

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO BART: A REVIEW ARTICLE OF *MISQUOTING JESUS* BY BART EHRMAN

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For most students of the NT, a book on textual criticism is a real yawn. The tedious details are not the stuff of a bestseller. But since its publication on November 1, 2005, *Misquoting Jesus* has been circling higher and higher toward the Amazon peak.<sup>1</sup> And since Bart Ehrman, one of North America's leading textual critics, appeared on two of NPR's programs (the *Diane Rehm Show* and *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross)—both within the space of one week—it has been in the top fifty sellers at Amazon. Within three months, more than 100,000 copies were sold. When Neely Tucker's interview of Ehrman in *The Washington Post* appeared on March 5 of this year, the sales of Ehrman's book shot up still higher. Mr. Tucker spoke of Ehrman as a “fundamentalist scholar who peered so hard into the origins of Christianity that he lost his faith altogether.”<sup>2</sup> Nine days later, Ehrman was the guest celebrity on Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*. Stewart said that seeing the Bible as something that was deliberately corrupted by orthodox scribes made the Bible “more interesting . . . almost more godly in some respects.” Stewart concluded the interview by stating, “I really congratulate you. It's a helluva book!” Within 48 hours, *Misquoting Jesus* was perched on top of Amazon, if only for a moment. Two months later and it is still flying high, staying in the top 25 or so books. It “has become one of the unlikeliest bestsellers of the year.”<sup>3</sup> Not bad for an academic tome on a “boring” topic!

Why all the hoopla? Well, for one thing, Jesus sells. But not the Jesus of the Bible. The Jesus that sells is the one that is palatable to postmodern man.

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<sup>1</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005). Thanks are due to Darrell L. Bock, Buist M. Fanning, Michael W. Holmes, W. Hall Harris, and William F. Warren for looking at a preliminary draft of this article and offering their input.

<sup>2</sup> Neely Tucker, “The Book of Bart: In the Bestseller ‘Misquoting Jesus,’ Agnostic Author Bart Ehrman Picks Apart the Gospels That Made a Disbeliever Out of Him,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 2006. Accessed at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/04/AR2006030401369.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Tucker, “The Book of Bart.”

And with a book entitled *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, a ready audience was created via the hope that there would be fresh evidence that the biblical Jesus is a figment. Ironically, almost none of the variants that Ehrman discusses involve *sayings* of Jesus. The book simply does not deliver what the title promises. Ehrman preferred *Lost in Transmission*, but the publisher thought such a book might be perceived by the Barnes and Noble crowd as dealing with stock car racing! Even though Ehrman did not choose his resultant title, it has been a publishing coup.

More importantly, this book sells because it appeals to the skeptic who *wants* reasons not to believe, who considers the Bible a book of myths. It is one thing to say that the stories in the Bible are legend; it is quite another to say that many of them were added centuries later. Although Ehrman does not *quite* say this, he leaves the impression that the original form of the NT was rather different from what the manuscripts now read.

According to Ehrman, this is the first book written on NT textual criticism—a discipline that has been around for nearly 300 years—for a lay audience.<sup>4</sup> Apparently he does not count the several books written by KJV Only advocates, or the books that interact with them. It seems that Ehrman means that his is the first book on the general discipline of NT textual criticism written by a *bona fide* textual critic for a lay readership. This is most likely true.

#### I. TEXTUAL CRITICISM 101

*Misquoting Jesus* for the most part is simply NT textual criticism 101. There are seven chapters with an introduction and conclusion. Most of the book (chs. 1–4) is basically a popular introduction to the field, and a very good one at that. It introduces readers to the fascinating world of scribal activity, the process of canonization, and printed texts of the Greek NT. It discusses the basic method of reasoned eclecticism. All through these four chapters, various snippets—variant readings, quotations from Fathers, debates between Protestants and Catholics—are discussed, acquainting the reader with some of the challenges of the arcane field of textual criticism.

Chapter 1, “The Beginnings of Christian Scripture,” addresses why the NT books were written, how they were received, and when they were accepted as Scripture.

Chapter 2, “The Copyists of the Early Christian Writings,” deals with scribal changes to the text, both intentional and unintentional. Here Ehrman mixes standard text-critical information with his own interpretation, an interpretation that is by no means shared by all textual critics, nor even most of them. In essence, he paints a very bleak picture of scribal activity,<sup>5</sup> leaving the unwary reader to assume that we have no chance of recovering the original wording of the NT.

Chapter 3, “Texts of the New Testament,” and chapter 4, “The Quest for Origins,” take us from Erasmus and the first published Greek NT to the text

<sup>4</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 15.

