounds exactly like the word for "washed" (LOUSANTI), and so it is no surprise that in a number of medieval manuscripts the author prays to the one "who washed us from our sins." (93)

Sometimes scribes changed their texts because they thought the text contained a factual error. This appears to be the case at the very beginning of Mark, where the author introduces his Gospel by saying, "Just as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold I am sending a messenger before your face .... Make straight his paths.'" The problem is that the beginning of the quotation is not from Isaiah at all but represents a combination of a passage from Exod. 23:20 and one from Mal. 3:1. Scribes recognized that this was a difficulty and so changed the text, making it say, "Just as is written *in the prophets* .... " Now there is no problem with a misattribution of the quotation. But there can be little doubt concerning what Mark originally wrote: the attribution to Isaiah is found in our earliest and best manuscripts.

On occasions the "error" that a scribe attempted to correct was not factual, but interpretive. A well-known example comes in Matt. 24:36, where Jesus is predicting the end of the age and says that "concerning that day and hour, no one knows – not the angels in heaven, nor even the Son, but only the Father." Scribes found this passage difficult: the Son of God, Jesus himself, does not know when the end will come? How could that be? Isn't he all-knowing? To resolve the problem, some scribes simply modified the text by taking out the words "nor even the Son." now the angels may be ignorant, but the Son of God isn't. (95)

Sometimes scribes changed their text for more patently theological reasons, to make sure that the text could not be used by "heretics" or to ensure that is said what it was already supposed (by the scribes) to mean. [...] Sometimes scribes altered their text to ensure that a favorite doctrine was duly emphasized. We find this, for example, in the account of Jesus's genealogy in Matthew's Gospel, which starts with the father of the Jews, Abraham, and traces Jesus's line from father to son all the way down to "Jacob, who was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus, who is called the Christ" (Matt. 1:16). As it stands, the genealogy already treats Jesus as an exceptional case in that he is not said to be the "son" of Joseph. For some scribes, however, that was not enough, and so they changed the text to read "Jacob, who was the father of Joseph, to whom being betrothed the virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Christ." Now Joseph is not even called Mary's husband, but only her betrothed, and she is clearly stated to be a virgin – an important point for many early scribes!

On occasion scribes modified their text not because of theology but for liturgical reasons. As the ascetic tradition strengthened in early Christianity, it is not surprising to find this having an impact on scribal changes to the text. For example, in Mark 9, when Jesus casts out a demon that his disciples had been unable to budge, he tells them, "This kind comes out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29). Later scribes made the appropriate addition, in view of their own practices, so that now Jesus indicates that "This kind comes out only by prayer and fasting." [...] Sometimes scribes were influenced not by parallel passages but by oral traditions then in circulation about Jesus and the stories told about his. [...] One outstanding example is the memorable story in John 5 of Jesus healing an invalid by the pool of Bethzatha. We are told at the beginning of the story that a number of people – invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed – lay beside this pool, and that Jesus singled out one man, who had been there for thirty-eight years, for healing. When he asks the man if he would like to be healed, the man replies that here is no one who can place him in the pool, so that "when the water is troubled" someone always beats him to it.

In our oldest and best manuscripts there is no explanation for why this man would *want* to enter the pool once the waters became disturbed, but the oral tradition supplied the lack in an addition to verses 3-4 found in many of our later manuscripts. There we are told that "an angel would at times descend into the pool and disturb the water; and the first to descend after the water was disturbed would be healed." A nice touch to an already intriguing story. (97-99)

[Richard Simon's], French Catholic, [...] view was precisely the one that [...] the wide-ranging variations in the tradition showed that Christian faith could not be based solely on scripture [...] since the text was unstable and unreliable. Instead, [...] the Catholics must be right that faith required the apostolic tradition preserved in the (Catholic) church. (102)

The first is a criterion he [Johann Albrecht Bengel] devised that more or less summed up [the] approach to establishing the original text whenever the wording was in doubt. [...] "Proclivi scriptioni praestat adrua" - *the more difficult reading is preferable to the easier one*. [...] In every instance, to know what the oldest [...] text said [...] the reading that is "harder" to explain. [...] The other breakthrough that Bengel made involves no so much the mass of readings we have at our disposal as the mass of documents that contain them. [...] Documents that are copied from one another naturally bear the closest resemblance to the exemplars from which they were copied and to other copies made

from the same exemplars. [...] All the surviving documents, then, can be arranged in a kind of genealogical relationship, in which there are groups of documents that are more closely related to one another than they are to other documents. [...] In theory one could set up a kind of family tree and trace the lineage of documents back to their source. (111-112)

One of the most controversial figures in the ranks of biblical scholarship in the eighteenth century was J. J. Wettstein (1693-1754). [...] In 1715 Wettstein went to England (as part of a literary tour) and was given full access to the Codex Alexandrinus. [...] One portion of the manuscript particularly caught Wettstein's attention: it was one of those tiny matters with enormous implications. It involved the text of a key passage in the book of 1 Timothy.

The passage in question, 1 Tim. 3:16, had long been used by advocates of orthodox theology to support the view that the New Testament itself calls Jesus God. For the text, in most manuscripts, refers to Christ as "God made manifest in the flesh, and justified in the Spirit." [...] Most manuscripts abbreviated sacred names (the so-called *nomina sacra*), and that is the case here as well, where the Greek word God (ΘΕΟΣ) is abbreviated in two letters, theta and sigma (ΘΣ), with a line drawn over the top to indicate that it is an abbreviation. What Wettstein noticed in examining Codex Alexandrinus was that the line over the top had been drawn in a different ink from the surrounding words, and so appeared to be from a *later* hand (i.e., written by a later scribe). Moreover, the horizontal line in the middle of the first letter, Θ, was not actually a part of the letter but was a line that had bled through from the other side of the old vellum. In other words, rather than being the abbreviation (theta-sigma) for "God" (ΘΣ), the word was actually an omicron and a sigma (ΟΣ), a different word altogether, which simply means "who." The original reading of the manuscript thus did not speak of Christ as "God made manifest in the flesh" but of Christ "*who* was made manifest in the flesh." According to the ancient testimony of the Codex Alexandrinus, Christ is no longer explicitly called God in this passage.

