

Did the Orthodox Corruption Occur Everywhere? Evaluating Bart Ehrman's Notion

Stefanus Kristianto

Abstrak

Bart Ehrman adalah salah seorang pakar kritik teks terbaik pada zaman ini. Terlepas dari kecemerlangannya, beberapa nosinya terkenal provokatif, salah satunya adalah persoalan kerusakan tekstual pada naskah Perjanjian Baru. Meski sejumlah pakar setuju bahwa kerusakan teologis terjadi dalam batas-batas tertentu, bagi Ehrman kerusakan itu terdapat pada banyak tempat. Esai ini akan memeriksa klaim Ehrman mengenai korupsi Ortodoks. Sebagai uji kasus, penulis akan memeriksa sebelas teks kunci rujukan Ehrman dan menunjukkan rekonstruksi yang cacat pada bagian-bagian ini. Hal ini berarti bahwa klaim Ehrman atas sebelas teks ini tidak tepat, dan bahwa yang kemungkinan besar benar adalah bahwa kerusakan tekstual itu sangat terbatas jumlahnya.

Kata-Kata Kunci: Ehrman, kerusakan teks, kritik biblis, ortodoksi, Perjanjian Baru

Abstract

Bart Ehrman was one of the best textual scholars of this era. Despite his brilliance, some of his notion are provocative. One of his provocative ideas is his notion on textual corruption of the New Testament text. While most scholar contend that theological corruption took place in a limited amount, Ehrman thinks that it occurred in many places. This paper will attempt to examine his notion on the Orthodox Corruption. As the test case, this paper will examine the eleven key texts Ehrman usually refers to and show that Ehrman's reconstruction in most passages are flawed. On the one hand, it thereby means that Ehrman's notion does not work for those eleven texts. On the other hand, it opens the possibility that the contention of most scholars—that theological corruption took place in a limited scale—is very likely correct.

Keywords: Ehrman, textual corruption, biblical criticism, New Testament, orthodoxy

Undeniably, Bart Ehrman was one of the prominent scholars who used to work¹ in the

realm of New Testament textual criticism. The works he has generated have proven his reliability in the discipline.² Despite his brilliance, however, some of Ehrman's view is highly problematic. One of his problematic

¹ According to Daniel Wallace, Ehrman has no longer worked in the discipline. Wallace writes, "When the INTF in Münster had a colloquium on textual criticism this past summer at which all NT textual critics were invited, Bart Ehrman did not show up. I inquired about this and learned that he was not invited. Why not? Because he had declared that he is no longer working in the discipline." Ehrman has confirmed it through personal email sent to Wallace. See Daniel B. Wallace, "Challenges in New Testament Textual

Criticism for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 1 (2009): 85.

² The complete list of Ehrman's works can be seen in his blog. See the *curriculum vitae* of Ehrman on his personal blog: <https://www.bartdehrman.com/curriculum-vitae/>

views is his view on the textual transmission of the New Testament.

Ehrman contends that during the textual transmission of the New Testament, the scribes frequently altered the text to be more 'orthodox'; a phenomenon that he later calls 'Orthodox Corruption.' This phenomenon, he argues, took place within the polemical context of the Proto-Orthodox party and the opposite party, namely heresies. Till this far, Ehrman's contention is correct. Most of New Testament textual critics realize that the scribes sometimes changed the text for theological reasons. What makes Ehrman differ from other textual critics is on the quantity of the alterations. Ehrman contends that this alteration can be found in many places in the New Testament,³ while other textual critics think it occurred in a limited scale.⁴

³ In his monograph, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, there are approximately a hundred text of the New Testament that, Ehrman thinks, underwent the orthodox corruption. If the other texts, which reflect other kind of theological polemics (such as conflict with Judaism, conflict with paganism, etc), are taken into account, the amount will automatically be increased. Interestingly, Ehrman opens the possibility that there are probably much more text in the New Testament that underwent orthodox corruption when he writes: "I can claim to have found a large number of such variants, perhaps most of the ones that ultimately prove significant for the history of the text and for exegesis. But I almost certainly *have not uncovered them all*. The following enumeration and discussion, then, is extensive and, I trust, representative; it is *not exhaustive*." See Bart 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), 32. Emphasis mine.

In 2011, the second edition of this monograph was published. But, because of the limitation of access, I will use the first edition, which is published in 1993. Fortunately, according to Wasserman, there are no significant differences between these two editions. See Tommy Wasserman, "Misquoting Manuscripts? The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture Revisited," in Magnus Zetterholm and Samuel Byrskog (eds), *The Making of Christianity: Conflicts, Contacts, and Constructions* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 326. n. 7.