<sup>5</sup> See especially pp. 59–60.

of Westcott and Hort. Discussed are the major scholars from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century. This is the most objective material in the book and makes for fascinating reading. But even here, Ehrman injects his own viewpoint by his selection of material. For example, in discussing the role that Bengel played in the history of textual criticism (pp. 109–12), Ehrman gives this pious German conservative high praise as a scholar: he was an “extremely careful interpreter of the biblical text” (p. 109); “Bengel studied *everything* intensely” (p. 111). Ehrman speaks about Bengel’s breakthroughs in textual criticism (pp. 111–12), but does not mention that he was the first important scholar to articulate the doctrine of the orthodoxy of the variants. This is a curious omission because, on the one hand, Ehrman is well aware of this fact, for in the fourth edition of *The Text of the New Testament*, now by Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman,<sup>6</sup> which appeared just months before *Misquoting Jesus*, the authors note, “With characteristic energy and perseverance, [Bengel] procured all the editions, manuscripts, and early translations available to him. After extended study, he came to the conclusions that the variant readings were fewer in number than might have been expected and that *they did not shake any article of evangelical doctrine.*”<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Ehrman instead mentions J. J. Wettstein, a contemporary of Bengel, who, at the tender age of twenty, assumed that these variants “can have no weakening effect on the trustworthiness or integrity of the Scriptures,”<sup>8</sup> but years later, after careful study of the text, Wettstein changed his views after he “began thinking seriously about his own theological convictions.”<sup>9</sup> One is tempted to think that Ehrman may see a parallel between himself and Wettstein: like Wettstein, Ehrman started out as an evangelical when in college, but changed his views on the text and theology in his more mature years.<sup>10</sup> But the model that Bengel supplies—a sober scholar who arrives at quite different conclusions—is quietly passed over.

What is also curiously left out is Tischendorf’s *motivation* for his indefatigable work of discovering manuscripts and of publishing a critical edition of the Greek text with a full apparatus. Tischendorf is widely acknowledged as the most industrious NT textual critic of all time. And what motivated him was a desire to recover the earliest form of the text—a text which he believed would vindicate orthodox Christianity against the Hegelian skepticism of F. C. Baur and his followers. None of this is mentioned in *Misquoting Jesus*.

Besides the selectivity regarding scholars and their opinions, these four chapters involve two curious omissions. First, there is next to no discussion about the various manuscripts. It is *almost* as if external evidence is a non-starter for Ehrman. Further, as much as he enlightens his lay readers about

<sup>6</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Metzger-Ehrman, *Text* 158 (italics mine). This stands in direct contradiction to Ehrman’s assessment in his conclusion (p. 207), quoted above.

<sup>8</sup> Quotation from Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus* 112.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

<sup>10</sup> See *Misquoting Jesus* 1–15, where Ehrman chronicles his own spiritual journey.

the discipline, the fact that he does not give them the details about which manuscripts are more trustworthy, older, and so on, allows him to control the information flow. Repeatedly, I was frustrated in my perusal of the book because it spoke of various readings without giving much, if any, of the data that supported them. Even in his third chapter—"Texts of the New Testament: Editions, Manuscripts, and Differences"—there is minimal discussion of the manuscripts, and none of individual codices. In the two pages that deal specifically with the manuscripts, Ehrman speaks only about their number, nature, and variants.<sup>11</sup>

Second, Ehrman overplays the quality of the variants while underscoring their quantity. He says, "There are more variations among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament."<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere he states that the number of variants is as high as 400,000.<sup>13</sup> That is true enough, but by itself is misleading. Anyone who teaches NT textual criticism knows that this fact is only part of the picture and that, if left dangling in front of the reader without explanation, this is a distorted view. Once it is revealed that the great majority of these variants are inconsequential—involving spelling differences that cannot even be translated, articles with proper nouns, changes in word order, and the like—and that only a very small minority of the variants alter the meaning of the text, the whole picture begins to come into focus. Indeed, only about 1% of the textual variants are both meaningful and viable.<sup>14</sup> The impression Ehrman sometimes gives throughout the book—and repeats in interviews<sup>15</sup>—is that of wholesale uncertainty about the original wording,<sup>16</sup> a view that is far more radical than the one he actually embraces.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In chapter 5, "Originals that Matter," Ehrman discusses the method of textual criticism. Here he devotes about three pages to external evidence (pp. 128–31), but does not mention any individual manuscripts.

<sup>12</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 90. This is a favorite statement of his, for it shows up in his interviews, both in print and on the radio.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 89.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the nature of the textual variants, see J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: What The Da Vinci Code and Other Novel Speculations Don't Tell You* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006). The section that addresses textual criticism, comprising five chapters, is called "Politically Corrupt? The Tainting of Ancient New Testament Texts."

<sup>15</sup> "When I talk about the hundreds and thousands of differences, it's true that a lot are insignificant. But it's also true that a lot are highly significant for interpreting the Bible" (Ehrman in an interview with Jeri Krentz, *Charlotte Observer*, December 17, 2005 [accessed at <http://www.charlotte.com/mld/observer/living/religion/13428511.htm>]). In the same interview, when asked, "If we don't have the original texts of the New Testament—or even copies of the copies of the copies of the originals—what do we have?" Ehrman responded, "We have copies that were made hundreds of years later—in most cases, many hundreds of years later. And these copies are all different from one another." On *The Diane Rehm Show* (National Public Radio, December 8, 2005), Ehrman said, "There are more differences in our manuscripts than there are words in the NT."

