

Misquoting Manuscripts? The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture Revisited

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Introduction

The view that doctrinal alterations have affected the text of the New Testament was first proposed by Johann Jakob Wettstein, who formulated the following canon of criticism: “Of two variant readings that which seems more orthodox is not immediately to be preferred.”¹ On the other hand, the well-known Cambridge scholar F. J. A. Hort rejected this principle and stated that, “[E]ven among the numerous unquestionably spurious readings of the New Testament there are no signs of deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes.”² More recently, several other scholars have treated the subject.³ In my own research I have encountered some peculiar readings in the textual transmission of the Greek New Testament, some of which most likely reflect the theology, not of the New

¹ “Inter duas variantes lectiones ea, quae magis orthodoxa videtur, non est protinus alteri praeferenda” (J. J. Wettstein, ed., *Novum Testamentum Graecum* [2 vols.; Amsterdam: Dommerian, 1751–1752], 2:864). The canon in question was formulated already in 1730 in his *Prolegomena ad Novi Testamenti graeci editionem accuratissimam*, which was later republished along with the critical edition.

² B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (2 vols.; London: Macmillan, 1881–1882), 1:282.

³ K. W. Clark, “Textual Criticism and Doctrine,” *Studia Paulina: In Honorem Johannis de Zwaan* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1953), 52–65; idem, “The Theological Relevance of Textual Variation in Current Criticism of the Greek New Testament,” *JBL* 85 (1966): 1–16; E. J. Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); H. Eshbaugh, “Textual Variants and Theology: A Study of the Galatian Text of Papyrus 46,” *JSNT* 3 (1979): 60–72; M. C. Parsons, “A Christological Tendency in P75,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 463–79; P. M. Head, “Christology and Textual Transmission: Reverential Alterations in the Synoptic Gospels,” *NovT* 35 (1993): 105–29.

Testament authors, but of the scribes who changed the text.⁴ The fact that scribes did alter the text of the New Testament for dogmatic reasons seems to be accepted by most scholars today.⁵ However, there are considerably different opinions as to the degree to which this phenomenon has affected the textual transmission. Many scholars, including myself, see this phenomenon as relatively limited, either to certain MSS (e.g., \mathfrak{P}^{72} or codex Bezae) or to some isolated passages.⁶

On the other hand, the well-respected New Testament scholar and textual critic Bart Ehrman has proposed that significant parts of the New Testament text have been corrupted by Christian scribes for dogmatic reasons. Ehrman presented his challenging thesis in the monograph *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, and more recently in the popularized version, *Misquoting Jesus*, which appeared on the New York Times bestseller list during a long period in 2005–2006.⁷

Ehrman takes as a starting point Walter Bauer's view of the Christian movement during the first centuries. In Bauer's classic study, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, Bauer rejected the traditional view that early Christianity was made up of a single "orthodox" type of Christianity, from which various heretical minorities developed.⁸ Instead a number of divergent groups with

⁴ T. Wasserman, "Papyrus 72 and the Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex," *NTS* 51 (2005): 137–54; idem, *The Epistle of Jude: Its Text and Transmission* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2006), 30–72; idem, "Theological Creativity and Scribal Solutions in Jude," in *Textual Variation: Theological and Social Tendencies* (ed. H. A. G. Houghton and D. C. Parker; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008), 75–83.

⁵ As an example of contemporary application of this principle, see B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994). The committee frequently refers to possible theological motivation behind textual variants.

⁶ Cf. Head, "Christology," 129: "The 'improvements' examined here have not affected the general reliability of the transmission of the text in any significant matter."

⁷ B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); idem, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story of Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005). More recently Ehrman was followed by his student, W. C. Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition Evidence of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Text of the Canonical Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). When this essay was completed, a second edition of Ehrman's *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* was published (Oxford University Press, 2011). However, the new edition remained virtually unchanged apart from an additional survey on the work done in textual criticism since the first edition.

⁸ W. Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1907).

competing ideas and practices appeared very early on, none of which was in majority. Bengt Holmberg has aptly called Bauer's model of early Christianity a scenario of "centerless multiplicity," i.e., "a movement characterized by great variety and no obvious center that defines the whole."⁹ According to Bauer, the "proto-orthodox" Christian group gained dominion in the third century and eventually succeeded to marginalize other groups. Hence, what was later stamped as "heresy" could in some regions be earlier forms of Christianities that were pushed back. Bauer's view of the early Christian movement has become influential among scholars of early Christianity, especially in the recent decades ever since the English translation of his work appeared in 1971.¹⁰ Holmberg explains this success with the fact that Bauer's refutation of previous historical models has fit well into the emerging post-modern climate.¹¹ On the other hand, Bauer's thesis has received severe critique, ever since the publication of his work.¹²

Building on Bauer's work, Ehrman places the scribes of the New Testament within this historical framework and calls them "the orthodox corruptors of scripture."¹³ He suggests that the diversification of groups within early Christianity with their distinct social structures, beliefs and practices corresponds to the spectrum of individuals who copied the manuscripts. Early on, the text of the New Testament was affected by scribes who, according to their theological persuasion, made conscious changes in the documents they reproduced, making them *say* what they were already thought

⁹ B. Holmberg, "Understanding the First Hundred Years of Christian Identity," in *Exploring Early Christian Identity* (ed. B. Holmberg; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 1–32, esp. 10. In his critique of Bauer's view, Holmberg poses a resulting question that remains unanswered, *viz.* how and when this alleged explosion from a movement with a one-person origin into a plethora of wildly divergent Christ-believing groups took place (*ibid.*, 12–13).

¹⁰ W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Earliest Christianity* (trans. R. A. Kraft and G. Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹² The most detailed critical analysis, which sums up previous critiques, is offered by T. A. Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1988). For a more recent critique and further references, see Holmberg, *Understanding Christian Identity*, 10–16.

¹³ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 274.

to *mean*. Hence, the orthodox gained control, not only over the church and its doctrines, but over the sacred text itself. Nevertheless, it is still possible for the modern critic to detect the various changes that have crept into the textual tradition. Hence, Ehrman presents an impressive number of examples of “orthodox corruption” affected by early Christological controversies. He groups them under four main headings:

Anti-Adoptionistic Corruptions of Scripture
 Anti-Separationist Corruptions of Scripture
 Anti-Docetic Corruptions of Scripture
 Anti-Patrippasianist Corruptions of Scripture¹⁴

Space does not permit me to go through all of Ehrman’s examples in a systematic fashion. In the following I will therefore restrict myself to a selection of passages treated by Ehrman in one of the largest chapters of his monograph, those passages that, according to his claims, reflect anti-adoptionistic corruption. Nevertheless, I believe that the result of this survey, based on a relatively large number of passages is quite representative. I will demonstrate that Ehrman’s interpretation of the textual evidence in these passages is seriously defective. I should emphasize that my aim is not to prove that the New Testament textual tradition is unaffected by “orthodox corruption,” although I think this factor plays a minor role. Instead I attempt to prove that, on a closer inspection, many of Ehrman’s examples do not apply to the issue at all, and that often there are other, more plausible explanations for the textual variation.