As Wettstein continued his investigations, he found other passages typically used to affirm the doctrine of the divinity of Christ that in fact represented textual problems; when these problems are resolved on text-critical grounds, in most instances references to Jesus's divinity are taken away. This happens, for example, when the famous Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7-8) is removed from the text. And it happens in a passage in Acts 20:28, which in many manuscripts speaks of "the Church of God, which he obtained by his own blood." here again, Jesus appears to be spoken of as God. But in Codex Alexandrinus and some other manuscripts, the text instead speaks of "The Church of the Lord, which he obtained by his own blood." Now Jesus is called the Lord, but he is not explicitly identified as God. [...] Wettstein published a discussion of the problems of the Greek New Testament in anticipation of a new edition that he was preparing. Included among the specimen passages in his discussion were some of these disputed texts that had been used by theologians to establish the biblical basis for the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. For Wettstein, these texts in fact had been altered precisely in order to incorporate that perspective: the original texts could not be used in support of it. (113-114)

It took the two Cambridge scholars, [Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort], twenty-eight years of almost constant work to produce their text, along with an

Introduction that came from the pen of Hort. The work was well worth it. The Greek text that Westcott and Hort produced is remarkably similar to the one still widely used by scholars today, more than a century later. It is not that no new manuscripts have been discovered, or that no theoretical advances have been made, or that no differences of opinion have emerged since Westcott and Hort's day. Yet, even with our advances in technology and methodology, even with the incomparably greater manuscript resources at our disposal, our Greek texts of today bear an uncanny resemblance to the Greek text of Westcott and Hort. (123)

The majority of textual critics today would call themselves *rational eclecticists* when it comes to making decisions about the oldest form of the text. This means that they "choose" (the root meaning of *eclectic*) from among a variety of textual readings the one that best represents the oldest form of the text, using a range of (rational) textual arguments. These arguments are based on evidence that is usually classified as either external or internal in nature. [...] Arguments based on external evidence have to do with the surviving manuscript support for one reading or another. (128)

[M]ost rational eclecticists think that the so-called Alexandrian text [...] originally associated with the careful copying practices of the Christian scribes in Alexandria, Egypt, is the superior form of text available, and in most cases provides us with the oldest or "original" text wherever there is variation. The "Byzantine" and "Western" texts, on the other hand, are less likely to preserve the best readings, when they are not also supported by Alexandrian manuscripts. (131)

[T]wo kinds of internal evidence are typically used. The first involves what are called *intrinsic* probabilities – probabilities based on what the author of the text was himself most likely to have written. [...] The second kind of internal evidence is called *transcriptional* probability. This asks, not which reading an author was likely to have written, but which reading a *scribe* was likely to have created. [...] This is premised on the idea that scribes are more likely to try to correct what they take to be mistakes, to harmonize passages that they regard as contradictory, and to bring the theology of a text more into line with their own theology. (131)

#### MARK AND AN ANGRY JESUS

The textual problem of Mark 1:41 occurs in the story of Jesus healing a man with a skin disease. The surviving manuscripts preserve verse 41 in two different forms; both readings are shown here, in brackets.

<sup>39</sup>And he came preaching in their synagogues in all of Galilee and casting out the demons. <sup>40</sup>And a leper came to him beseeching him and saying to him, "If you will, you are able to cleanse me." <sup>41</sup>And [feeling compassion (Greek: *SPLANGNISTHEIS*)/ becoming angry (Greek: *ORGISTHEIS*)], reaching out his hand, he touched him and said, "I wish, be cleansed." <sup>42</sup>And immediately the leprosy went out from him, and he was cleansed. <sup>43</sup>And rebuking him severely, immediately he cast him out; <sup>44</sup>and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing that which Moses commanded as a witness to them. <sup>45</sup>But when he went out he began to preach many things and to spread the word, so that he [Jesus] was no longer able to enter publicly into a city.

Most English translations render the beginning of verse 41 so as to emphasize Jesus's love for the poor outcast leper: "feeling compassion" (or the word could be translated "moved with pity") for him. In doing so, these translations are following the Greek text found in most of our manuscripts. It is certainly easy to see why compassion might be called for in the situation. We don't know the precise nature of the man's disease – many commentators prefer to think of it as a scaly skin disorder rather than the kind of rotting flesh that we commonly associate with leprosy. In any event, he may well have fallen under the injunctions of the Torah that forbade "lepers" of any sort of live normal lives; they were to be isolated, cut off from the public, considered unclean (Leviticus 13-14). Moved with pity for such a one, Jesus reaches out a tender hand, touches his diseased flesh, and heals him.

The simple pathos and unproblematic emotion of the scene may well account for translators and interpreters, as a rule, not considering the alternative text found in some of our manuscripts. For the wording of one of our oldest witnesses, called Codex Bezae, which is supported by three Latin manuscripts, is at first puzzling and wrenching. Here, rather than saying that Jesus felt *compassion* for the man, the text indicates that he became *angry*. In Greek it is a difference between the words SPLANGNISTHEIS and ORGISTHEIS. Because of its attestation in both Greek and Latin witnesses, this other reading is generally conceded by textual specialists to go back at least to the second century. Is it possible, though, that this is what Mark himself wrote?

As we have already seen, we are never completely safe in saying that when the vast majority of manuscripts have one reading and only a couple have another, the majority are right. Sometimes a few manuscripts appear to be right even when all the others disagree. In part, this is because the vast majority of our manuscripts were produced hundreds and hundreds of years after the originals, and they themselves were copied not from the originals but from other, much later copies. Once a change made its way into the manuscript tradition, it could be perpetuated until *it* became more commonly transmitted than the original wording. In this case, both readings we are considering appear to be very ancient. Which one is original?