<sup>16</sup> Note the following: "our manuscripts are . . . full of mistakes" (p. 57); "Not only do we not have the originals, we don't have the first copies of the originals. We don't even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals. What we have are copies made later—much later . . . And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places . . . these copies differ from one another in so many places that we don't even know how many

We can illustrate things this way. There are approximately 138,000 words in the Greek NT. The variants in the manuscripts, versions, and Fathers constitute almost three times this number. At first blush, that is a striking amount. But in light of the possibilities, it actually is rather trivial. For example, consider the ways in which Greek can say “Jesus loves Paul”:

1. Ἰησοῦς ἀγαπᾷ Παῦλον
2. Ἰησοῦς ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Παῦλον
3. ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀγαπᾷ Παῦλον
4. ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Παῦλον
5. Παῦλον Ἰησοῦς ἀγαπᾷ

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differences there are” (p. 10); “Mistakes multiply and get repeated; sometimes they get corrected and sometimes they get compounded. And so it goes. For centuries” (p. 57); “We could go on nearly forever talking about specific places in which the texts of the New Testament came to be changed, either accidentally or intentionally. As I have indicated, the examples are not just in the hundreds but in the thousands” (p. 98); in discussing John Mill’s textual apparatus of 1707, Ehrman declares, “To the shock and dismay of many of his readers, Mill’s apparatus isolated some thirty thousand places of variation among the surviving witnesses . . . Mill was not exhaustive in his presentation of the data he had collected. He had, in fact, found far more than thirty thousand places of variation” (p. 84); “Scholars differ significantly in their estimates—some say there are 200,000 variants known, some say 300,000, some say 400,000 or more! We do not know for sure because, despite impressive developments in computer technology, no one has yet been able to count them all” (p. 89); he concludes his discussion of Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11, the two longest textual problems of the NT by far, by saying that these two texts “represent just two out of thousands of places in which the manuscripts of the New Testament came to be changed by scribes” (p. 68). To say that these two textual problems are *representative* of other textual problems is a gross overstatement: the *next* largest viable omission/addition problem involves just two verses. Ehrman does add that, “Although most of the changes are not of this magnitude, there are lots of significant changes (and lots more insignificant ones)” (p. 69). Yet even that is a bit misleading. By “most of the changes” Ehrman means *all other changes*.

<sup>17</sup> For example, he opens chapter 7 with these words: “It is probably safe to say that the copying of early Christians texts was by and large a ‘conservative’ process. The scribes . . . were intent on ‘conserving’ the textual tradition they were passing on. Their ultimate concern was not to modify the tradition, but to preserve it for themselves and for those who would follow them. Most scribes, no doubt, tried to do a faithful job in making sure that the text they reproduced was the same text they inherited” (p. 177). “It would be a mistake . . . to assume that the only changes being made were by copyists with a personal stake in the wording of the text. In fact, most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the [*sic*] most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another” (p. 55). “To be sure, of all the hundreds of thousands of changes found among the manuscripts, most of them are completely insignificant” (p. 207). Such concessions seem to be wrung out of him, for these facts are contrary to his agenda. In this instance, he immediately adds that, “It would be wrong, however, to say—as people sometimes do—that the changes in our text have no real bearing on what the texts mean or on the theological conclusions that one draws from them” (pp. 207–8). And he prefaces his concession by the bold statement that, “The more I studied the manuscript tradition of the New Testament, the more I realized just how radically the text had been altered over the years at the hands of scribes” (p. 207). But this is another claim without sufficient nuancing. Yes, scribes have changed the text, but the vast majority of changes are insignificant. And the vast majority of the rest are easily detectable. One almost gets the sense that it is the honest scholar in Ehrman who is adding these concessions, and the theological liberal in Ehrman who keeps the concessions at a minimum.

6. τὸν Παῦλον Ἰησοῦς ἀγαπᾷ
7. Παῦλον ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀγαπᾷ
8. τὸν Παῦλον ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀγαπᾷ
9. ἀγαπᾷ Ἰησοῦς Παῦλον
10. ἀγαπᾷ Ἰησοῦς τὸν Παῦλον
11. ἀγαπᾷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Παῦλον
12. ἀγαπᾷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν Παῦλον
13. ἀγαπᾷ Παῦλον Ἰησοῦς
14. ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Παῦλον Ἰησοῦς
15. ἀγαπᾷ Παῦλον ὁ Ἰησοῦς
16. ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Παῦλον ὁ Ἰησοῦς

These variations only represent a small fraction of the possibilities. If the sentence used φιλεῖ instead of ἀγαπᾷ, for example, or if it began with a conjunction such as δέ, καί, or μέν, the potential variations would grow exponentially. Factor in synonyms (such as κύριος for Ἰησοῦς), spelling differences, and additional words (such as Χριστός, or ἅγιος with Παῦλος) and the list of potential variants that do *not* affect the essence of the statement increases to the hundreds. If such a simple sentence as “Jesus loves Paul” could have so many insignificant variations, a mere 400,000 variants among the NT manuscripts seems like an almost negligible amount.<sup>18</sup>

But these criticisms are minor quibbles. There is nothing really earth-shaking in the first four chapters of the book. Rather, it is in the introduction that we see Ehrman’s motive, and the last three chapters reveal his agenda. In these places he is especially provocative and given to overstatement and *non sequitur*. The remainder of our review will focus on this material.