⁴ For examples, Wasserman, "Misquoting Manuscripts?" 326; Stanley E. Porter, *How We Got the New Testament: Text, Transmission, Translation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 26; Michael J. Kruger, "Review Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (2006): 390. cf. also James R. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 738.

In this paper, I will attempt to show that Ehrman's contention – that the orthodox corruption occurred in many places – is highly questionable. Because of the limitation of space, I will not, of course, discuss all passages that, Ehrman thinks, reflecting the orthodox corruption phenomenon. Instead, I will focus on the eleven key texts Ehrman frequently refers to prove that the orthodox corruption took place in a high quantity. The eleven texts are Luke 3:22; Mark 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 4:3; Mark 15:34; Hebrews 2:9; Luke 22:43-44; Luke 22:19-20; Luke 24:12; Luke 24:51-52; and Mark 1:41.⁵

By discussing those eleven texts, it does not mean, however, that Ehrman's thesis about Orthodox corruption will completely collapse. Instead, I hope the discussions will prompt the reader to question Ehrman's thesis and see the plausibility that the contention of most scholars—that theological corruption took place in a limited scale – is very likely correct. Since Ehrman used 'reasoned-eclecticism' approach,⁶ I will also use the approach in order to examine Ehrman's reconstruction over the passages. Lastly, to make it easier, I will first discuss six passages where Ehrman's conclusion is highly problematic (Luke 3:22; Hebrews 2:9; Luke 22:19-20; Luke 24:12; Luke 24:51-52; Mark 1:41) and later five texts where there are some agreeable contention of Ehrman (Mark 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 4:3; Mark 15:34; Luke 22:43-44).

Luke 3:22

⁵ There is actually one more text that Ehrman usually refers to, that is John 1:18. I will not discuss that text since I have discussed it elsewhere. See Stefanus Kristianto, "Evaluating Bart Ehrman's Textual Reconstruction: A Test Case on John 1.18," *Asia Journal of Theology* 31, no. 2 (2017): 23-35.

⁶ See Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005), 128-32; *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 447-9; "The Text of the New Testament," in *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 4-7. Interestingly, as can be seen later, Ehrman used this approach inconsistently.

Ehrman discusses this text in four works, i.e. *The Orthodox Corruption* (pp. 62-67), *Misquoting Jesus* (pp. 158-161), *Lost Christianities* (p. 222), and in an article, "The Text of the Gospels at the End of the Second Century."⁷ As to this text, Ehrman concludes that the widely accepted reading, "You are my beloved Son with you I am well pleased" is not the original text.⁸ He defends, instead, that the original reading is "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." He proposes some arguments in supporting the notion: (i) the reading he proposes is found in Codex Bezae (05) and some Old Latin manuscripts. He also notices that some fathers from the second and third centuries (e.g. Justin, Clement of Alexandria) support the originality of the reading; (ii) he considers that the reading he defends is theologically more difficult, while the widely acknowledged reading could be understood as a harmonization with Mark 1:11; and (iii) Ehrman considers that the reading is best fit with Lukan theology, which sometimes impress that Jesus becomes the Christ or the Elected Son in his baptism (e.g. Acts 10:37-38; Luke 9:35). Ehrman classifies this alteration into the Anti-Adoptionistic category. But, he admits that Luke himself might not intend adoptionistic theology. Luke, in his view, perhaps aims to emphasize God's action of

anointing or electing Jesus. However, the later controversy with the Adoptionistic group plausibly prompted the Orthodox party to alter this text so that it does not seem to support Adoptionistic Christology.

Unlike Ehrman, I think the widely accepted reading is probably more original. Related to the external evidence, there are three points to note. *First*, the widely accepted reading is supported by the older and the best witness, such as **P**⁴ (third century), Codex Sinaiticus (01; fourth century), and Codex Vaticanus (03; fourth century). *Second*, the readings could be found in all clusters, such as B text, C text (038, *f*¹, *f*¹³), D text (some Old Latin manuscripts), and A text. In contrast, the reading Ehrman proposes is typical reading of D text. *Third*, Ehrman's assumption that 05 reflects the earlier variant could possibly be approved. But, given the nature of D cluster, which tends to harmonize and add the text, it is likely that the reading of Codex 05 was an interpolation.⁹

In regard to the internal evidence, there are two things to note. First, the reading Ehrman proposes can be understood as the easier reading because it can be interpreted as harmonization with Psalms 2:7 LXX.¹⁰ Fitzmyer writes:

the similarity of wording between the more common reading (sy ei ho huioi mou) and the Greek of Ps 2:7 (huioi mou ei sy) was more likely the reason why scribes familiar with the Greek Psalter would have substituted this quotation, derived from a psalm often interpreted in the early Christian centuries as "messianic."¹¹

In addition, the similarity between the Luke and the Markan text should not be interpreted as a harmonization by the later

⁷ Ehrman, *Studies in the Textual Criticism*, 71-99.