Anti-Adoptionistic Corruption

Under various subheadings in the chapter entitled “Anti-Adoptionistic Corruptions of Scripture,” Ehrman treats passages that he thinks scribes changed in order to avoid the notions that Jesus

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

had a human father, or that he came into existence at his birth, or that he was adopted to be the Son of God at his baptism. Conversely, he attempts to demonstrate how the scribes changed other passages in order to emphasize Jesus' divinity, his pre-existence and the fact that his mother was a virgin.¹⁵ In this chapter, however, Ehrman also cites examples of what he views as adoptionistic corruption, similarly reflecting the battle between various early Christian groups over the sacred text. As I refer to Ehrman's examples of orthodox corruption in selected passages, I will indicate the alternative reading(s) in each passage, one of which is identified by Ehrman as the primary reading. Occasionally, however, I have omitted some poorly attested variant readings since they do not affect the discussion. For convenience sake, I will not specify all the textual witnesses that support the printed text of NA²⁷ in a given passage, unless Ehrman claims that it contains an adoptionistic/anti-adoptionistic corruption.

1. Jesus the Unique Son of God—

The Orthodox Affirmation of the Virgin Birth

Since the battle against the adoptionists centered on the doctrine of the virgin birth, Ehrman identifies several examples of orthodox corruption in the birth narratives in the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke.

Luke 2:22

adoptionistic corruption: ἀνήγαγον οἱ γονεῖς τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν (X Θ^{ms} 4 50 64 273 1071 GrNy)

alternative reading: ἀνήγαγον αὐτόν (NA²⁷)

Luke 2:27

anti-adoptionistic corruption: omit τοὺς γονεῖς (245 1347 1510 2643)

alternative reading: τοὺς γονεῖς (NA²⁷)

¹⁵ Ibid., 47–118.

Luke 2:33

anti-adoptionistic corruption: ὁ Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ (A Δ Θ Ψ *f*¹³ 28 33 180 565 579 700 892 1006 1010 1241 1292 1342 1424 1505 ℞ a aur b β c e f ff² l q r¹ vg^{mss} sy^{p,h,pal mss} bo^{pt} ethTH)

alternative readings: ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ (NA²⁷) / Ἰωσήφ ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ (157 [eth^{pp}])

Luke 2:41

anti-adoptionistic corruption: ὁ τε Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ Μαριά(μ) (1012 a b g¹ l r¹) / “Joseph and Mary, his mother (c ff²) / “His kinfolk” (sy^{s,p})

alternative reading: οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ (NA²⁷)

Luke 2:42

adoptionistic corruption: ἀνέβησαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ ἔχοντες αὐτόν (D d e [c r¹])

alternative readings: ἀναβάντων αὐτῶν (Γ Δ Θ *f*^{1,13} 28 157 245 700 1424 ℞) / ἀναβαινόντων αὐτῶν (NA²⁷)

Luke 2:43

anti-adoptionistic corruption: Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ (A C K N Γ Δ Ψ 0130 *f*¹³ 28 245 565 1071 1424 ℞ b c f ff² l q r¹ sy^{p,h} bo^{pt})

alternative reading: οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ (NA²⁷)

Because of the similar nature of the variants in these six passages in Luke 2:22–43 where we find abundant references to Jesus’ parents, I will comment on them together. I have collected the evidence in various witnesses, in order to demonstrate first of all that no witness has been consistently changed throughout this stretch of text, and, secondly, that some witnesses actually display opposite tendencies, which, again, disproves the notion of theologically motivated corruption.

	Luke 2:22	Luke 2:27	Luke 2:33
⌘	ἀνήγαγον αὐτόν	τοὺς γονεῖς	ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ
A	ἀνήγαγον αὐτόν	τοὺς γονεῖς	ὁ Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ (anti-adoptionistic)
B	ἀνήγαγον αὐτόν	τοὺς γονεῖς	ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ
D	ἀνήγαγον αὐτόν	τοὺς γονεῖς	ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ
X	ἀνήγαγον οἱ γονεῖς τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν (adoptionistic)	τοὺς γονεῖς	ὁ Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ (anti-adoptionistic)
245	ἀνήγαγον αὐτόν	omit (anti- adoptionistic)	ὁ Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ (anti-adoptionistic)
c	(ἀνήγαγον αὐτόν)	(τοὺς γονεῖς)	(ὁ Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ) (anti-adoptionistic)

	Luke 2:41	Luke 2:42	Luke 2:43
⌘	οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ	ἀναβαινόντων αὐτῶν	οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ
A	οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ	ἀναβαινόντων αὐτῶν	Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ (anti-adoptionistic)
B	οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ	ἀναβαινόντων αὐτῶν	οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ
D	οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ	ἀνέβησαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ ἔχοντες αὐτόν (adoptionistic)	οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ
X	οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ	ἀναβάντων αὐτῶν	Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ (anti-adoptionistic)
245	οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ	ἀναβάντων αὐτῶν	Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ (anti-adoptionistic)
c	(Ἰωσήφ καὶ Μαριάμ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ) (anti- adoptionistic)	(ἀνέβησαν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ ἔχοντες αὐτόν) (adoptionistic)	(Ἰωσήφ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ) (anti-adoptionistic)

What we see from these examples is that no witness display a consistent pattern of what could be perceived as adoptionistic/anti-adoptionistic changes.¹⁶ On the contrary, some witnesses display opposite tendencies. In the case of Luke 2:42 Ehrman actually identifies adoptionistic corruption only in codex Bezae (D d), not in the other witnesses that share the reading (c e r¹), because here he chooses to relate it to the context and the previous reading in v. 41 (he apparently overlooked the fact that the Old Latin MS e shares both readings with Bezae):

It should be noted that precisely the opposite pattern of corruption occurs in the text of Luke 2:42, where codex Bezae and several Old Latin manuscripts change the text from “they went up to the feast” to read “his parents went up to the feast, taking him with them.” In this case the change [presumably in c and r¹] was apparently not made for theological but for literary reasons, simply to clarify what is assumed in the rest of the pericope, that Jesus accompanied his parents on the occasion. Because the scribe of codex Bezae [and e] reads γονεῖς in verse 41, there can be no question of his importing an adoptionistic tone to the account.¹⁷

So when Ehrman detects an “opposite pattern of corruption” in Bezae he apparently attempts to downplay one of the tendencies and look for an alternative explanation (“literary reasons”). If Ehrman would have followed this line of reasoning consistently, being sensitive to the attestation in all six examples combined, he might have drawn very different conclusions. A question that remains concerning this particular passage in Luke 2:42 is whether it is defensible to assume that the reading reflects an adoptionistic corruption only in Bezae (and presumably e), and not in the other Old Latin witnesses to the same reading. Does Ehrman think that the reading arose independently, and was theologically motivated in just these two “Western” witnesses?