## II. EHRMAN’S EVANGELICAL BACKGROUND

In the introduction, Ehrman speaks of his evangelical background—three years at Moody Bible Institute, two years at Wheaton College where he first learned Greek, followed by an M.Div. and Ph.D. at Princeton Seminary. It was at Princeton that Ehrman began to reject some of his evangelical upbringing, especially as he wrestled with the details of the text of the NT. He notes that the study of the NT manuscripts increasingly created doubts in his mind: “I kept reverting to my basic question: how does it help us to say that the Bible

<sup>18</sup> This illustration is taken from Daniel B. Wallace, “Laying a Foundation: New Testament Textual Criticism,” in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis* (Festschrift for Harold W. Hoehner; ed. Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning; Wheaton: Crossway, forthcoming). One more item worth mentioning about Ehrman’s lacunae on the manuscripts is that he seems to be gradually moving toward an internal priority view. He argues for several readings that are hanging onto external evidence by a bare thread. This seems strange because just months before *Misquoting Jesus* appeared the fourth edition of Bruce Metzger’s *Text of the New Testament* was published, co-authored this time by Bart Ehrman. Yet in that book, both authors speak more highly of the external evidence than Ehrman does in *Misquoting Jesus*.

is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don't have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by the scribes—sometimes correctly and sometimes (many times!) incorrectly?"<sup>19</sup> This is an excellent question. And it is featured prominently in *Misquoting Jesus*, being repeated throughout the book. Unfortunately, Ehrman does not really spend much time wrestling with it directly.

While he was in the master's program, Ehrman took a course on Mark's Gospel from Professor Cullen Story. For his term paper, he wrote on the problem of Jesus speaking of David's entry into the temple "when Abiathar was the high priest" (Mark 2:26). The well-known crux is problematic for inerrancy because, according to 1 Samuel 21, the time when David entered the temple was actually when Abiathar's father, Ahimelech, was priest. But Ehrman was determined to work around what looked to be the plain meaning of the text, in order to salvage inerrancy. Ehrman tells his readers, Professor Story's comment on the paper "went straight through me. He wrote, 'Maybe Mark just made a mistake.'"<sup>20</sup> This was a decisive moment in Ehrman's spiritual journey. When he concluded that Mark may have erred, "the floodgates opened."<sup>21</sup> He began to question the historical reliability of many other biblical texts, resulting in "a seismic change" in his understanding of the Bible. "The Bible," Ehrman notes, "began to appear to me as a very human book. . . . This was a human book from beginning to end."<sup>22</sup>

What strikes me as most remarkable in all this is how much Ehrman tied inerrancy to the general historical reliability of the Bible. It was an all-or-nothing proposition for him. He still seems to see things in black-and-white terms, for he concludes his testimony with these words: "It is a radical shift from reading the Bible as an inerrant blueprint for our faith, life, and future to seeing it as a very human book. . . . This is the shift in my own thinking that I ended up making, and to which I am now *fully committed*."<sup>23</sup> There thus seems to be no middle ground in his view of the text. In short, Ehrman seems to have held to what I would call a "domino view of doctrine." When one falls down, they all fall down. We shall return to this issue in our conclusion.

### III. THE ORTHODOX CORRUPTION OF SCRIPTURE

The heart of the book is chapters 5, 6, and 7. Here Ehrman especially discusses the results of the findings in his major work, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*.<sup>24</sup> His concluding chapter closes in on the point that he is driving at in this section: "It would be wrong . . . to say—as people sometimes

<sup>19</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 9. For a treatment of the problem in Mark 2:26, see Daniel B. Wallace, "Mark 2.26 and the Problem of Abiathar," ETS SW regional meeting, March 13, 2004, available at [http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page\\_id=3839](http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=3839).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 13 (italics mine).

<sup>24</sup> *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

do—that the changes in our text have no real bearing on what the texts mean or on the theological conclusions that one draws from them. We have seen, in fact, that just the opposite is the case.”<sup>25</sup>

We pause to observe two fundamental theological points being stressed in *Misquoting Jesus*: first, as we mentioned previously, it is irrelevant to speak of the Bible’s inerrancy because we no longer have the original documents; second, the variants in the manuscripts change the basic theology of the NT.

1. *The logical fallacy in denying an inerrant autograph.* Although Ehrman does not really develop this first argument, it does deserve a response. We need to begin by making a careful distinction between verbal inspiration and inerrancy. Inspiration relates to the *wording* of the Bible, while inerrancy relates to the *truth* of a statement. American evangelicals generally believe that only the original text is inspired. This is not to say, however, that copies cannot be inerrant. Indeed, statements that bear no relation to Scripture can be inerrant. If I say, “I am married and have four sons, two dogs, and a cat,” that is an inerrant statement. It is not inspired, nor at all related to Scripture, but it is true. Similarly, whether Paul says “we have peace” or “let us have peace” in Rom 5:1, both statements are true (though each in a different sense), though only one is inspired. Keeping this distinction in mind as we consider the textual variants of the NT should clarify matters.

Regardless of what one thinks about the doctrine of inerrancy, the argument against it on the basis of the unknown autographs is logically fallacious. This is so for two reasons. First, we have the text of the NT *somewhere* in the manuscripts. There is no need for conjecture, except perhaps in one or two places.<sup>26</sup> Second, the text we have in any viable variants is no more a problem for inerrancy than other problems where the text is secure. Now, to be sure, there are some challenges in the textual variants to inerrancy. This is not denied. But there are simply bigger fish to fry when it comes to issues that inerrancy faces. Thus, if conjectural emendation is unnecessary, and if no viable variant registers much of a blip on the radar called “problems for inerrancy,” then not having the originals is a moot point for this doctrine. It is not a moot point for verbal inspiration, of course, but it is for inerrancy.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 208.