⁸ I realise the critique of some scholars (e.g. Eldon J. Epp and D. C. Parker) who consider the task of reconstructing the original text as elusive. I concur, however, with most of textual scholars who see that the task of reconstructing the original text is still probable. For the defence of this goal, see Holger Strutwolf, "Original Text and Textual History," in Klaus Wachtel and Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Textual History of the Greek New Testament: Changing Views in Contemporary Research* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 23-41; Paul Ellingworth, "Text, Translation, and Theology: The New Testament in the Original Greek?" *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 13, no. 25-26 (2000): 61-73.

In some sense, Ehrman also seems to assume the probability of reconstructing the original text. In the context of his study, he has to assume that reconstructing the original text is achievable. If not, his thesis about the orthodox corruption will automatically fade. See similar observation from Moises Silva dan Stanley Porter. See Moises Silva, "Response," in David Alan Black, ed., *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 149; Porter, *How We Got, 25*.

⁹ Cf. David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 33.

¹⁰ Bock states that Codex D (05) tends to alter the text so that it fits with the LXX. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 347. Similarly, Wasserman, "Misquoting Manuscripts," 337.

¹¹ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 485.

scribes, given that Luke has literary dependency to Mark. Thus, it is feasible that the similarity to the Markan text was created by Luke himself. Second, Porter thinks that Ehrman forgets (or ignores?) the fact that the wording of Codex D is similar to the words of Epiphanius of Salamis, which quotes the Gospel of Ebionites and reflects the Gnostic thought. This, Porter says, makes the adoptionistic reading unlikely be the original reading.¹² In short, these arguments make Ehrman's proposal unacceptable.

Hebrews 2:9

The discussion of this passage can be found in four works of Ehrman, i.e. *The Orthodox Corruption* (pp. 145-150), *Misquoting Jesus* (pp. 144-148), *Lost Christianities* (p. 225) and an article entitled "Text and Interpretation: The Exegetical Significance of the "Original" Text."¹³ Again, Ehrman generates a controversial conclusion. He infers that *χάριτι θεοῦ* (grace of God) is not the original reading of this text; *χωρίς θεοῦ* (apart from God) is. Some considerations that lead him to such conclusion are as follows: (i) although *χωρίς θεοῦ* occurs only in two manuscripts from the tenth century, Ehrman argues that it actually reflects an earlier reading. This is supported by the fact that some early fathers (e.g. Origen) knew this reading. (ii) This reading is widely attested. It can be found in the writings of many church fathers (e.g. Ambrose and Jerome) and in many versions (e.g. Latin, Peshitta). (iii) This reading is a more difficult reading. To say that Jesus was dead "apart from God" could connote offensive meaning for Christians. It makes more sense, then, to infer that the scribes altered the uncommon expression with the common one. It is interesting to note that Ehrman is not alone in his argument toward this reading. Ellingworth, for instance, accept-

ed the originality of this reading with some hesitations.¹⁴

Again, I seriously doubt Ehrman's conclusion over this passage. I think *χάριτι θεοῦ* is more original because: (i) the best witnesses support the originality of *χάριτι θεοῦ*, inter alia **P**⁴⁶ (around 200 CE), 01, and 03. (ii) This reading is widely attested, since it can be found in A, B, and C clusters. (iii) Attridge contends that although *χωρίς θεοῦ* is more difficult, it does not fit with the context. He writes, "While some modern critics accept "apart from God" as the more difficult reading, it does not fit well in the context of the psalm that had spoken of God's concern for humanity."¹⁵ In contrast, the *χάριτι θεοῦ* fits better to the context of Hebrew.¹⁶ (iv) Ehrman's argument that *χωρίς θεοῦ* is more difficult reading, since it contains offensive tone for the Orthodox, is unfounded. Especially, when someone keeps Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 in their mind.¹⁷ (v) As to the change from *χάριτι θεοῦ* to *χωρίς θεοῦ*, it can be explained either by misreading¹⁸ or influenced by 1 Corinthians 15:27. The scribes who read verse 8 wanted to clarify that everything in subjection to the Son does not involve God Himself.¹⁹ Despite the uncer-

¹⁴ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 155. Kistemaker is somewhat ambivalent about the reading of this verse. But, it seems that he tends to choose *χωρίς θεοῦ* as the original reading. See Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 67.

¹⁵ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 77; cf. Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 100.

¹⁶ See also Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990), 49; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 77; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus and Hebrews* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2009), 345; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 218; O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 100.

¹⁷ See similar observation by Porter in *How We Got*, 70.

¹⁸ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1994), 594. In majuscule manuscripts, XAPITIΘY looks like XΩPICΘY.