¹⁶ Ehrman admits, apparently with some surprise, that the changes “occur randomly in various textual witnesses, not at all with the kind of consistency one might expect” (ibid., 56). Nevertheless, he fails to realize the negative implication of this observation for his thesis.

¹⁷ Ibid., 103 n. 59.

An alternative explanation is to see the variation mainly as a question of stylistic preference on the part of the scribes. In light of the inconsistent pattern of variation, I do not think the affirmation of the Virgin birth is the issue here. The scribes knew fully that Joseph was not Jesus' biological father—there was no need to prove it by altering the text.

John 6:42

anti-adoptionistic corruption: ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ (P⁶⁶* sa^{ms})

alternative reading: οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ (NA²⁷)

Ehrman suggests that the readings of P⁶⁶ in vv. 42 and 44 reflect a clear attempt to heighten the irony of the unbelievers' misperception that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary.¹⁸ He explains that the reading in v. 42 cannot be an adoptionistic change because of the corresponding change in v. 44 (see below). He fails to consider that the latter change is absent from the Sahidic manuscript (is the change in v. 42 adoptionistic in that witness then?), while it is found in a few other MSS that conversely lack this change in v. 42. In my opinion, this is another instance when Ehrman overinterprets textual minutiae. He should have indicated that the former reading is in fact corrected in P⁶⁶, possibly by the original scribe. In any case, I agree with Royse who regards the original reading in v. 42 with ὅτι as a harmonization to the context: "the scribe simply continued ελεγον with οτι (see vs. 42b: λεγει οτι), a construction that indeeds [sic] makes perfectly good sense."¹⁹

John 6:44

anti-adoptionistic corruption: ὁ πατήρ μου (P⁶⁶ G 157)

alternative reading: ὁ πατήρ (NA²⁷)

¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹ See J. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 453 n. 305. Elsewhere, Royse points out that Ehrman finds doctrinal significance in other readings of P⁶⁶* but he always cites them simply as "P⁶⁶" (p. 459).

Ehrman connects this textual variant to the preceding one in v. 42. Since the scribe of \mathfrak{P}^{66} displays a tendency to omit short words rather than to add them, Ehrman suggests that μου is a deliberate addition in order to “reinforce the ‘correct’ [orthodox] construal of the passage.”²⁰ He does not discuss the presence of the pronoun in other witnesses. Ehrman’s case, combining the corrected reading of \mathfrak{P}^{66} in v. 42 with its reading here, is built on sand. A more natural explanation for the change in all witnesses is to regard it as a harmonization to the common phrase in the Gospel of John, ὁ πατήρ μου (5:17; 6:32; 8:54; 10:29; 14:23; 15:1, 8).²¹ Moreover, Gordon Fee has in fact identified a tendency in \mathfrak{P}^{66} to add the possessive pronoun after πατήρ and μαθηταί when looking at differences from the basic tradition of \mathfrak{P}^{66} .²²

2. The Orthodox Opposition to an Adopted Jesus

Ehrman proposes that the scribes changed some places in order to avoid the notion that Jesus was adopted to be the Son of God at his baptism.²³

Luke 3:22

anti-adoptionistic corruption: σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱὸς μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα (\mathfrak{P}^4 ✠ A B L W Δ Θ Ψ 070 0233^{vid} f^{1.13} 33 579 1241 \mathfrak{M} aur e q vg sy^h sa bo^{pt} arm^{mss} eth geo slav Aug NA²⁷)

alternative reading: υἱὸς μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε (D a [b] c d ff² l r¹ Ju, Cl [add ἀγαπητός after σύ] Meth Eus Ambst Hil Tyc Latin mss^{acc. to Aug} Cyr)

This is the first instance that Ehrman identifies a corruption in the text adopted in NA²⁷. The passage is also one of four highlighted

²⁰ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 57, 104 n. 64. It should be noted that \mathfrak{P}^{66} has a very slight tendency to omit more often than to add (Royse, *Scribal Habits*, 544).

²¹ The phrase occurs four times in the other Gospels (Matt 15:3; 16:17; 18:35; Luke 5:17). According to Royse, harmonization is frequent in \mathfrak{P}^{66} and there are several examples of singular readings reflecting harmonization to Johannine usage, e.g., 17:3, 6, 24; 18:37; 21:6b (ibid., 542–4). Royse does not treat this particular passage since it is not a singular reading.

²² G. D. Fee, *Papyrus Bodmer II (\mathfrak{P}^{66}): Its Textual Relationships and Scribal Characteristics* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1968), 51.

²³ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 61–62.

examples of anti-adoptionistic corruption that receive extensive treatment under separate headings (Mark 1:1; Luke 3:22; John 1:18; 1 Tim 3:16).²⁴ Ehrman rightly points out that the external attestation of the second reading in Luke 3:22, which he thinks is original, has been discounted too easily in some treatments.²⁵ The reading is indeed well attested in the early period. In my opinion, however, Ehrman exaggerates the weight of the evidence in favor of it.