<sup>26</sup> P. 281, n. 5 (to ch. 8), “Is What We Have Now What They Wrote Then?” in *Reinventing Jesus* is here duplicated: “There are two places in the New Testament where conjecture has perhaps been needed. In Acts 16:12 the standard critical Greek text gives a reading that is not found in any Greek manuscripts. But even here, some members of the UBS committee rejected the conjecture, arguing that certain manuscripts had the original reading. The difference between the two readings is only one letter. See discussion in Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) 393–95; cf. NET Bible “tc” note on Acts 16:12. Also, in Revelation 21:17 the standard Greek text follows a conjecture that Westcott and Hort originally put forth, though the textual problem is not listed in either the UBS text or the Nestle-Aland text. This conjecture is a mere spelling variant that changes no meaning in the text.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of this issue, see Daniel B. Wallace, “Inerrancy and the Text of the New Testament: Assessing the Logic of the Agnostic View,” posted in January 2006 on <http://www.4truth.net/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=hiKXLbPNLrF&b=784441&ct=1799301>.

2. *Cardinal doctrines affected by textual variants?* Ehrman's second theological point occupies center stage in his book. It will accordingly occupy the rest of this review. In chapters five and six, Ehrman discusses several passages that involve variants that allegedly affect core theological beliefs. He summarizes his findings in his concluding chapter as follows:

In some instances, the very meaning of the text is at stake, depending on how one resolves a textual problem: Was Jesus an angry man [Mark 1:41]? Was he completely distraught in the face of death [Heb 2:8–9]? Did he tell his disciples that they could drink poison without being harmed [Mark 16:9–20]? Did he let an adulteress off the hook with nothing but a mild warning [John 7:53–8:11]? Is the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly taught in the New Testament [1 John 5:7–8]? Is Jesus actually called “the unique God” there [John 1:18]? Does the New Testament indicate that even the Son of God himself does not know when the end will come [Matt 24:36]? The questions go on and on, and all of them are related to how one resolves difficulties in the manuscript tradition as it has come down to us.<sup>28</sup>

It is apparent that such a summary is intended to focus on the major problem passages that Ehrman has uncovered. Thus, following the well-worn rabbinic principle of a *maiore ad minus*,<sup>29</sup> or arguing from the greater to the lesser, we will address just these seven texts.

#### IV. THE PROBLEM WITH PROBLEM PASSAGES

Three of these passages have been considered inauthentic by most NT scholars—including most *evangelical* NT scholars—for well over a century (Mark 16:9–20; John 7:53–8:11; and 1 John 5:7–8).<sup>30</sup> Yet Ehrman writes as though the excision of such texts could shake up our theological convictions. Such is hardly the case. (We will suspend discussion of one of these passages, 1 John 5:7–8, until the end.)

1. *The last twelve verses of Mark and the pericope adulterae.* At the same time, Ehrman implicitly raises a valid issue. A glance at virtually any English Bible today reveals that the longer ending of Mark and the *pericope adulterae* are to be found in their usual places. Thus, not only do the KJV and NKJV have these passages (as would be expected), but so do the ASV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, TNIV, NASB, ESV, TEV, NAB, NJB, and NET. Yet the scholars who produced these translations, by and large, do not subscribe to the authenticity of such texts. The reasons are simple enough: they do not show up in the oldest and best manuscripts and their internal evidence is decidedly against authenticity. Why then are they still in these Bibles?

<sup>28</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 208.

<sup>29</sup> See Hermann L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Atheneum, NY: Temple, 1978) 94, 96 for this hermeneutical principle known as *kal wa-homer*.

<sup>30</sup> An accessible discussion of the textual problem in these three passages can be found in the footnotes of the NET Bible on these texts.

The answer to this question varies. For some, they seem to be in the Bibles because of a tradition of timidity. There are seemingly good reasons for this. The rationale is typically that no one will buy a particular version if it lacks these famous passages. And if they do not buy the version, it cannot influence Christians. Some translations have included the *pericope adulterae* because of mandate from the papal authorities declaring the passage to be Scripture. The NEB/REB include it at the end of the Gospels, rather than in its traditional location. The TNIV and NET have both passages in smaller font with brackets around them. Smaller type, of course, makes it harder to read from the pulpit. The NET adds a lengthy discussion about the inauthenticity of the verses. Most translations mention that these pericopae are not found in the oldest manuscripts, but such a comment is rarely noticed by readers today. How do we know this? From the shock waves produced by Ehrman's book. In radio, TV, and newspaper interviews with Ehrman, the story of the woman caught in adultery is almost always the first text brought up as inauthentic, and the mention is calculated to alarm the audience.

Letting the public in on scholarly secrets about the text of the Bible is not new. Edward Gibbon, in his six-volume bestseller, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, noted that the *Comma Johanneum*, or Trinitarian formula of 1 John 5:7–8, was not authentic.<sup>31</sup> This scandalized the British public of the eighteenth century, for their only Bible was the Authorized Version, which contained the formula. "Others had done [this] before him, but only in academic and learned circles. Gibbon did so before the general public, in language designed to offend."<sup>32</sup> Yet by the time the Revised Version appeared in 1885, no trace of the *Comma* was to be found in it. Today the text is not printed in modern translations, and it hardly raises an eyebrow.