If Christian readers today were given the choice between these two readings, no doubt almost everyone would choose the one more commonly attested in our manuscripts: Jesus felt pity for this man, and so he healed him. The other reading is hard to figure out: what would it *mean* to say that Jesus felt angry? Isn't this in itself sufficient ground for assuming that Mark must have written that Jesus felt compassion?

On the contrary, the fact that one of the readings makes such good sense and is easy to understand is precisely what makes some scholars suspect that it is wrong. For, as we have seen, scribes also would have preferred the text to be nonproblematic and simple to understand. The question to be asked is this: which is more likely, that a scribe copying this text would change it to say that Jesus became wrathful instead of compassionate, or to say that Jesus became compassionate instead of wrathful? Which reading better explains the existence of the other? When seen from this perspective, the latter is obviously more likely. The reading that indicates Jesus became angry is the "more difficult" reading and therefore more likely to be "original."

There is even better evidence than this speculative question of which reading the scribes were more likely to invent. As it turns out, we don't have any Greek manuscripts of Mark that contain this passage until the end of the fourth century, nearly three hundred years after the book was produced. But we do have two authors who copied this story within *twenty years* of its first production.

Scholars have long recognized that Mark was the first gospel to be written, and that both Matthew and Luke used Mark's account as a source for their own stories about Jesus. It is possible, then, to examine Matthew and Luke to see how they change Mark, wherever they tell the same story but in a (more or less) different way. When we do this, we find that Matthew and Luke have both taken over this story from Mark, their common source. It is striking that Matthew and Luke are almost word for word the same as Mark in the leper's request and in Jesus's response in verses 40-41. Which word, then, do they use to describe Jesus's reaction? Does he become compassionate or angry? Oddly enough, Matthew and Luke both omit the word altogether.

If the text of Mark available to Matthew and Luke had described Jesus as feeling compassion, why would each of them have omitted the word? Both Matthew and Luke describe Jesus as compassionate elsewhere, and whenever Mark has a story in which Jesus's compassion is explicitly mentioned, one or the other of them retains this description in his own account.

What about the other opinion? What if both Matthew and Luke read in Mark's Gospel that Jesus became angry? Would they have been inclined to eliminate *that* emotion? There are, in fact other occasions on which Jesus becomes angry in Mark. In each instance, Matthew and Luke have modified the account. In Mark 3:5 Jesus looks around "with anger" at those in the synagogue who are watching to see if he will heal the man with the withered hand. Luke has the verse almost the same as Mark, but he removes the reference to Jesus's anger. Matthew completely rewrites this section of the story and says nothing of Jesus's wrath. Similarly, in Mark 10:14 Jesus is aggravated at his disciples (a different Greek word is used) for not allowing people to bring their children to be blessed. Both Matthew and Luke have the story, often verbally the same, but both delete the reference to Jesus's anger (Matt. 19:14; Luke 18:16).

In sum, Matthew and Luke have no qualms about describing Jesus as compassionate, but they never describe him as angry. Whenever one of their sources (Mark) did so, they both independently rewrote the term out of their stories. Thus, whereas it is difficult to understand why they would have removed "feeling compassion" from the account of Jesus's healing of the leper, it is altogether easy to see why they might have wanted to remove "feeling anger." combined with the circumstance that the latter term is attested in a very ancient stream of our manuscript tradition and that scribes would have been unlikely to create it out of the much more readily comprehensible "feeling compassion," it is becoming increasingly evident that Mark, in fact, described Jesus as angry when approached by the leper to be healed.

One other point must be emphasized before we move on. I have indicated that whereas Matthew and Luke have difficulty ascribing anger to Jesus, Mark has no problem doing so. Even in the story under consideration, *apart* from the textual problem of verse 41, Jesus does not treat this poor leper with kid gloves. After he heals him, he "severely rebukes him" and "throws him out." These are literal renderings of the Greek words, which are usually softened in translation. They are harsh terms, used elsewhere in Mark always in context of violent conflict and aggression (e.g., when Jesus casts out demons). It is difficult to see why Jesus would harshly upbraid this person and cast him out if he feels compassion for him; but if he is angry, perhaps it makes better sense.

At what, though, would Jesus be angry? This is where the relationship of text and interpretation becomes critical. Some scholars who have preferred the text that indicates that Jesus "become angry" in this passage have come up with highly improbable interpretations. Their goal in doing so appears to be to exonerate the emotion by making

Jesus look compassionate even though they realize that the text says he became angry. One commentator, for example, argues that Jesus is angry with the state of the world that is full of disease; in other words, he loves the sick but hates the sickness. There is no textual basis for the interpretation, but it does have the virtue of making Jesus look good. Another interpreter argues that Jesus is angry because this leprous person had been alienated from society, overlooking the facts that the text says nothing about the man being an outsider and that, and even if it assumes he was, it would not have been the fault of Jesus's society but of the Law of God (specifically the book of Leviticus). Another argues that, in fact, that is what Jesus was angry about, that the Law of Moses forces this kind of alienation. This interpretation ignores the fact that at the conclusion of the passage (v. 44) Jesus affirms the Law of Moses and urges the former leper to observe it.

All these interpretations have in common the desire to exonerate Jesus's anger and the decision to bypass the text in order to do so. Should we opt to do otherwise, what might we conclude? It seems to me that there are two options, one that focuses on the immediate literary context of the passage and the other, on its broader context.