First, he states that among sources of the second and third centuries, it is virtually the only reading to be found, and “except for the third-century manuscript \mathfrak{P}^4 , there is no certain attestation of the other reading [adopted in NA²⁷], the reading of our later manuscripts, in this early period.”²⁶ In fact, the most recent research on \mathfrak{P}^4 suggests that it belongs in the second century.²⁷ Moreover, Clement of Alexandria attests to a conflated reading (including ἀγαπητός), so it is clear that both readings are very early. Furthermore, Ehrman does not mention the important remark by Augustine that the most ancient Greek MSS do not attest to the second reading.²⁸

His appeal to sources like the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, the *Didascalia*, and the *Gospel according to the Ebionites* is

²⁴ Because of the limited space I will only treat three of these passages (Luke 3:22; John 1:18; 1 Tim 3:16). An examination of Mark 1:1 will be published elsewhere. It suffices to say that new textual evidence has come to light since the publication of Ehrman’s monograph that strengthens the possibility of an accidental omission of the phrase “Son of God” (υἱοῦ θεοῦ) in Mark 1:1, interpreted by Ehrman as a deliberate anti-adoptionistic omission (*Orthodox Corruption*, 75). In addition to the evidence presented by Ehrman, the following Byzantine MSS omit the phrase: 530 582* 820* 1021 1436 1692 2430 2533 12211 (K. Aland and B. Aland, eds., *Text und Textwert der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments. IV.1: Die Synoptischen Evangelien: Das Markusevangelium* [2 vols.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998], 2:2). Hence, Ehrman’s statement that an accidental omission is “rendered yet more difficult by the circumstance that the same error, so far as our evidence suggests, was not made by later scribes of the Byzantine tradition” is now obsolete (*Orthodox Corruption*, 73).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Cf. *idem*, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and Faiths We Never Knew*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 222: “In the oldest surviving witnesses to Luke’s Gospel, however, the voice instead quotes the words of Psalms 2:7.”

²⁷ For the latest discussion, see S. D. Charlesworth, “T. C. Skeat, P64+67 and P4, and the Problem of Fibre Orientation in Codicological Reconstruction,” *NTS* 53 (2007): 582–604.

²⁸ Ehrman is clearly aware of the passage in *Cons.* 2.14 since he refers to it in order to demonstrate that Augustine knew both readings (*Orthodox Corruption*, 107 n. 92), but he omits the crucial remark about the MSS that were available to Augustine: “*Illud uero quod nonnulli codices habent secundum Lucam, hoc illa uoce sonuisse quod in Psalmo scriptum est: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te: quamquam in antiquioribus codicibus Graecis non inueniri perhibeatur . . .*” (CSEL 43:132).

questionable, since we do not know exactly which source or sources they depend on. It is likely that some traits of these accounts derive from an apocryphal source. The most significant trace is found already in Justin, who says that after Jesus had gone into the water “a fire was kindled in the Jordan” (*Dial.* 88). The *Gospel of the Ebionites* apparently knew the same tradition (here it stands in direct conjunction with the words from Ps 2:7; see *Pan.* 30.8.7), as did probably the *Diatessaron* and several later writers.²⁹ Interestingly, the tradition is also attested in some “Western” witnesses to the Matthean account of the baptism in Matt 3:15.³⁰

Ehrman thinks there can be little doubt that Justin refers to the text of Luke, since he states that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the “form” (εἶδος) of a dove, the word being unique to Luke. I maintain, however, that Justin or someone else before him has harmonized several sources to include synoptic as well as apocryphal elements.³¹ The particular passage in *Dial.* 88 is introduced with the words, καὶ ἐλθόντος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην (Luke does not mention that the baptism took place at the Jordan). Justin refers to the occasion in *Dial.* 103 too, and there it is mentioned in direct connection with the temptation that follow in Matthew and Mark (not Luke).

Ehrman’s reference to Origen is directly misleading, since there is nothing in the context that suggests that Origen is citing Luke 3:22 in *Comm. Jo.* 1.32.³² On the contrary, one gets the impression that Origen is citing Ps 2:7. Hence, what can be safely said of all these sources, apart from the MSS, is that they all witness to the early tradition that connected the words of Ps 2:7 (LXX), υἱός μου εἶ σύ ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε, with Jesus (cf. Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5), and at least four sources connect the words to Jesus’ baptism (*Gos. Heb.*, *Gos. Eb.*, Justin, Clement, and most

²⁹ Cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 8–9.

³⁰ Between Matt 3:15 and 16 the Latin codices Vercellensis (a) and Sangermanensis (g¹) add: *et cum baptizaretur Iesus (om. Iesus a) lumen magnum fulgebat (lumen ingens circumfulsit a) de aqua, ita ut timerent omnes qui erant (advenerant a)*.

³¹ Justin is cited in support of the reading in NA²⁷ and UBS⁴ but the attestation must, nevertheless, be critically evaluated.

³² Ehrman erroneously refers to *Comm. Jo.* 1.29, see *Orthodox Corruption*, 107 n. 91.

probably the *Didascalía*), and may be dependent on Luke 3:22.

As for transcriptional probabilities, Ehrman points out that both readings can be viewed as scribal harmonizations, either to Mark 1:11 or to Ps 2:7. However, he finds it more likely that a scribe will harmonize a Gospel text to another parallel in the Gospels than to a passage in the Old Testament. In my opinion, it is important in this case, where harmonization can go in both directions, to pay attention to Hort's famous dictum, "knowledge of documents should precede final judgment on readings."³³ The second reading is attested chiefly by "Western" witnesses. Significantly, harmonization, including the expansion of Old Testament quotations, is a hallmark of the "Western" text, whereas it occurs rarely among Alexandrian witnesses.³⁴ In fact, when we turn to Acts 13:33, where the same words from Psalm 2:7 are cited, Bezae and some other witnesses add Ps 2:8! Another hallmark of the Western text, besides harmonizing, is the introduction of material about Jesus from extra-canonical sources.³⁵

Ehrman is correct in pointing out that the second reading could be doctrinally offensive to later scribes. On the other hand, the argument can be turned around: the harmonization to Ps 2:7 in some witnesses may ultimately derive from an apocryphal source (from adoptionistic circles), in which the story was modified to include the full citation of Ps 2:7.³⁶ As in Matt 3:15, this extra-canonical source affected some corners of the New Testament textual tradition.

1 John 5:18

anti-adoptionistic corruption A: ἡ γέννησις τοῦ Θεοῦ (1127 1505 1852 2138 latt sy^h bo)

alternative reading: ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (NA²⁷)

³³ Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament*, 1:31.

³⁴ G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 171–2.

³⁵ D. C. Parker, *Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and Its Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 279.