Ehrman has followed in Gibbon's train by exposing the public to the inauthenticity of Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53–8:11. The problem here, though, is a bit different. Strong emotional baggage is especially attached to the latter text. For years, it was my favorite passage that was not in the Bible. I would even preach on it as true historical narrative, even after I rejected its literary/canonical authenticity. And we all know of preachers who cannot quite give it up, even though they, too, have doubts about it. But there are two problems with this approach. First, in terms of popularity between these two texts, John 8 is the overwhelming favorite, yet its external credentials are significantly worse than that of Mark 16. The same preacher who declares the Markan passage to be inauthentic extols the virtues of John 8. This inconsistency is appalling. Something is amiss in our theological seminaries when one's feelings are allowed to be the arbiter of textual problems. Second, the *pericope adulterae* is most likely not even *historically* true. It was probably

<sup>31</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Edition DeLuxe; 6 vols.; Philadelphia: John D. Morris, 1900) 3.703–5.

<sup>32</sup> James Bentley, *Secrets of Mount Sinai: The Story of the Codex Sinaiticus* (London: Orbis, 1985) 29.

a story conflated from two different accounts.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the excuse that one can proclaim it because the story really happened is apparently not valid.

In retrospect, keeping these two pericopae in our Bibles rather than relegating them to the footnotes seems to have been a bomb just waiting to explode. All Ehrman did was to light the fuse. One lesson we must learn from *Misquoting Jesus* is that those in ministry need to close the gap between the church and the academy. We have to educate believers. Instead of trying to *isolate* laypeople from critical scholarship, we need to *insulate* them. They need to be ready for the barrage, because it is coming.<sup>34</sup> The intentional dumbing down of the church for the sake of filling more pews will ultimately lead to defection from Christ. Ehrman is to be thanked for giving us a wake-up call.

This is not to say that everything Ehrman has written in this book is of that ilk. But these three passages are. Again, we need to stress: these texts change no fundamental doctrine, no core belief. Evangelical scholars have pointed out their doubtful scriptural status for over a century without disturbing one iota of orthodoxy.

The remaining four textual problems, however, tell a different story. Ehrman appeals either to an interpretation or to evidence that most scholars consider, at best, doubtful.

2. *Hebrews 2:8–9*. Translations are roughly united in how they treat Heb 2:9b. The NET is representative: “by God’s grace he would experience death on behalf of everyone.” Ehrman suggests that “by God’s grace”— $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\iota\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ —is a secondary reading. Instead, he argues that “apart from God,” or  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ , is what the author originally wrote. There are but three Greek manuscripts that have this reading, all from the tenth century or later. Codex 1739, however, is one of them, and it is a copy of an early and decent manuscript.  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  is also discussed in several Fathers, one Vulgate manuscript, and some copies of the Peshitta.<sup>35</sup> Many scholars would dismiss such paltry evidence without further ado. If they bother to treat the internal evidence at all, it is because even though it has a poor pedigree,  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  is the harder reading and thus may require some explanation, since scribes tended to smooth out the wording of the text. As well, something needs to explain the several patristic citations. But if a reading is an unintentional change, the

<sup>33</sup> See Bart D. Ehrman, “Jesus and the Adulteress,” *NTS* 34 (1988) 24–44.

<sup>34</sup> Because of this need, *Reinventing Jesus* was written. Although written on a popular level, it is backed with serious scholarship.

<sup>35</sup> Ehrman says the reading “occurs in only two documents of the tenth century” (*Misquoting Jesus* 145), by which he means only two Greek documents, 0243 (0121b) and 1739<sup>xt</sup>. These manuscripts are closely related and probably represent a common archetype. It is also found in 424<sup>evld</sup> (thus, apparently a later correction in an eleventh century minuscule) as well as  $v_g^{ms}$   $syr^{pmss}$  Origen<sup>gr</sup> (vr), lat MSS<sup>according to Origen</sup> Theodore Nestorians<sup>according to Ps-Oecumenius</sup> Theodoret 1/2; lem Ambrose MSS<sup>according to Jerome</sup> Vigilius Fulgentius. Ehrman does note some of the patristic evidence, underscoring an important argument, viz., “Origen tells us that this was the reading of the majority of manuscripts in his own day” (ibid.).

canon of the harder reading is invalid. The hardest reading will be a non-sense reading, something that cannot be created on purpose. Although  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  is apparently the harder reading,<sup>36</sup> it can be explained as an accidental alteration. It is most likely due either to a “scribal lapse”<sup>37</sup> in which an inattentive copyist confused  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  for  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\iota$ , or “a marginal gloss” in which a scribe was thinking of 1 Cor 15:27 which, like Heb 2:8, quotes Ps 8:6 in reference to God’s subjection of all things to Christ.<sup>38</sup>

Without going into the details of Ehrman’s defense of  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ , we simply wish to note four things. First, Ehrman overstates his case by assuming that his view is *certainly* correct. After three pages of discussion of this text in his *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, he pronounces the verdict: “The external evidence notwithstanding, Hebrews 2:9 *must* have originally said that Jesus died ‘apart from God.’”<sup>39</sup> He is still seeing things in black-and-white terms. Second, Ehrman’s text-critical views are getting dangerously close to rigorous eclecticism.<sup>40</sup> The external data seem to mean less and less to him as he seems to *want* to see theological corruption in the text. Third, even though

<sup>36</sup> This, however, is not necessarily the case. An argument could be made that  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\iota$  θεοῦ is the harder reading, since the cry of dereliction from the cross, in which Jesus quoted Ps 22:1, may be reflected in the  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  θεοῦ reading, while dying “by the grace of God” is not as clear.