¹⁹ Most scholars who propose this scenario see that *χωρίς θεοῦ* was formerly a marginal note that later being

¹² Porter, *How We Got*, 21

¹³ Ehrman, *Studies in the Textual Criticism*, 320-4.

tainty pertaining to the real scenario, it does not deny that $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\iota$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ is probably the original reading.

Luke 22:19-20

There are at least three of Ehrman's works that contains discussion about these passages (*The Orthodox Corruption*, pp. 212-217; *Misquoting Jesus*, pp. 165-167; and the article "The Cup, The Bread, and the Salvific Effect of Jesus' Death in Luke-Acts"²⁰). Among six variants, Ehrman sees that the two strongest readings are the longer reading (includes verses 19b-20) and the shorter reading (does not include verses 19b-20). Between these two readings, he contends that the shorter reading is the original one: (i) it is because he deems that the longer reading contains some words that are not Lukan; (ii) the longer text contains idea that is alien to Luke, i.e. the substitution theory, in which Jesus died as the ransom for people. And (iii) if this reading is original, it is hardly understood why the later scribes omitted such important passages.

Ehrman's arguments, however, are not persuasive. External evidence conclusively support the authenticity of the longer reading. The reading is attested by \mathbf{P}^{75} , codex 01, and codex 03. In addition, the longer text can be found in all clusters (A, B, C, and D) and is well known by the early church fathers. In contrast, the shorter reading is only supported by some witnesses of D text (codex 05 and some Old Latin manuscripts). Ehrman thereby ignores the conclusive external evidence and depends only on speculative internal evidence.

Four things make Ehrman's speculation blatant. *First*, although Ehrman refuses Petzer's thesis, Petzer persuasively shows that the longer text forms parallelism with the pre-

vious part, so that when verses 19b-20 is omitted, the parallelism will be defective.²¹ *Second*, as to the theological aspect, Ehrman ignores (or worse, does not care?) substitution language that Luke records in Acts 20:28,²² as well as the influence of Paul as Luke's supervisor. *Third*, the longer text fits well with the immediate context as it prepares the way for the discussion in chapter 22. Bock gives some examples: "the start of 22:21 assumes 22:20 . . . the covenant reference in 22:29 ("assigned a kingdom") assumes the new covenant reference of the long text . . . the cup of 22:42 looks back to the "poured out" cup of 22:20."²³ *Fourth*, the longer reading is the difficult reading, as Stein explains, "it is more difficult to understand why a scribe might willingly omit the concluding word about the cup than to understand why one might want to add the final word about the cup in order to make it conform to the parallel accounts."²⁴

If the longer reading is the original reading, why did then some manuscripts omit it? Metzger lists some possible causes, such as confusion or misunderstanding, or because of *disciplina arcana*.²⁵ As in Hebrews 2:9, the reason behind the omission is uncertain as well. However, the considerations above are enough to persuade the readers that Ehrman's

²¹ See J. H. Petzer, "Luke 22:19b-20 and the Structure of the Passage," *Novum Testamentum* 3 (1984): 249-52. Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X:XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1388; John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53* (Dallas: Word, 1998), 1041.

²² Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 1041.

²³ Darrel L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1722.

²⁴ Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 542.

²⁵ See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 148. Cf. also I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 800. As to the latter possibility, Metzger explains: "The rise of the shorter version can be accounted for in terms of the theory of *disciplina arcana*, i.e. in order to protect the Eucharist from profanation, one or more copies of the Gospel according to Luke, prepared for circulation among non-Christian readers, omitted the sacramental formula after the beginning words" (Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 148). Cf. also Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus: Tradition and Interpretation in the Passion Narrative* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1988), 37.

assimilated to the main text and replacing the original $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\iota$ $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$. See *ibid*; Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrew*, 77; Michaels, *Hebrews*, 345; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Dallas: Word, 2002), 43; Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 135. n. 47.

²⁰ Ehrman, *Studies in the Textual Criticism*, 156-75.

conclusion about the authenticity of the shorter reading is indefensible.

Luke 24:12

Ehrman's discussion on this passage can be found in *The Orthodox Corruption* (pp. 212-217), *Misquoting Jesus* (pp. 168-169), and *Lost Christianities* (p. 226). He states that this verse is not actually original part of the Gospel of Luke. Instead, it is a later addition. He develops his conclusion over some argument: (i) there is some vocabularies that are not Lukan, such as παρακύψας (stoop and look) and τα ὀθόνια (linen); (ii) this verse is probably a harmonization with John 20:3-10; (iii) if this verse is original, Ehrman has no idea why the scribes omitted this verse.

There are some weaknesses from Ehrman's arguments. Related to external evidence, Ehrman once again ignores the external data that conclusively support the authenticity of this verse. This verse is supported by P⁷⁵, codex 01 (fourth century), codex 02 (fifth century), and codex 03 (fourth century). Moreover, this verse can be found in all clusters, whereas the alternative reading can only be found in some D witnesses (e.g. codex 05, it-a, b, d, e, l, r¹).