³⁶ Cf. the further development in the accounts of *Gos. Eb.* and *Gos. Heb.* that the Spirit entered into Jesus, or came to rest in him.

anti-adoptionistic corruption B: τηρεῖ ἑαυτὸν (⌘ A^c P Ψ 5 6 33 81 322 323 436 442 468 1243 1739 1881 Ɔ Did Or PsOec)

alternative reading: τηρεῖ αὐτόν (NA²⁷)

Ehrman identifies two readings as orthodox corruptions: first, the replacement of the participle γεννηθεῖς with the noun γέννησις and, secondly, the replacement of the personal pronoun αὐτόν with the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτόν.³⁷ Ehrman thinks ὁ γεννηθεῖς refers to Christ, and that the two variant readings represent attempts to avoid this adoptionistic interpretation. The UBS committee, on the other hand, thinks that both variants arose, not because of theological considerations, but because of an “ambiguity of reference intended by the words ὁ γεννηθεῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ,” which prompted scribes to clarify the meaning.³⁸

First, it should be noted that the two “corruptions” are in fact interrelated; the Greek and Latin MSS that attest to ἡ γέννησις naturally also will attest to αὐτόν, “The birth from God keeps him” (the reflexive pronoun, “himself,” would not make sense). Ehrman rightly rejects this reading, but he then should also discount the attestation of these witnesses in the latter variation-unit, which he does not.³⁹ In fact, the only significant witnesses that remain in support for the text that Ehrman thinks is original, αὐτόν, are A* and B². However, both the original scribes of Alexandrinus and Vaticanus actually wrote ΑΥΤΟΝ without breathing and accent and could therefore have intended both αὐτόν and αὐτόν (=ἑαυτόν).⁴⁰ Moreover, even the personal pronoun can actually be understood

³⁷ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 70. (Ehrman wrongly indicates the masculine article in the first reading.)

³⁸ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 650.

³⁹ “Thus . . . one can conclude that the personal pronoun, as attested in manuscripts A* B and a range of other Greek and versional witnesses, must be original” (*Orthodox Corruption*, 71).

⁴⁰ Cf. the UBS⁴ apparatus. In 1 John 5:10, the ECM has correctly noted that the original scribes of Alexandrinus and Vaticanus who copied ΑΥΤΩ can support either the personal or the reflexive pronoun. I have proposed to the editors that this be noted in 5:18 too. In several places a later scribe of Vaticanus has added a rough breathing (e.g., Mark 5:26 and Jude 16) indirectly supporting the reflexive pronouns (these examples are not noted in NA²⁷).

in the reflexive sense in the first place (cf. Luke 23:13; Acts 8; Heb 5:3; Rev 8:6; 18:7). In light of the very slim support, it is reasonable that the new *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM) has abandoned the reading previously printed in NA²⁷, i.e., the same reading that Ehrman thinks is original.⁴¹ The UBS committee apparently did not realize how weak the support was for this variant, partly because they, like Ehrman, did not consider how it relates to the previous variation unit.

Further, Ehrman thinks Johannine style supports ὁ γεννηθεὶς . . . τηρεῖ αὐτόν, since γεννάω is always in the perfect passive when designating believers in 1 John (eight times).⁴² However, the aorist passive is actually used to refer to believers in John's Gospel (e.g., 1:13). Moreover, γεννάω never designates Christ elsewhere in 1 John.⁴³ The aorist may have been used here for stylistic reasons (to avoid repetition). Finally, the passage in 1 John 3:3 offers a good parallel to the use of a verb with reflexive pronoun referring to the believer's sanctification. Hence, we arrive at the following translation of this passage as it stands in the *ECM*: "We know that everyone who is born of God does not sin, but the one who has been born of God keeps himself."

3. Jesus, Son of God before His Baptism

Since the adoptionists connected Jesus' sonship to his baptism, Ehrman identifies several references to Jesus as the Son of God before the time of his baptism that reflect textual corruption.

Matthew 1:18

anti-adoptionistic corruption: ἡ γέννησις οὕτως ἦν (L f¹³ 33 ℳ Ir Or)

⁴¹ The reflexive pronoun will be adopted in Nestle-Aland 28th edition (which will include all changes to the critical text adopted in the ECM).

⁴² Ehrman indicates nine times but one occurrence in 1 John 5:1 (which is in the aorist) cannot be counted since it does not refer to the believer.

⁴³ There is an occurrence in John 18:37, ἐγὼ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι (perfect passive), but, significantly, without textual variation. In any case, one would have expected ἐκείνος here in 1 John 5:18, as in 2:6; 3:3, 5, 7, 16; 4:17.

alternative reading: ἡ γένεσις οὕτως ἦν (NA²⁷)

Both γένεσις and γέννησις can mean “birth,” but, as Ehrman points out, the former noun can also denote “creation,” “beginning,” and “origination,” and therefore he thinks that scribes replaced it in order to avoid the notion that this was the moment in which Jesus Christ came into being.⁴⁴ He does not think this was a “simple slipup” due to the orthographic and phonetic similarity of the nouns, since both readings are widely attested. However, if we look at the passage in Luke 1:14, where the angel announces the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah, we find the same variation between the two synonyms in the MSS. In that case Ehrmann apparently thinks that later scribes harmonized the noun to the verb γεννάω used in the preceding verse.⁴⁵ But this could well have happened here in Matthew too, since the verb γεννάω features even more prominently in this context, both in the previous genealogy and in the following account of Jesus’ birth. The fact that Matthew uses γένεσις in a somewhat different sense in v. 1 (“origin”), may also have led to the preference of the synonym γέννησις on the part of the scribes.⁴⁶

Luke 2:43

anti-adoptionistic corruption: “The boy, the Lord Jesus” (sy^{pal})

alternative reading: Ἰησοῦς ὁ παῖς (NA²⁷)

Apparently, the Palestinian Syriac identifies the twelve-year-old Jesus as “the Lord” (ὁ κύριος) at this point.⁴⁷ Ehrman regards this as another example of anti-adoptionistic corruption reflecting an exalted view of Jesus prior to his baptism.⁴⁸ He is apparently

⁴⁴ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 76.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 111 n. 146.

⁴⁶ Cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 7.

⁴⁷ The reading is found in all three lectionary witnesses to the Palestinian Syriac in slightly different forms. See A. L. Smith and M. D. Gibson, *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary of the Gospels, Re-Edited from Two Sinai MSS. and from P. de Lagarde’s Edition of the Evangelium Hierosolymitanum* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1899), 259.

⁴⁸ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 75.

unfamiliar with the character of the version, and its limitations in representing the Greek *Vorlage*, from which it was translated.⁴⁹ One of the curious features of the Syriac versions in general is that they occasionally render (ὁ) Ἰησοῦς with *maran* (“our Lord”).⁵⁰ In fact, in the Palestinian Syriac version (ὁ) Ἰησοῦς is almost invariably rendered by *mare Isus*, “the Lord Jesus”, corresponding to Syriac ecclesiastical idiom!⁵¹ Hence, this reading has absolutely nothing to do with anti-adoptionistic corruption. Instead, such an ascription rather reflects Ehrman’s deficient methodology, disregarding the particular context and nature of individual variant readings.