First, in terms of the more immediate context, how is one stuck by the portrayal of Jesus in the opening part of Mark's Gospel? Bracketing for a moment our own preconception of who Jesus was and simply reading this particular text, we have to admit that Jesus does not come off as a meek-and-mild, soft-featured, good shepherd of the stain-glassed window. Mark begins his Gospel by portraying Jesus as a physically and charismatically powerful authority figure who is not to be messed with. He is introduced by a wild-man prophet in the wilderness; he is cast out from society to do battle in the wilderness with Satan and the wild beasts; he returns to call for urgent repentance in the face of the imminent coming of God's judgment; he rips his followers away from their families; he overwhelms his audiences with his authority; he rebukes and overpowers demonic forces that can completely subdue mere mortals; he refuses to accede to popular demand, ignoring people who plead for an audience with him. The only story in this opening chapter of Mark that hints at personal compassion is the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, sick in bed. But even that compassionate interpretation may be open to question. Some wry observers have noted that after Jesus dispels her fever, she rises to serve them, presumably bringing them their evening meal.

Is it possible that Jesus is being portrayed in the opening scenes of Mark's Gospel as a powerful figure with a strong will and an agenda of his own, a charismatic authority who doesn't like to be disturbed? It would certainly make sense of his response to the healed leper, whom he harshly rebukes and then casts out.

There is another explanation, though. As I've indicated, Jesus does get angry elsewhere in Mark's Gospel. The next time it happens is in chapter 3, which involves, strikingly, another healing story. Here Jesus is explicitly said to be angry at Pharisees, who think that he has no authority to heal the man with the crippled hand on the Sabbath.

In some ways, and even closer parallel comes in a story in which Jesus's anger is not explicitly mentioned but is nonetheless evident. In Mark 9, when Jesus comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John, he finds a crowd around his disciples and a desperate man in their midst. The man's son is possessed by a demon, and he explains the situation to Jesus and then appeals to him: "If you are able, have pity on us and help us." Jesus fires back an angry response, "If you are able? Everything is possible to the one who believes." The man grows even more desperate and pleads, "I believe, help my unbelief." Jesus then casts out the demon.

What is striking in these stories is that Jesus's evident anger erupts when someone doubts his willingness, ability, or divine authority to heal. Maybe this is what is involved in the story of the leper as well. As in the story of Mark 9, someone approaches Jesus gingerly to ask: "If you are *willing* you are able to heal me." Jesus becomes angry. Of *course* he's willing just as he is able and authorized. He heals the man and, still somewhat miffed, rebukes him sharply and throws him out.

There's a completely different feel to the story, given this way of constructing it, a construal based on the text as Mark appears to have written it. Mark, in places, portrays an angry Jesus. (133-139)

[S]ometimes the text of the New Testament were modified for theological reasons. This happened whenever the scribes copying the text were concerned to ensure that the texts said what they wanted them to say; sometimes this was because of theological disputes raging in the scribes' own day. (151)

In the second and third centuries there were, of course, Christians who believed that there was only one God, the Creator of all there is. Other people who called themselves Christians, however, insisted that there were two different gods – one of the Old Testament (a God of wrath) and one of the New Testament (a God of love and mercy). These were not simply two different facets of the same God: they were actually two different gods. Strikingly, the groups that made these claims – including the followers of Marcion [...] - insisted that their views were the true teachings of Jesus and his apostles. Other groups, for example, of Gnostic Christians, insisted that there were not just two gods, but twelve. Others said thirty. Others still said 365. All these groups claimed to be Christian, insisting that their views were true and had been taught by Jesus and his followers. (152)

During the second and third centuries [...] there was a wide range of diversity: diverse groups asserting diverse theologies based on diverse written texts, all claiming to be written by apostles of Jesus.

Some of these Christian groups insisted that God had created this world; others maintained that the true God had not created this world (which is, after all, an evil place), but that it was the result of a cosmic disaster. Some of these groups insisted that the Jewish scriptures were given by the one true God; others claimed that the Jewish scriptures belong to the inferior God of the Jews, who was not the one true God. Some of these groups insisted that Jesus Christ was the one Son of God who was both completely human and completely divine; other groups insisted that Christ was completely human and not at all divine; others maintained that he was completely divine and not at all human; and yet others asserted that Jesus Christ was two things – a divine being (Christ) and a human being (Jesus). Some of these groups believed that Christ's death brought about the salvation of the world; others maintained that Christ's death had nothing to do with the salvation of this world; yet other groups insisted that Christ had never actually died. (153)

One of the best-known early Christian groups [...] [were] the Ebionites. [...] They insisted that Jesus was not himself divine, but was a human being no different in "nature" from the rest of us. He was born from the sexual union of his parents, Joseph and Mary, born like everyone else (his mother was not a virgin), and reared, then, in a Jewish home.

What made Jesus different from all others was that he was more righteous in following the Jewish law; and because of his great righteousness, God adopted him to be his son at his baptism, when a voice came from heaven announcing that he was God's son. From that moment on, Jesus felt called to fulfill the mission God had allotted him – dying on the cross, as a righteous sacrifice for the sins of others. This he did in faithful obedience to his calling; God then honored this sacrifice by raising Jesus from the dead and exalting him up to heaven, where he still waits before returning as the judge of the earth. [...] There are very few, if any, variant readings that appear to have been created by scribes who held to an adoptionistic [of Ebionites] point of view. The reason for this lack of evidence should not be surprising. If an adoptionistic Christian had inserted his views into the text of scripture, surely they would have been corrected by later scribes who took a more orthodox line. What we do find, however, are instances in which texts have been altered in such a way as to oppose an adoptionistic Christology. These changes emphasize that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he was not adopted at his baptism, and that he was himself God. (155-157)

Other antiadoptionistic changes took place in the manuscripts that record Jesus's early life in Gospel of Luke. In one place we are told that when Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple and the holy man Simeon blessed him, "his father and mother were marveling at what was said to him" (Luke 2:33). His father? How could the text call Joseph Jesus's father if Jesus had been born of a virgin? Not surprisingly, a large number of scribes changed the text to eliminate the potential problem, by saying "Joseph and his mother were marveling...." Now the text could not be used by an adoptionist Christian in support of the claim that Joseph was the child's father.