Related to internal evidence, Ehrman's conclusion is problematic for some reasons. First, Ehrman refuses the authenticity of this verse based on some *hapax legomena*. It is, however, unfounded. (i) It assumes that Luke has limited vocabularies. (ii) *Hapax legomena* can be found throughout the New Testament as a form of author's creativity. (iii) Ehrman ignores that this verse contains Lukan vocabularies as well, such as ἀναστὰς (arise; e.g. Luke 4:38; 5:25, 28; 6:8; 11:7-8; 15:18, 20; 17:19; 22:45; Acts 1:15; 5:17, 34; 8:27, dsb), θαυμάζω (to marvel, to wonder; e.g. Luke 2:33; 20:26; Acts 3:12; 13:41) and τὸ γεγονός (what had happened; Luke 2:15; 8:34-35, 56; Acts 5:7; 13:12).²⁶ Second, this verse fits with

the Lukan plot, as it anticipates verse 24.²⁷ Third, as to the omission of this verse in some D witnesses, it was possibly caused by potential contradiction to verse 34.²⁸ While as to the similarity to the Fourth Gospel, Metzger believes that it might be caused by similar source they used.²⁹ These, therefore, make Ehrman's conclusion unjustifiable.

Luke 24:51-52

Ehrman addresses this text in his two works, namely *The Orthodox Corruption* (pp. 227-232) dan *Misquoting Jesus* (pp. 169-170). Ehrman notices that there are two omitted phrases in some important D manuscripts, i.e. "was taken up into heaven" (verse 51; 05 a b d e ff² l syr^s geo¹) and "then they worshiped him" (verse 52; D a b d e ff² l syr^s). He contends that those witnesses probably reflect the original reading. Some considerations that underlie his conclusion are as follows:

1. If the phrases are original, they will contradict to Acts 1. Was Jesus taken up in Bethany (verse 50) or in Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12)? Was Jesus taken up on his resurrection day, as this passage impress, or forty days after his resurrection (Acts 1:13)?
2. There are some words that are not Lukan, e.g. ἀναφέρω (take up).
3. Acts 1:12 does not indicate that Luke has previously told about the ascension story. Consequently, the phrases (especial in verse 51) are not necessity.
4. Ehrman rejects that D witnesses omitted the phrases in order to get rid of the contradiction to Acts. He accuses that such an idea is based on modern assumption about unity. Moreover, since he thinks that the Gospel of Luke was not intended to be read together with the

²⁶Cf. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1902.

²⁷ Bock, 606; cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 157; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 888.

²⁸ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 888.

²⁹ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 157.

Acts, the author did not need to make so-called “harmonizing omission.”

5. Ehrman also rejects the possibility that the phrases were omitted because of *homoearchton*. It is impossible, in his opinion, that the *vorlage* of 05 and 01 did similar error. In addition, this does not explain the omission of the phrase in verse 52.

Ehrman finally concludes that the addition of the phrases is a scribal attempt to emphasize that Jesus was taken up to heaven in his physical body. It is, thus, an attempt to attack Docetic Christology at the time.

Ehrman’s arguments initially seemed to be convincing. However, they are rather problematic. First, Ehrman again ignores the external evidence that strongly support the authenticity of the phrases. The longer text is attested by P⁷⁵, codex 03 and the second edition of 01. Moreover, these phrases occur in all text types (A, B, C, and D).

Second, there are some important notes related to the internal evidence. First, Marshall says that ἀναφέρω is not a common word for the earliest church to refer to Jesus’ ascension. So, if it was a later addition, then the scribes should use a more common word, i.e. ἀναλαμβάνω.³⁰ Second, Ehrman is not careful when he says that Acts 1:12 does not indicate that Luke previously tells the ascension story. In fact, the text does indicate that Luke does (cf. Acts 1:1-5).³¹

Third, Ehrman is inconsistent. He considers accusation that D witnesses omitted contradiction between Luke and Acts as an anachronistic allegation (since ancient people did not see the unity of a work with modern view), but he makes a similar accusation by regarding contradiction between Luke and Acts using modern point of view.³²

³⁰ See Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 909; cf. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1949.

³¹ Cf. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1949; Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 162.

³² Contradiction that Ehrman demonstrates is not that correct, given that Bethany is lied in Mount of Olives (see Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29). As to the time contradiction,

Fourth, it is plausible that the scribes omitted the phrases to get rid of the contradiction (given that similar phenomena can also be found elsewhere, e.g. Matthew 24:36) or because of *homoearchton* (ΑΥΤΩΝΚΑΙΑΝΕΦΕΡΕΤΟΕΙCTONOYΡΑΝ ΟΝΚΑΙΑΥΤΟΙ).³³ Considering the objection toward Ehrman’s conclusion, I concur with the scholar who judge that both phrases are original.