4. Jesus the Divine: The Orthodox

Opposition to a Low Christology

Ehrman suggests that the most common kind of anti-adoptionistic corruption in the New Testament involve “the orthodox denial that Jesus was a ‘mere man’.”⁵² He thinks these corruptions move in two directions: either they heighten Jesus’ divine character, or they minimize his human limitations.

John 1:18

anti-adoptionistic corruption: μονογενῆς θεός (P⁶⁶ ⋈* B C* L pc sy^{hmg} geo² Or^{pt} Did Cyr^{pt} NA²⁷) / ὁ μονογενῆς θεός (P⁷⁵ ⋈¹ 33 bo Cl^{pt} Cl^{ex} Thdpt Or^{pt} Eus^{pt} GrNy Eph)

alternative readings: ὁ μονογενῆς υἱός (A C³ W^s Θ Ψ f^{1.13} M a aur b c e f ff² vg sy^{c.h.pal} arm eth geo¹ slav Ir^{lat pt} Cl^{pt} Cl^{ex} Thdpt Hipp Or^{lat pt} Eus^{pt} Ath Bas^{pt} Chr Cyr^{pt} Thret Tert Ambst Hil^{pt} Ambr^{pt} Hier Aug) /

⁴⁹ See S. P. Brock, “Limitations of Syriac in Representing Greek,” in *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (ed. B. M. Metzger; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 83–98.

⁵⁰ F. C. Burkitt, *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 2:97–9.

⁵¹ Brock, “Limitations,” 87. Cf. the comment to Rom 3:26 in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 449. It is unfortunate that the IGNTP apparatus cites the Palestinian Syriac version in support of κύριος in Luke 2:43, since it apparently has the potential of misleading users to draw wrong conclusions of what was in the Greek *Vorlage*.

⁵² Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 77.

μονογενῆς υἱὸς θεοῦ (q Ir^{lat pt} Ambr^{pt vid}) / ὁ μονογενής (vg^{ms})

The reading θεός, with or without the article, has strong support by the best witnesses. On the other hand, the attestation is mainly limited to Alexandrian witnesses, whereas the main rival reading υἱός is more widely attested. Ehrman prefers the latter reading on the basis of internal evidence. Firstly, it conforms with Johannine usage; μονογενής and υἱός are used in conjunction in John 3:16, 18 and 1 John 4:9; and, secondly, μονογενῆς θεός is “virtually impossible to understand within a Johannine context.”⁵³ Ehrman suggests that the reading with θεός may reflect a harmonization to the context where θεός occurs some seven times, υἱός never. Under all circumstances, he thinks there was a theological motivation to do so: “The variant was created to support a high Christology in the face of widespread claims . . . that Christ was not God but merely a man, adopted by God.”⁵⁴ One may well question whether it is at all possible to detect an anti-adoptionistic motivation behind a harmonization within a context where the Logos is understood to be God right at the outset (v. 1).

Ehrman goes on to state that the sense of the reading μονογενῆς θεός is impossible, suggesting that Jesus is the *unique* God, since in John, the Father is also God. At the same time, he rejects the alternative interpretation of the adjective μονογενής as substantival, standing in apposition with θεός, “(the) unique one, God,” since he thinks that the use of an adjective as a substantive, when it precedes a noun of the same gender, number and case, is impossible: “No Greek reader would construe such a construction as a string of substantives, and no Greek writer would create such an inconcinnity.”⁵⁵ Apparently, Ehrman is wrong. Daniel Wallace has cited a number of examples of such a construction just from the New Testament (Luke 14:13; 18:11; John 6:70; Acts 2:5; Rom 1:30; Gal 3:9; Eph 2:20; 1 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 2:5).⁵⁶ Admittedly, this construction is syntactically

⁵³ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁵⁶ D. B. Wallace, “The Gospel according to Bart: A Review Article of *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart Ehrman,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 327–49, esp. 345.

difficult, but, at the same time, that fact in itself speaks in favor of its originality (*lectio difficilior potior*). It should also be noted that μονογενῆς is used as a substantive four verses earlier in John 1:14.⁵⁷

Furthermore, the variation between μονογενῆς θεός and ὁ μονογενῆς θεός is, in my opinion, significant for the overall evaluation of the passage. The only comment Ehrman offers in this regard is that “if external support is considered decisive, the article is probably to be preferred” because “ \mathfrak{P}^{75} is generally understood to be the strongest” and “ \mathfrak{P}^{66} , which supports the shorter text, is notoriously unreliable when it comes to articles and other short words.”⁵⁸ It is true that \mathfrak{P}^{66} (like \mathfrak{P}^{75}) shows a tendency to omit articles,⁵⁹ but in this case the reading of \mathfrak{P}^{66} is shared by other prominent Alexandrian manuscript witnesses (\aleph^* B C* L), so there is a strong reason to believe that there was no article in the exemplar. The anarthrous use of θεός is more primitive, and, as the UBS committee observes, “There is no reason why the article should have been deleted, and when υἱός supplanted supplanted θεός it would certainly have been added.”⁶⁰ Hence, the reading μονογενῆς θεός best explains the rival readings ὁ μονογενῆς θεός and ὁ μονογενῆς υἱός. The latter reading may reflect scribal harmonization to the Johannine collocation μονογενῆς υἱός (John 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). In any case, it seems difficult to detect an anti-adoptionistic motivation on the part of the scribes in a passage that already reflects a high Christology, regardless of what textual decision we make.

1 Tim 3:16

anti-adoptionistic corruption: θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί (\aleph^c A^c C² D² Ψ 1739 1881 \aleph vg^{ms} GrNy Chr Thret)

⁵⁷ Wallace points out that the substantival function of μονογενῆς in patristic authors was commonplace (ibid., 346). See *PGL*, s.v. μονογενῆς B 7.

⁵⁸ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 80, 112 n. 163.

⁵⁹ Royse’s study of the papyrus witnesses demonstrates that among the 109 significant singulars (not counting the corrections), \mathfrak{P}^{66} is found to add the article on one occasion and omit it six times, whereas \mathfrak{P}^{75} adds the article six times and omits it fourteen times. See Royse, *Scribal Habits*, 507, 511, esp. n. 588 (\mathfrak{P}^{66}); 660, 662 (\mathfrak{P}^{75}).