A similar phenomenon happens a few verses later in the account of Jesus as a twelve-year-old in the Temple. The story line is familiar: Joseph, Mary, and Jesus attend a festival in Jerusalem, but then when the rest of the family heads home in the caravan, Jesus remains behind, unbeknownst to them. As the text says, "his parents did not know about it." But why does the text speak of his *parents* when Joseph is not really his father? A number of textual witnesses "correct" the problem by having the text read, "Joseph and his mother did not know it." And again, some verses later, after they return to Jerusalem to hunt high and low for Jesus, Mary finds him, three days later, in the Temple. She upbraids him: "Your father and I have been looking for you!" Once again, some scribes solved the problem – this time by simply altering the text to read "We have been looking for you!" (158)

One of the most intriguing antiadoptionist variants among our manuscripts occurs just where one might expect it, in an account of Jesus's baptism by John, the point at which many adoptionists insisted Jesus had been chosen by God to be his adopted son. In Luke's Gospel, as in Mark, when Jesus is baptized, the heavens open up, the Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and a voice comes from heaven. But the manuscripts of Luke's Gospel are divided concerning what exactly the voice says. According to most of our manuscripts, it spoke the same words one finds in Mark's account: "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:23). In one early Greek manuscript and several Latin one, however, the voice says something strikingly different: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." *Today* I have begotten you! Doesn't that suggest that his day of baptism is the day on which Jesus has become the Son of God? Couldn't this text be used by an adoptionist Christian to make the point

that Jesus became the Son of God at this time? (158-159)

Standing at the opposite end of the theological spectrum from the Jewish-Christian Ebionites and their adaptationistic Christology were groups of Christians known as docetists. The name comes from the Greek word *DOKEŌ*, which means "to seem" or "to appear." Docetists maintained that Jesus was not a full flesh-and-blood human being. He was instead completely (and only) divine; he only "seemed" or "appeared" to be a human being, to feel hunger, thirst, and pain, to bleed, to die. Since Jesus was God, he could not really be a man. He simply came to earth in the "appearance" of human flesh. (162-163)

For proto-orthodox Christians, it was important to emphasize that Christ was a real man of flesh and blood because it was precisely that sacrifice of his flesh and the shedding of his blood that brought salvation – not in appearance but in reality. Another textual variant in Luke's account of Jesus's final hours emphasizes his reality. It occurs in the account of Jesus's last supper with his disciples. In one of our oldest Greek manuscripts, as well as in several Latin witnesses, we are told:

*And taking a cup, giving thanks, he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves, for I say to you that I will not drink from the fruit of the vine from now on, until the kingdom of God comes." And taking bread, giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body. But behold, the hand of the one who betrays me is with me at the table." (Luke 22:17-19)*

In most of our manuscripts, however, there is an addition to the text, an addition that will sound familiar to many readers of the English Bible, since it has made its way into most modern translations. Here, after Jesus says "This is my body," he continues with the words "which has been given for you; do this in remembrance of me"; And the cup likewise after supper, saying 'this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for you.'"

These are the familiar words of the "institution" of the Lord's Supper, known in a very similar form also from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:23-25). Despite the fact that they are familiar, there are good reasons for thinking that these verses were not originally in Luke's gospel but were added to stress that it was Jesus's broken body and shed blood that brought salvation "for you." For one thing, it is hard to explain why a scribe would have *omitted* the verses if they were original to Luke (there is no homoeoteleuton, for example, that would explain an omission), especially since they make such clear and smooth sense when they are added. In fact, when the verses are taken away, most people find that the text sounds a bit truncated. The unfamiliarity of the truncated version (without the verses) may have been what led scribes to add the verses. (165-166)

Another verse that appears to have been added to Luke's Gospel by proto-orthodox scribes is Luke 24:12, which occurs just after Jesus has been raised from the dead. Some of Jesus's women followers go to the tomb, find that he is not there, and are told that he has been raised. They go back to tell the disciples, who refuse to believe them because it strikes them as a "silly tale." Then, in many manuscripts, occurs the account of 24:12: "But Peter, rising up, ran to the tomb, and stooping down he saw the linen cloths alone, and he returned home marveling at what happened." (168)

Not only did Jesus physically suffer and die, and physically come to be raised: for the proto-orthodox he was also physically exalted to heaven. A final textual variant to consider comes at the end of Luke's Gospel, after the resurrection has occurred (but on the same day). Jesus has spoken to his followers for the last time, and then departs from them:

*And it happened that while he was blessing them, he was removed from them: and they returned into Jerusalem with great joy. (Luke 24:51-52)*

It is interesting to note, however, that in some of our earliest witnesses – including the Alexandrian manuscript Codex Sinaiticus – there is an addition to the text. After it indicates that “he was removed from them,” in these manuscripts it states “and he was taken up into heaven.” This is a significant addition because it stresses the physicality of Jesus's departure at this ascension (rather than the bland “he was removed”). In part, this is an intriguing variant because the same author, Luke, in his second volume, the book of Acts, *again* narrates Jesus's ascension into heaven, but explicitly states that it took place “forty days” after the resurrection (Acts 1:1-11). (169)

### Early Christian Separationists

A third area of concern to proto-orthodox Christians of the second and third centuries involved Christian groups who understood Christ not as only human (like the adoptionists) and not as only divine (like the docetists) but as two beings, one completely human and one completely divine. We might call this a “separationists” Christology because it divided Jesus Christ into two: the man Jesus (who was completely human) and the divine Christ (who was completely divine). According to most proponents of this view, the man Jesus was temporarily indwelt by the divine being, Christ, enabling him to perform his miracles and deliver his teachings; but before Jesus's death, the Christ abandoned him, forcing him to face his crucifixion alone.