<sup>37</sup> So Metzger, *Textual Commentary*<sup>2</sup> 595. In uncial script: *ca*ρίτιca vs. *ca*ρisca.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* For similar arguments, see F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 70–71, n. 15. The point of the marginal gloss is that in Heb 2:8 the author quotes Ps 8:6, adding that “in the subjecting of all things to him, he left nothing outside of his control.” In 1 Cor 15:27, which also quotes Ps 8:6, Paul adds the qualifier that God was excluded from the “all things” that were subjected to Christ. Metzger argues that the gloss was most likely added by a scribe “to explain that ‘everything’ in ver. 8 does not include God; this gloss, being erroneously regarded by a later transcriber as a correction of  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\iota$  θεοῦ, was introduced into the text of ver. 9” (*Textual Commentary* 595). For the better treatments of this problem in the exegetical literature, see Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (MeyerK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 200–202; Bruce, *Hebrews* 70–71.

Ehrman says that such is quite unlikely because of the location of the  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  reading in v. 9 rather than as an additional note in v. 8 where it belongs. But the fact that such an explanation presupposes a single errant ancestor for the few witnesses that have it is hardly a stretch. Stranger things have happened among the manuscripts. Ehrman adds that  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  is the less usual term in the NT, and thus scribes would tend toward the more usual,  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\iota$ . But in Hebrews  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  is almost twice as frequent as  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ , as Ehrman notes (*Orthodox Corruption* 148). Further, although it is certainly true that scribes “typically confuse unusual words for common ones” (*ibid.* 147), there is absolutely nothing unusual about  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ . It occurs 41 times in the NT, thirteen of which are in Hebrews. This brings us back to the canon of the harder reading. Ehrman argues that  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  is indeed the harder reading here, but in Metzger-Ehrman, *Text*, he and Metzger say, “Obviously, the category ‘more difficult reading’ is relative, and a point is sometimes reached when a reading must be judged to be so difficult that it can have arisen only by accident in transcription” (p. 303). Many scholars, including Metzger, would say that that point was reached in Heb 2:9.

<sup>39</sup> *Orthodox Corruption* 149 (italics mine).

<sup>40</sup> By this, I do not mean merely his adoption of  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  θεοῦ here. After all, Günther Zuntz, highly regarded as a brilliant and sober-minded reasoned eclectic, also considered  $\chi\omega\rho\acute{\iota}\varsigma$  θεοῦ as authentic (*The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum* [Schweich Lectures, 1946; London: Oxford University Press, 1953] 34–35). Rather, I am referring to Ehrman’s overall agenda of exploiting the apparatus for orthodox corruptions, regardless of the evidence for alternative readings. With this agenda, Ehrman seems driven to argue for certain readings that have little external support.

he is certain about his verdict, his mentor, Bruce Metzger, is not. A year after *Orthodox Corruption* was published Metzger's second edition of his *Textual Commentary* appeared. The UBS committee still gave the  $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\tau\iota$   $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  reading the palm, but this time *upgrading* their conviction to an "A" rating.<sup>41</sup> Finally, even assuming that  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma$   $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  is the correct reading here, Ehrman has not made a case that this is a variant that "affect[s] the interpretation of an *entire book* of the New Testament."<sup>42</sup> He argues that "[t]he less attested reading is also more consistent with the theology of Hebrews."<sup>43</sup> He adds that the author "repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus died a fully human, shameful death, totally removed from the realm whence he came, the realm of God. His sacrifice, as a result, was accepted as the perfect expiation for sin. Moreover, God did not intervene in his passion and did nothing to minimize his pain. Jesus died 'apart from God.'"<sup>44</sup> If this is the view of Jesus throughout Hebrews, how does the variant that Ehrman adopts in 2:9 change that portrait? In his *Orthodox Corruption*, Ehrman says that "Hebrews 5:7 speaks of Jesus, in the face of death, beseeching God with loud cries and tears."<sup>45</sup> But that this text is speaking of Jesus "in the face of death" is not at all clear (nor does Ehrman defend this view). Further, he builds on this in his concluding chapter of *Misquoting Jesus*—even though he has never established the point—when he asks, "Was [Jesus] completely distraught in the face of death?"<sup>46</sup> He goes even further in *Orthodox Corruption*. I am at a loss to understand how Ehrman can claim that the author of Hebrews seems to know "of passion traditions in which Jesus was *terrified* in the face of death"<sup>47</sup> unless it is by connecting three dots, all of which are dubious—viz., reading  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma$   $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  in Heb 2:9, seeing 5:7 as referring principally to the death of Christ and that his prayers were principally for himself,<sup>48</sup> and then

<sup>41</sup> The preface to this edition was written on September 30, 1993. Metzger is acknowledged in *Orthodox Corruption* as having "read parts of the manuscript" (p. vii), a book completed in February 1993 (ibid. viii). If Metzger read the section on Heb 2:9, he still disagreed strongly with Ehrman. Alternatively, he was not shown this portion of the manuscript. If the latter, one has to wonder why Ehrman would not want to get Metzger's input since he already knew, from the first edition of *Textual Commentary*, that Metzger did not see the  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma$  reading as likely (there it is given a "B" rating).

<sup>42</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 132 (italics mine).

<sup>43</sup> *Orthodox Corruption* 148.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 149.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 208.

<sup>47</sup> *Orthodox Corruption* 144 (italics mine).