Mark 1:41

The last text I address here is Mark 1:41, which Ehrman discusses in an article entitled “A Leper in the Hand of an Angry Jesus”³⁴ and in *Misquoting Jesus* (pp. 133-139). Ehrman argues that “Jesus is angry” (ὀργισθεῖς) is the original reading, and not “Jesus have compassion” (σπλαγχισθεῖς). Ehrman’s main arguments are internal (i) ὀργισθεῖς is more difficult than σπλαγχισθεῖς. Therefore, it is more understandable when the scribes altered the more difficult reading to be easier than vice versa; (ii) Matthew and Luke, who used Mark as one of their *vorlage*, omitted this information. If σπλαγχισθεῖς is the original, why did they omit such positive information? According to Ehrman, the omission hints that the two evangelists found difficulty with this text.

It is interesting to find that many commentators concur with Ehrman about the au-

scholars give various explanation showing that there is actually no chronological contradiction between Luke and Acts. Bock, for instance, contends that “it is possible that Luke pictures the two departures as an inclusio bracketing Jesus’ beginning appearance and his final appearance” (Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1944). Elsewhere, Godet and Morris argue that there is actually no specific hint of time in Luke, that there is actually no time contradiction at all. See Frédéric Louis Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, trans. E. W. Shalders (New York: I. K. Funk, 1881), 2:366 Leon Morris, *Luke* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 363.

³³ Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 163. Nolland adds that the omission is plausibly related to the tendency of D witnesses to shorten the text. The D scribes plausibly felt that the phrases were unnecessary because of the clearer narrative in Acts 1. See John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, 1224.

³⁴ Ehrman, *Studies in the New Testament*, 120-41.

thenticity of ὀργισθεῖς.³⁵ There are, however, some problems with this conclusion. Related to external evidence, σπλαγχισθεῖς is well attested by codex 01, codex 03, and most manuscripts, while ὀργισθεῖς can only be found in D witnesses (codex 05, a, ff², r¹).

Related to the internal evidence, there are some critical notes. *First*, if the alteration was intended to get rid of the difficulties, it is not understandable why there are still verses such as Mark 3:5 and 10:14.³⁶ Although Ehrman argues that the anger is reasonable, it does not eliminate, however, the fact that Jesus's emotion is influenced by human deeds. Ehrman writes that the alteration of this verse is initiated by apologetic attempt of some Christians toward some pagans who thought that God cannot be influenced by human's emotion and deeds.³⁷ If this is the case, those texts (Mark 3:5; 10:14) should have been altered as well. The fact that those texts are not altered automatically weakened Ehrman's reconstruction over this text.

Second, Tan contends that σπλαγχισθεῖς could be considered as the difficult reading in the light of ἐμβριμησάμενος (to be moved with anger, to admonish sternly) in verse 43.³⁸ *Third*, Williams finds that σπλαγχισθεῖς is a very rare word, found only in New Testament, while ὀργισθεῖς is a common word.³⁹ If so, it

is more logical that the scribes changed the uncommon word into the common one rather than vice versa.⁴⁰ *Fourth*, there are many explanations about the reason of the alterations. Metzger, for instance, believes that there was a harmonization with verse 43 or confusion about the background word in Aramaic.⁴¹ I am personally persuaded by William, who contends that there may be eye-sight confusion due to the similarity of the six last letters (ΟΡΓΙCΘΕΙC dan ΠΙΛΑΓΧΙCΘΕΙC).⁴² Because of these observations, I contend that σπλαγχισθεῖς is most likely the original reading.

Five Other Texts

Beside above passages, I concur with Ehrman as to the authenticity of five others. *First*, I agree that the shorter reading of Mark 1:1, which does not include the phrase "Son of God," is probably the original reading.⁴³ It must be admitted that external evidence supports the authenticity of both readings. The longer reading can be found in codex 03, codex 05, and Codex 032 (fourth/fifth century), while the shorter reading is attested by 01, Irenaeus (second century), and Origen (third century). I conclude that the shorter reading is original because of some internal considerations: (i) the application of the criterion *lectio brevior portior*; (ii) instead of assuming that the scribes omitted the phrase, it is easier to assume that the scribes added it, which occurs several times in the Gospel of Mark. Some scholars argue that there might be *homoioteleuton*.⁴⁴ But, it is difficult to understand why the scribes could omit such an important epithet.⁴⁵ The inconclusiveness of

³⁵E.g. James A. Brooks, *Mark* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 55; James R Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 70; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 115; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 79; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 206. Even Wallace concurs with Ehrman that ὀργιστεῖς is probably the original reading. See Daniel B. Wallace, "The Gospel According to Bart: A Review Article of *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart Ehrman," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 2 (2006): 340-2.