This separationists Christology was most commonly advocated by groups of Christians that scholars have called Gnostic. The term Gnosticism comes from the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*. It is applied to a wide range of groups of early Christians who stressed the importance of secret knowledge of salvation. According to most of these groups, the material world we live in was not the creation of the one true God. It came about as a result of a disaster in the divine realm, in which one of the (many) divine beings was for some mysterious reason excluded from the heavenly places; as a result of her fall from divinity the material world came to be created by a lesser deity, who captured her and imprisoned her in human bodies here on earth. Some human beings thus have a spark of the divine within them, and they need to learn the truth of who they are, where they came from, how they go there, and how they can return. Learning this truth will lead to their salvation.

This truth consists of secret teaching, mysterious “knowledge” (*gnosis*), which can only be imparted by a divine being from the heavenly realm. For Christian Gnostics, Christ is this divine revealer of the truth of salvation; in many Gnostic systems, the Christ came into the man Jesus at his baptism, empowered him for his ministry, and then at the end left him to die on the cross. That is why Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” For these Gnostics, the Christ literally *had* forsaken Jesus (or “left him behind”). After Jesus's death, though, he raised him from the dead as a reward for his faithfulness, and continued through him to teach his disciples the secret truths that can lead to salvation. (170-171)

A second intriguing example of the phenomenon occurs almost exactly where one might expect to find it, in a Gospel account of Jesus's crucifixion. [...] In Mark's Gospel Jesus is silent throughout the entire proceeding of his crucifixion. The soldiers crucify him, the passers-by and Jewish leaders mock him, as do the two criminals who are crucified with him; and he says not a word – until the very end, when death is near, and Jesus cries out the words taken from Psalm 22 “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani,” which translated means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34).

In one Greek manuscript and several Latin witnesses, Jesus is said not to call out the traditional “cry of dereliction” from Psalm 22, but instead to cry out, “My God, my God, why have you mocked me?” (173)

It is probably safe to say that the copying of early Christian texts was by and large a “conservative” process. The scribes – whether non-professional scribes in the early centuries or professional scribes of the Middle Ages – were intent on “conserving” the textual tradition they were passing on. Their ultimate concern was not to modify the tradition, but to preserve it for themselves and for those who would follow them. Most scribes, no doubt, tried to do a faithful job in making sure that the text they reproduced was the same text they inherited. (177)

#### Women in the Early Church

Modern scholars have come to recognize that disputes over the role of women in the early church occurred precisely because women *had* a role – often a significant and publicly high profile role. Moreover, this was the case from the very beginning, starting with the ministry of Jesus himself. It is true that Jesus's closest followers – the twelve disciples – were all men, as would be expected of a Jewish teacher in first century Palestine. But our earlier Gospels indicate that Jesus was also accompanied by women on his travels, and that some of these women provided for him and his disciples financially, serving as patrons for his itinerant preaching ministry (see Mark 15:40-51; Luke 8:1-3). Jesus is said to have engaged in public dialogue with women and to have ministered to them in public (Mark 7:24-30; John 4:1-42). In particular, we are told that women accompanied Jesus during his final trip to Jerusalem, where they were present at his crucifixion and where they alone remained faithful to him at the end, when the male disciples had fled (Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:40-41). Most significant of all, each of our Gospels indicates that it was women – Mary Magdalene alone, or with several companions – who discovered his empty tomb and so were the first to know about and testify to Jesus's resurrection from the dead (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:108; Luke 23:55-24:10; John 20:1-2). (178-179)

[In early years of Christianity] in some churches women played very important, leadership roles; in others, their roles were diminished and their voices quieted. Reading later documents associated with Paul's churches, after his death, we can see that disputes arose about the roles women should play; eventually there came an effort to suppress the role of women in the churches altogether. (181)

One of the most important passages in the contemporary discussion of the role of women in the church is found in 1 Corinthians 14. As represented in most of our modern English translations, the passage reads as follows.

<sup>33</sup>*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the*

*saints, <sup>34</sup>let the women keep silent. For it is not permitted for them to speak, but to be in subjection, just as the law says. <sup>35</sup>But if they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. <sup>36</sup>What! Did the word go forth only from you, or has it reached you alone?*

The passage appears to be a clear and straightforward injunction for women no to speak (let alone teach!) in the church. [...] As it turns out, the verses in question (vv. 34-35) are shuffled around in some of our important textual witnesses. In three Greek manuscripts and a couple of Latin witnesses, they are found not here, after verse 33, but later, after verse 40. That has led some scholars to surmise that the verses were not written by Paul but originated as a kind of marginal note added by a scribe, possibly under the influence of 1 Timothy 2. The note was then inserted in different places of the text by various scribes – some placing the note after verse 33 and others inserting it after verse 40. (183)

One of the ironies of early Christianity is that Jesus himself was a Jew who worshiped the Jewish God, kept Jewish customs, interpreted the Jewish law, and acquired Jewish disciples, who accepted him as the Jewish messiah. Yet, within just a few decades of his death, Jesus's followers had formed a religion that stood over-against Judaism. [...]

The last twenty years have seen an explosion of research into the historical Jesus. As a result, there is not an enormous range of opinion about how Jesus is best understood – as a rabbi, a social revolutionary, a political insurgent, a cynic philosopher, an apocalyptic prophet: the options go on and on. The one thing that nearly all scholars agree upon, however, is that *no matter how* one understands the major thrust of Jesus's mission, he must be situated in his own context as a first-century Palestinian Jew. Whatever else he was, Jesus was thoroughly Jewish, in every way – as were his disciples. At some point – probably before his death, but certainly afterward – Jesus's followers came to think of him as the Jewish messiah. The term *messiah* was understood in different ways by different Jews in the first century, but one thing that all Jews appear to have had in common when thinking about the messiah was that he was to be a figure of grandeur and power, who in some way – for example, through raising a Jewish army or by leading the heavenly angels – would overcome Israel's enemies and establish Israel as a sovereign state that could be ruled by God himself (possibly through human agency). Christians who called Jesus the messiah obviously had a difficult time convincing others of this claim, since rather than being a powerful warrior or a heavenly judge, Jesus was widely known to have been an itinerant preacher who had gotten on the wrong side of the law and had been crucified as a low-life criminal.