⁶⁰ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 169.

alternative readings: ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί (NA²⁷) / ὁ ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί (D* lat Hil Ambst Pel Aug Qu)

There is little doubt that the reading ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί is to be preferred. Witnesses that read the pronoun in the neuter (bringing it in conformity with the antecedent μυστήριον) indirectly support ὁς. As for the reading θεός, it is quite likely that it first arose due to the confusion of OC with the *nomen sacrum*, ΘC̄. Ehrman, however, remarks that the corrections in four uncials show that the change was not an accident; “it did not creep into the tradition unawares.”⁶¹ Here I think it is important to make a distinction between the *origin* of a reading, and its subsequent *transmission*. I agree with Ehrman insofar as these corrections show that subsequent changes to θεός in some MSS were not done by accident; the scribes/correctors knew the reading θεός and preferred it, either because it supplied a subject for the six following verbs, or because of dogmatic reasons (or both).⁶² This does not exclude the possibility that the variant initially arose by accident.

Ehrman goes on to state that the change must have been early, at least from the third century given its widespread attestation in the fourth century.⁶³ In an accompanying footnote he explains that of all witnesses of either variant, only Origen antedates the fourth century. (Origen’s witness is apparently found in a fourth-century Latin translation of his works, reflecting ὁς). First, it should be pointed out that the earliest attestation of θεός in an actual Greek MS is the correction in C (04), probably dating from the sixth century, whereas the earliest attestation of ὁς is in **ℵ*** (01) dating from ca. 350 C.E.⁶⁴ Furthermore, attestations of θεός in patristic writers are not found until the last third of the fourth century (Gregory

⁶¹ Ibid., 78.

⁶² Cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 574.

⁶³ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 78.

⁶⁴ Some scholars have proposed that codex Alexandrinus reads ΘC̄, but this is not generally accepted. See F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament for the Use of Biblical Students* (ed. E. Miller; 2 vols; 4th ed.; London: Deighton, 1894), 2:391–2. Codex B (03) does not preserve 1 Tim.

of Nyssa, Apollinaris, John Chrysostom)—half a century after the Council of Nicaea.⁶⁵ This silence during the first phases of the Christological and Trinitarian controversies is strange, since the reading, if it existed in the third century or earlier, would indeed have been very attractive to use as prime evidence for Jesus' divinity.

5. Christ as Divine: The Exchange of Predicates

Ehrman points out that it was common for proto-orthodox Christians of the second and third centuries to “exchange predicates” in which attributes and activities of God were predicated of Christ, and vice versa, as reflected in writers like Ignatius, Melito and Tertullian. On the other hand, he points out that they were “cautious not to identify Christ and God in such a way as to eliminate any distinctions between them.”⁶⁶ Correspondingly, he suggests that this “balancing act” is reflected in textual changes in the MSS.

1 Cor 10:5

anti-adoptionistic corruption: εὐδόκησεν, κατεστρώθησαν γὰρ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (81 *pc*)

alternative reading: εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεός, κατεστρώθησαν γὰρ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (NA²⁷)

The passage in 1 Cor 10 contains a Christian interpretation of the account of Israel's experience in the wilderness. The words ὁ θεός are omitted in codex 81 (and a few other MSS), so that the subject of the verb εὐδόκησεν is ὁ Χριστός from v. 4; “He (Christ) was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.”⁶⁷ Ehrman points out that the christological focus

⁶⁵ Liberatus Diaconus of Cartaghe (6th cent.) in *Brevarium* 19 (PL 68:1033–1034) records a narrative, according to which Macedonius II, Patriarch of Constantinople (496–511 C.E.) was deprived by Emperor Anastasius for having corrupted the Scriptures, and that he was the inventor of this very reading, θεός, in 1 Tim 3:16. The narration only proves that the two readings ὅς and θεός were known in the early sixth century.

⁶⁶ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 87.

⁶⁷ Besides codex 81, Ehrman cites Clement and Irenaeus for the omission of ὁ θεός, probably

already present in the passage is extended through this omission, so as to attribute to Christ the execution of divine wrath.⁶⁸ I think this subsingular reading should rather be viewed as an accidental omission. Significantly, Ehrman does not note that the same valuable Alexandrian witness, codex 81, is among the very few witnesses that read θεόν in v. 9 (A 81 1883) instead of the better attested readings Χριστόν and κύριον.⁶⁹ It seems to me that θεόν in v. 9 would be the least expected reading to find in a witness alleged to heighten the Christology of the passage.

1 Cor 10:9

anti-adoptionistic corruption: μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν Χριστόν (ℱ⁴⁶ D F G Ψ 1739 1881 ℞ latt sy^{p,h} co geo¹ slav Ir^{lat} Or^{1739mg} Eus Ambst Ambr Pel Aug NA²⁷)

alternative readings: μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν κύριον (⊗ B C P 33 104 326 365 1175 2464 pc sy^{hmg,pal} arm geo² Epiph Hes) / μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν θεόν (A 81 1883)

The reading Χριστόν has early and diverse attestation including the oldest Greek manuscript of the Pauline corpus (ℱ⁴⁶). According to the UBS committee, it is the reading that best explains the origin of the other readings; the notion that the ancient Israelites tempted Christ in the wilderness was too difficult for some scribes, who substituted “either the ambiguous κύριον or the unobjectionable θεόν.”⁷⁰ Carroll D. Osburn is also in favor of Χριστόν and he thinks that the change to κύριον was possibly made for theological reasons in the end of the third century by some Eastern Father, influenced by the Antiochene

depending on the patristic textual data indicated in Tischendorf’s eight edition (1869) of *Novum Testamentum Graece*. However, I have not been able to identify any citations in either Clement and Irenaeus that can be used for text-critical purposes, according to modern standards of evaluating patristic evidence (neither reference is included in NA²⁷).

⁶⁸ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 89.

⁶⁹ A genealogical relationship is known to exist between A and 81. Recent research in the Catholic Epistles has somewhat unexpectedly shown that the later minuscule 81 has a predominantly older textual state than the uncial 02 (see above). This is most probably the case in the Pauline epistles too.