³⁶Tan Kim Huat, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Manila: Asian Theological Association, 2011), 44.; cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 65.

³⁷See Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 201.

³⁸Tan, *Mark*, 44.

³⁹Williams says that ὀργιστεῖς is well known by Greek speaker and could be found in many literatures. See Peter J. Williams, "An Examination of Ehrman's Case for ὀργισθεῖς in Mark 1:41," *Novum Testamentum* 54 (2012): 8.

⁴⁰Williams, "An Examination," 7-8.

⁴¹Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 65.

⁴²See Williams, "An Examination," 1-12, especially 6.

⁴³See Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 72-5; *Studies in the New Testament*, 149-54.

⁴⁴E.g. Brooks, *Mark*, 39; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 48; Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (Word Biblical Commentary 34A; Dallas: Word, 2002), 6.

⁴⁵Cf. Peter M. Head, "A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1: The Begging of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," *New*

the evidence made UBS editors bracket this phrase and give it a C rating, which shows a significant doubt of the authenticity of this phrase.⁴⁶ I am not, however, persuaded by Ehrman's narrative that this phrase was added to strengthen the belief in Jesus' divinity. In fact, such a phrase is repeated in Mark (1:11; 3:11; 9:7; 14:61; 15:39). In other words, Mark's depiction of Jesus will not be affected by the authenticity of this polemical phrase.⁴⁷

Second, I agree with Ehrman that 1 Timothy 3:16 has OC (who/which) instead of ΘC (*nomina sacra* of ΘEOC; God). This is because (i) external evidence conclusively supports the authenticity of OC. Unlike OC, which can be found in the original version of some important codices (e.g. Codex 01, Codex 02, and Codex 04), ΘC can only be found in the latter manuscripts, such as the third revision of Codex 01, second revision of Codex 04 and Codex 05, as well as in K, L, P, and Ψ. Metzger even adds that there are no patristic sources before fourth century which contain ΘC;⁴⁸ (ii) the ΘC reading does not fit with the context;⁴⁹ (iii) given the importance of *nomina sacra* for early Christians, it is more probable to change OC to ΘC than vice versa.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, I am not convinced that this alteration was driven by theological motive, as what Ehrman claims. It was probably caused by grammatical consideration (the scribes wanted to solve the lack of antecedent) or the eyesight confusion. I myself consider eyesight confusion as the best expla-

nation for the alterations, given the similarity between OC and the *nomina sacra* ΘC.⁵¹

Third, 1 John 4:3 is the only verse about which I concur with Ehrman both on the original form of the text and the reason behind the alteration.⁵² External evidence shows that λυει (to loose or to separate) is secondary reading since it cannot be not found in any important Greek manuscript. It can only be found in several Patristic testimonies and a handful of Old Latin manuscripts. In contrast, "to confess" (ὁμολογεῖ) is found in Codex 01, 02, 03, and in most Greek manuscripts. The latter is therefore most likely the original reading.⁵³ This conviction becomes stronger when we also count the testimonies of some versions and several Patristic sources. As to the reason behind the alteration, I concur with Ehrman and other scholars that the alteration probably took place in the context of Christological polemic between the Orthodox and heresies, either with Docetism or Nestorianism/Separationism.⁵⁴

Fourth, Ehrman is also correct that "revile" is not the original word of Mark 15:34⁵⁵ as this reading is only attested by some D witnesses (05 and some Old Latin manuscripts). However, I do not think that we need to hastily conclude that the alteration was caused by anti-Separationist movement (as does Ehrman). I think the explanation of some interpreters, that the alteration was

Testament Studies 37 (1991): 628; Although Bock approves the longer reading, he admits that *homoioioteleuton* argument is not conclusive, given that not all manuscripts made "son" as *nomina sacra*. See Darrel L. Bock, *Mark* (Cornerstone Bible Commentary 11; Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2005), 404.

⁴⁶ See Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 62.

⁴⁷ Cf. Tan, *Mark*, 21; Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 34.

⁴⁸ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 574.

⁴⁹ Cf. I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 505.

⁵⁰ Cf. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Dallas : Word, 2002), 214.

⁵¹ Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 574.

⁵² Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 125-35; idem, *Studies in New Testament*, 221-46.

⁵³ Some authors, however, contends that λυει is the original reading. E.g. Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John: Translated, with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 494; and Rudolph Schnakenburg, *The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 201-2.

⁵⁴ Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 644; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (Dallas: Word, 2002), 214; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 206 n. 11; Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 145 n. 160; Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 136.