To call Jesus the messiah was for most Jews completely ludicrous. Jesus was not the powerful leader of the Jews. He was a weak and powerless nobody – executed in the most humiliating and painful way devised by the Romans, the ones with the real power. Christians, however, insisted that Jesus *was* the messiah, that his death was not a miscarriage of justice or an unforeseen event, but an act of God, by which he brought salvation to the world. (187-188)

The anti-Jewishness of some second- and third-century Christian scribes played a role in how the text of scripture were transmitted. One of the clearest examples is found in Luke's account of the crucifixion, in which Jesus is said to have uttered a prayer for those responsible:

*And when they came to the place that is called "The Skull," they crucified him there, along with criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." (Luke 23:33-34)*

As it turns out, however, this prayer of Jesus cannot be found in all our manuscripts: it is missing from our earliest Greek witness (a papyrus called P<sup>75</sup>, which dates to about 200 C.E) and several other high-quality witnesses of the fourth and later centuries; at the same time, the prayer can be found in Codex Sinaiticus and a large range of manuscripts, including most of those produced in the Middle Ages. (191)

There were other passages in which the anti-Jewish sentiment of early Christian scribes made an impact on the texts they were copying. One of the most significant passages for the eventual rise of anti-Semitism is the scene of Jesus's trial in the Gospel of Matthew. According to this account, Pilate declares Jesus innocent, washing his hands to show that "I am innocent of this man's blood! You see to it!" The Jewish crowd then utters a cry that was to play such a horrendous role in the violence manifest against the Jews down through the Middle Ages, in which they appear to claim responsibility for the death of Jesus: "His blood be upon us and our children" (Matt. 27:24-25).

The textual variant we are concerned with occurs in the next verse. Pilate is said to have flogged Jesus and then "handed him over to be crucified." Anyone reading the text would naturally assume that he handed Jesus over to his own (Roman) soldiers for crucifixion. That makes it all the more striking that in some early witnesses – including one of the scribal corrections in codex Sinaiticus – the text is changed to heighten even further the Jewish culpability in Jesus's death. According to these manuscripts, Pilate "handed him over *to them* [i.e., to the Jews] in order that *they* might crucify him." Now the Jewish responsibility for Jesus's execution is absolute, a change motivated by anti-Jewish sentiment among the early Christians.

Sometimes anti-Jewish variants are rather slight and do not catch one's attention until some thought is given to the matter. For example, in the birth narrative of the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph is told to call Mary's newborn son Jesus (which means "salvation") "because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). It is striking that in one manuscript preserved in Syriac translation, the text instead says "because he will save *the world* from its sins." Here again it appears that a scribe was uncomfortable with the notion that the Jewish people would ever be saved.

A comparable change occurs in the gospel of John. In chapter 4, Jesus is talking with the woman from Samaria and tells her, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, because salvation comes from the Jews" (v. 22). In some Syriac and Latin manuscripts, however, the text has been changed, so that now Jesus declares that "salvation comes from Judea." In other words, it is not the Jewish people who have brought salvation to the world; it is Jesus's death in the country of Judea that has done so. Once again we might suspect that it was anti-Jewish sentiment that prompted the scribal alteration. (193-194)

[An apologetic, against pagans] alteration comes [...] in Mark's Gospel, in a well-known account in which Jesus's own townsfolk wonder how he could deliver such spectacular teachings and perform such spectacular deeds. As they put it, in their astonishment, "Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon, and aren't his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3). How, they wondered, could

someone who grew up as one of them, whose family they all knew, be able to do such things? (201-202)

In our earliest manuscript of Mark's Gospel, called P<sup>45</sup>, which dates to the early third century (the time of Origin), and in several later witnesses, the verse reads differently. Here Jesus's townsfolk ask, "Is this not the son of the carpenter?" Now rather than being a carpenter himself, Jesus is merely the carpenter's son. [...]

Another verse that appears to have been changed for apologetic reasons is Luke 23:32, which discusses Jesus's crucifixion. The translation of the verse in the New Revised Standard Version of the New Testament reads: "Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him." But the way the verse is worded in the Greek, it could also be translated "Two others, who were also criminals, were led away to be put to death with him." Given the ambiguity of the Greek, it is not surprising that some scribes found it necessary, for apologetic reasons, to rearrange the word order, so that it unambiguously reports that it was the two others, not Jesus as well, who were criminals.

There are other changes in the textual tradition that appear to be driven by the desire to show that Jesus, as a true son of God, could not have been "mistaken" in one of his statements, especially with regard to the future (since the Son of God, after all, would know what was to happen). It may have been this that led to the change we have already discussed in Matthew 24:36, where Jesus explicitly states that no one knows the day or the hour in which the end will come, "not even the angels of heaven nor even the son, but the Father alone." A significant number of our manuscripts omit "nor even the Son." The reason is not hard to postulate; if Jesus does not know the future, the Christian claim that he is a divine being is more than a little compromised.

A less obvious example comes three chapters later in Matthew's crucifixion scene. We are told in Matt. 27:34 that while on the cross Jesus was given wine to drink, mixed with gall. A large number of manuscripts, however, indicate that it was not wine that he was given, but vinegar. The change may have been made to conform the text more closely with the Old Testament passage that is quoted to explain the action, Psalm 69:22. But one might wonder if something else was motivating the scribes as well. It is interesting to note that at the last Supper, in Matt. 26:29, after distributing the cup of wine to his disciples, Jesus explicitly states that he will not drink wine again until he does so in the kingdom of the Father. Was the change of 27:34 from wine to vinegar meant to safeguard that prediction, so that he in fact did not taste wine after claiming that he would not?