⁷⁰ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 494.

school that stressed a literal interpretation.⁷¹ As for intrinsic evidence, both the committee and Osburn points to Paul's analogous reference to Christ in v. 4, ἡ πέτρα δὲ ἦν ὁ Χριστός.⁷² However, Ehrman does not find these arguments persuasive. First, most Christians did believe that Christ was actively involved in the Old Testament and would not have perceived the reading Χριστόν as difficult. Secondly, the reading κύριον is found in Alexandrian witnesses (Ⲙ B C 33 et al.) which speaks against an Antiochene origin. Thirdly, although Paul understood Christ to be present in the wilderness to sustain the Israelites, he attributed their judgment solely to God, as seen in v. 5. Thus, Ehrman regards κύριον as the original reading, and thinks that the text was changed to Χριστόν by proto-orthodox scribes in order to combat adoptionistic Christology.⁷³

I question whether it is really necessary to ascribe this “exchange of predicates” in one direction or the other to theological motivation on the part of “proto-orthodox scribes,” made in order to combat specific opponents. I think there are many possible explanations for this type of variation, and in each case the full context has to be considered. Sometimes the changes in divine names and titles may be explained on palaeographic grounds (i.e., the confusion of *nomina sacra*); other changes reflect a concern for clarification (e.g., the specification of ambiguous κύριος); still others are due to harmonization or lectionary influence; but some changes, I suspect, are simply due to a free and unreflected attitude on the part of the scribes to interpret what is already implied in the text. In fact, Ehrman himself captures this point well in an earlier discussion of the very similar context in Jude 5, where there is variation concerning whether it was “the Lord,” “Jesus” or “God” who brought the people out of Egypt and later destroyed those who did not believe. He says that these “variations . . . are all explicable from the Old Testament narratives themselves and from early Christian

⁷¹ Cf. C. D. Osburn, “The Text of 1 Corinthians 10:9,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis—Essays in Honour of Bruce M. Metzger* (ed. J. Epp and G. D. Fee; Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 201–12, esp. 211–12.

⁷² Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 494; Osburn, “The Text of 1 Corinthians 10:9,” 208.

⁷³ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 90.

understandings of them, at least as intimated in 1 Cor 10.”⁷⁴ Significantly, if we look at the textual variation between significant manuscripts that are extant in 1 Cor 10:4–5, 9 and Jude 5, referring to the pre-existent Christ, who saves, sustains and judges the people, we find no clear pattern concerning divine names and titles:

	Jude 5	1 Cor 10:5	1 Cor 10:9
Ⲙ	κύριος	ὁ θεός	κύριον
A	Ἰησοῦς	ὁ θεός	θεόν
B	Ἰησοῦς	ὁ θεός	κύριον
C	ὁ θεός (C ^{2vid})	ὁ θεός	κύριον
Ψ	κύριος	ὁ θεός	Χριστόν
81	Ἰησοῦς	omit (Χριστός implied subject)	θεόν
1739	Ἰησοῦς	ὁ θεός	Χριστόν
Ⲛ	ὁ κύριος	ὁ θεός	Χριστόν

In conclusion, the textual transmission does not reflect any discernable tendency on the level of text-types or individual manuscript witnesses. The evidence speaks directly against Ehrman’s notion of conscious alterations made by proto-orthodox scribes for dogmatic purposes in order to combat adoptionistic Christology.

Conclusion

We have analysed seventeen selected examples of orthodox corruption, brought forth by Bart Ehrman in his influential work on the orthodox corruption of Scripture. Ehrman’s optimism regarding the ability of modern textual criticism, not only to identify corruption, but to reconstruct the initial text in these passages may come as a surprise. As we have seen, Ehrman accepts the initial

⁷⁴ Ibid., 86. In this instance, I agree with Ehrman that ⲡ⁷² reflects proto-orthodox corruption stating that it was “God Christ” (θεὸς Χριστός) who brought the people out of Egypt, and I agree with Ehrman in this judgment.

text as adopted in NA²⁷ with very few exceptions (Mark 1:1; Luke 3:22; John 1:18; 1 Cor 10:9).⁷⁵ My examination, however, has demonstrated several problems with his procedure as he identifies various variant readings as examples of “orthodox corruption.”

The first problem with Ehrman’s text-critical analysis is the mixed nature of the sample that he uses. It seems to me that he has harvested the entire textual tradition in order to find data to support his preconceived thesis, without crossexamining the possible tendencies of *individual witnesses*. It will become clear that, on the level of the individual witness, it is very difficult to detect any consistent theological tendency. On the contrary, individual witnesses will often reflect directly opposite tendencies (e.g., adoptionistic/anti-adoptionistic).

The second and more serious problem with Ehrman’s procedure is the mechanical character of his treatment of *individual passages*. Whenever there is textual variation in a passage that somehow relates to Christology, Ehrman too easily identifies one reading as the original and another as “orthodox corruption.” Ehrman’s philological and text-critical groundwork is unsatisfactory, in that he lacks a sensitivity to the particular context and nature of the variation in the individual passage.

In a classic essay on “The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism,” Alfred E. Housman proposed that “every problem which presents itself to the textual critic must be regarded as possibly unique.”⁷⁶ This sound view of textual criticism excludes every mechanical application of a single canon of criticism to a passage, e.g., to prefer the least orthodox reading whenever there is a grain of suspicion that a passage may have been tampered with for doctrinal reasons. Instead, the textual critic should attempt at each point to seek the most plausible explanation for the textual variation, weighing external and internal evidence and utilizing whatever principles that may apply to the individual problem.

⁷⁵ It should be noted that the ratio in favor of NA²⁷ would in fact be significantly higher if we counted all of Ehrman’s examples in this chapter on anti-adoptionistic corruption, and in the whole monograph.

⁷⁶ A. E. Housman, “The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism,” *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 18 (1921): 67–84, esp. 69.

If the criteria are found to be in conflict, which is often the case, the textual critic has to decide when to give greater consideration to one criterion and less to another. As I have attempted to demonstrate in my treatment of these examples, a balanced judgment will often require knowledge of the peculiarities of individual manuscripts and their scribe(s), the citation habits of church fathers, and a familiarity with the character of a particular version and its limitations in representing the *Vorlage* from which it was translated.⁷⁷

Indeed, this close examination of a significant number of passages has confirmed the judgment of Gordon Fee who in a review of Ehrman's work points out that, "too often [Ehrman] turns mere *possibility* into *probability*, and *probability* into *certainty*, where other equally viable reasons for corruption exist."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Hence, we are reminded again of Hort's dictum, "knowledge of documents should precede final judgment on readings" (Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament*, 1:31).

⁷⁸ G. D. Fee, review of B. D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, *CRBR* 8 (1995): 203–66, esp. 204.