⁵⁵ See Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 143-5; idem, *Studies in New Testament*, 83-4, 147-8; Misquoting Jesus, 172-3.

caused by the difficulty of explaining how God could forsake Jesus, is more probable.⁵⁶

Finally, I agree with Ehrman that Luke 22:43-44 is not an original part of Luke.⁵⁷ As a matter of fact, these verses are not attested by some important witnesses, such as P⁶⁹ (third century), P⁷⁵ (third century), and 03 (fourth century). Moreover, f¹³ places this verse after Matthew 26:39. This is, of course, a strong cue that these verses are not original of the Third Gospel. In addition, some interpreters think that Luke 22:43-44 does not fit with the Lukan style. For instance, Luke tends to depict Jesus not as an emotional person, while these verses do.⁵⁸ This made UBS editor double bracket these verses to indicate that they are not original. However, Ehrman's contention that these verses were added to combat Docetism is not persuasive. Just like John 7:52-8:11, these verses are plausibly widely-known tradition which was later assimilated into the main text of Luke.⁵⁹

Conclusion

From the discussions above, it is clear that, in the eleven texts discussed, Ehrman's so-called 'Orthodox corruption' occurred in a very limited scale. It can be seen that (i) six of them did not undergo Orthodox corruption; (ii) four of them underwent interpolations, but it must not be understood as Orthodox corruption. In fact, there are other explanations that is more plausible than Ehrman's. And, (iii) it is only one verse that seemed to undergo Orthodox corruption. From this sample, it can be inferred, therefore, that Ehrman's notion – that Orthodox corruption occurred everywhere – is highly questionable.

⁵⁶ E.g. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 100; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (Dallas: Word, 2002), 497; France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 649.

⁵⁷ See Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 187-94; idem, *Studies in New Testament*, 79-81, 178; *Misquoting Jesus*, 164-5, 139-44.

⁵⁸ E.g. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 1443; Nolland, *18:35-24:53*, 1080; Stein, *Luke*, 559. Marshall accepts these verses with hesitation. See Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 831.

⁵⁹ Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 151.

In fact, the notion of most scholars – that Orthodox corruption occurred in a limited scale – is more justifiable.

Ehrman's notion is apparently generated by errors in methodology and presupposition. Methodologically, Ehrman utilizes external evidence inconsistently. He frequently ignores the conclusive external evidence and leans only on the speculative internal evidence. Thus, he actually utilizes 'thoroughgoing/rigorous eclecticism'⁶⁰ as his basic method. He pays attention to the external evidence as long as it is in line with his conclusions.⁶¹ In addition, Ehrman frequently refers to the *Western Non-Interpolation* and forget that it must not be applied generally. Instead, it must be examined text by text.⁶²

This probably comes from Ehrman's presuppositions. Ehrman's works impress that he uses the data to serve his presupposition (which is interpreted by some as anti-Orthodox tendency).⁶³ Instead of testing his presupposition, Ehrman lets his presupposition control his research. So, it is not surprising when Philip Miller accuses that Ehrman actually has an extra canon in textual criticism, namely *the least orthodox reading is to be preferred*.⁶⁴ My personal suspicion becomes stronger since Ehrman ignores alternative explanations that is far more probable than his. This is in line with Fee's observation:

⁶⁰ *Thoroughgoing eclecticism* is a method in New Testament textual criticism which leans completely on the internal evidence. See Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 222-6.

⁶¹ See similar observation from Daniel Wallace. See Wallace, "The Gospel According to Bart Ehrman," 338.

⁶² Cf. Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24*, 1041.

⁶³ Brehm states that Ehrman tends to suspect the evidence from the Orthodox party. See H. Alan Brehm, "Review The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 37, no. 2 (1995): 54.

⁶⁴ Philip Miller, "The Least Orthodox Reading is to be Preferred: A New Canon for New Testament Textual Criticism?" in Daniel B. Wallace, ed., *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic, and Apocryphal Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 57-89.

Unfortunately, Ehrman too often turns mere possibility into probability, and probability into certainty, where other equally viable reasons for corruption exist.⁶⁵

I close this paper with a sharp and apt comment from Birdsall:

Ehrman may convince us of the correctness of his hypothesis in some instances, but weakens his endeavor by the attempt to prove his case over too wide a range.⁶⁶

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⁶⁵ Gordon D. Fee, review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* in *CRBR* 8 (1995): 204. Quoted in Wasserman, "Misquoting Manuscripts?" 350. Similarly, Bray remarks, "he has made a case based on probabilities, which lead to possibilities, which lead to conjectures - which are then taken as a plausible reconstruction of events." See Gerald Bray, "Review *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*," *Churchman* 108, no. 1 (1994), 86. Cf. also Wasserman, "Misquoting Manuscripts," 328.

⁶⁶ See J. Neville Birdsall, "Review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*," *Theology* 97, no. 780 (1994): 462.

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