Or we might consider the alteration to Jesus's prediction to the Jewish high priest at his trial in Mark 14:62. When asked whether he is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, Jesus replies, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven." Widely considered by modern scholars to embody or approximate an authentic saying of Jesus, these words have proved discomfiting for many Christians since near the end of the first century. For the Son of Man never did arrive on the clouds of heaven. Why then did Jesus predict that the high priest would himself see him come? The historical answer may well be that Jesus actually thought that the high priest would see it, that is, that it would happen within his lifetime. But, obviously, in the context of second-century apologetics, this could be taken as a false prediction. It is no wonder that one of our earliest witnesses to Mark modifies the verse by eliminating the offending words, so that now Jesus simply says that the high priest will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power with the clouds of heaven. No

mention remains of an imminent appearance by One who, in fact, never came. (203-205)

It would be wrong, however, to say – as people sometimes do – that the changes in our text have no real bearing on what the texts mean or on the theological conclusions that one draws from them. We have seen, in fact, that just the opposite is the case. In some instances, the very meaning of the text is at stake, depending on how one resolves a textual problem: Was Jesus an angry man? Was he completely distraught in the face of death? Did he tell his disciples that they could drink poison without being harmed? Did he let an adulteress off the hook with nothing but a mild warning? Is the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly taught in the New Testament? Is Jesus actually called the “unique God” there? Does the New Testament indicate that even the Son of God himself does not know when the end will come? The questions go on and on, and all of them are related to how one resolves difficulties in the manuscript tradition as it has come down to us.

It bears repeating that the decisions that have to be made are by no means obvious, and that competent, well-meaning, highly intelligent scholars often come to opposite conclusions when looking at the same evidence. These scholars are not just a group of odd, elderly, basically irrelevant academics holed up in a few libraries around the world; some of them are, and always have been, highly influential on society and culture. The Bible is, by all counts, the most significant book in the history of Western civilization. And how do you think we have access to the Bible? Hardly any of us actually read it in the original language, and even among those of us who do, there are very few who ever look at a manuscript – let alone a group of manuscripts. How then do we know what was originally in the Bible? A few people have gone to the trouble of learning the ancient languages (Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, etc.) and have spent their professional lives examining our manuscripts, deciding what the authors of the New Testament actually wrote. In other words, someone has gone to the trouble of doing textual criticism, reconstructing the “original” text based on the wide array of manuscripts that differ from one another in thousands of places. Then someone else has taken that reconstructed Greek text, in which textual decisions have been made (what was the original form of Mark 1:2? of Matt. 24:36? of John 1:18? of Luke 22:43-44? and so on), and translated it into English. What you read is that English translation – and not just you, but millions of people like you. How do these millions of people know what is in the New Testament? They “know” because scholars with unknown names, identities, backgrounds, qualifications, predilections, theologies, and personal opinions have *told* them what is in the New Testament. But what if the translators have translated the wrong text? It has happened before. The King James Version is filled with places in which the translators rendered a Greek text derived ultimately from Erasmus's edition, which was based on a single twelfth-century manuscript that is one of the worst of the manuscripts that we now have available to us! It's no wonder that modern translation often differ from the King James, and no wonder that some Bible-believing Christians prefer to pretend there's never been a problem, since God inspired the King James Bible instead of the original Greek! (As the old saw goes, If the King James was good enough for Saint Paul, it's good enough for me). (207-209)

I came to think that my earlier views of inspiration were not only irrelevant, they were probably wrong. For the only reason (I came to think) for God to inspire the Bible would be so that his people would have his actual words; but if he really wanted people to have his actual words, surely he would have miraculously preserved those words, just as he

had miraculously inspired them in the first place. Given the circumstance that he didn't preserve the words, the conclusion seemed inescapable to me that the hadn't gone to the trouble of inspiring them. (211)

Luke has changed the account [of Jesus's crucifixion] and if we wish to understand what Luke wanted to emphasize, we need to take his changes seriously. People don't take his changes seriously, I came to see, when they pretend that Luke is saying the same thing as Mark. Mark wanted to emphasize the utter forsakenness and near-despair of Jesus in the face of death. Interpreters differ in their explanations of *why* this is what Mark wanted to emphasize; one interpretation is that Mark wanted to stress that God works in highly mysterious ways, and that seemingly inexplicable suffering (Jesus at the end seems to be in the throes of doubts: "Why have you forsaken me?") can in fact be the way of redemption. Luke wanted to teach a different lesson. For him, Jesus was not in despair. He was calm and in control, knowing what was happening to him, why it was happening, and what would occur later ("today you will be with me in paradise"). Again interpreters are divided on why Luke portrayed Jesus this way in the face of death, but it may be that Luke wanted to give an example to persecuted Christians about how they themselves should face death, in full assurance that God is on their side despite their torments ("into your hands I commend my spirit"). (213-214)

John's Gospel is quite different from each of the other three (he never has Jesus tell a parable, for example or cast out a demon; and in his account, unlike theirs, Jesus gives long discourses about his identity and does "signs" in order to prove that what he says about himself is true). The message of Paul is both like and unlike what we find in the Gospels (he doesn't say much about Jesus's words or deeds, for example, but focuses on what for Paul were the critical issues, that Christ died on the cross and was raised from the dead). The message of James differs from the message of Paul; the message of Paul differs from the message of Acts; the messages of the Revelation of John differs from the message of the Gospel of John; and so forth. Each of these authors was human, each of them had a different message, each of them was putting the tradition he inherited into his own words. Each of them, in a sense, was changing the "texts" he inherited. (215)

[M]eaning is not inherent and texts do not speak for themselves. If texts could speak for themselves, then everyone honestly and openly reading a text would agree on what the text says. But interpretations of texts abound, and people in fact do *not* agree on what the texts mean. (216)