<sup>48</sup> The context of Hebrews 5, however, speaks of Christ as high priest; v. 6 sets the stage by linking Christ's priesthood to that of Melchizedek; v. 7 connects his prayers with "the days of his flesh," not just with his passion. It is thus not unreasonable to see his prayers as prayers for his people. All this suggests that more than the passion is in view in Heb 5:7. The one datum in this text that may connect the prayers with the passion is that the one to whom Christ prayed was "able to save him from death." But if the prayers are restricted to Christ's ordeal on the cross, then the  $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma$  reading in Heb 2:9 seems to be refuted, for in 5:7 the Lord "was *heard* [εἰσακουσθεῖς] because of his devotion." How could he be heard if he died *apart from God*? The interpretive issues in Heb 5:7 are somewhat complex, yielding no facile answers. See William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991) 119–20.

regarding the loud cries there to reflect his terrified state. Ehrman seems to be building his case on linked hypotheses, which is a poor foundation at best.

3. *Mark 1:41*. In the first chapter of Mark's Gospel, a leper approaches Jesus and asks him to heal him: "If you are willing, you can make me clean" (Mark 1:40). Jesus' response is recorded in the Nestle-Aland text as follows: *καὶ φησὶ σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἤψατο καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· θέλω, καθάρισθητι* ("and moved with compassion, he stretched out [his] hand and touched him and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed'"). Instead of *σπλαγχνισθεὶς* ("moved with compassion") a few Western witnesses<sup>49</sup> read *ὀργισθεὶς* ("becoming angry"). Jesus' motivation for this healing apparently hangs in the balance. Even though the UBS<sup>4</sup> gives *σπλαγχνισθεὶς* a "B" rating, an increasing number of exegetes are starting to argue for the authenticity of *ὀργισθεὶς*. In a *Festschrift* for Gerald Hawthorne in 2003, Ehrman made an impressive argument for its authenticity.<sup>50</sup> Four years earlier, a doctoral dissertation by Mark Proctor was written in defense of *ὀργισθεὶς*.<sup>51</sup> The reading has also made its way into the TNIV and is seriously entertained in the NET. We will not take the time to consider the arguments here. At this stage I am inclined to think it is most likely original. Either way, for the sake of argument, assuming that the "angry" reading is authentic, what does this tell us about Jesus that we did not know before?

Ehrman suggests that if Mark originally wrote about Jesus' anger in this passage, it changes our picture of Jesus in *Mark* significantly. In fact, this textual problem is his lead example in chapter 5 ("Originals That Matter"), a chapter whose central thesis is that some variants "affect the interpretation of an *entire book* of the New Testament."<sup>52</sup> This thesis is overstated in general, and particularly for Mark's Gospel. In Mark 3:5 Jesus is said to be angry—wording that is indisputably in the original text of *Mark*. And in Mark 10:14 he is indignant at his disciples.

Ehrman, of course, knows this. In fact, he argues implicitly in the Hawthorne *Festschrift* that Jesus' anger in Mark 1:41 perfectly fits into the picture that Mark elsewhere paints of Jesus. He says, for example, "Mark described Jesus as angry, and, at least in this instance, scribes took offense. This comes as no surprise; apart from a fuller understanding of Mark's portrayal, Jesus' anger is difficult to understand."<sup>53</sup> Ehrman even lays out the fundamental principle that he sees running through Mark: "Jesus is angered when anyone questions his authority or ability to heal—or his desire to heal."<sup>54</sup> Now, for the sake of argument, let us assume that not

<sup>49</sup> D it<sup>a</sup> d f12 r1 Diatessaron.

<sup>50</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, "A Leper in the Hands of an Angry Jesus," in *New Testament Greek and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Hawthorne* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 77–98.

<sup>51</sup> Mark A. Proctor, "The 'Western' Text of Mark 1:41: A Case for the Angry Jesus" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1999). Even though Ehrman's article appeared four years after Proctor's dissertation, Ehrman did not mention Proctor's work.

<sup>52</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 132 (italics mine).

<sup>53</sup> Ehrman, "A Leper in the Hands of an Angry Jesus" 95.

only is Ehrman's textual reconstruction correct, but his interpretation of ὀργισθεῖς in Mark 1:41 is correct—not only in that passage but in the totality of Mark's presentation of Jesus.<sup>55</sup> If so, how then does an angry Jesus in 1:41

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 94. See also p. 87: "Jesus gets angry on several occasions in Mark's Gospel; what is most interesting to note is that each account involves Jesus' ability to perform miraculous deeds of healing."

<sup>55</sup> There are a few weak links in his overall argument, however. First, he does not make out the best case that every instance in which Jesus is angry is in a healing account. Is the pericope about Jesus laying hands on children really a *healing* story (10:13–16)? It is unclear of what disease these children are being "healed." His suggestion that the laying on of hands indicates healing or at least the transmission of divine power here is lame ("A Leper in the Hands of an Angry Jesus" 88). Further, it proves too much, for 10:16 says that Jesus "took the children in his arms and placed his hands on them and blessed them." To not see a compassionate and gentle Jesus in such a text is almost incomprehensible. So, if this is a healing narrative, it *also* implies Jesus' compassion in the very act of healing—a motive that Ehrman says never occurs in healing narratives in Mark.

Second, he claims that Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1:30–31 is not a compassionate act: "More than one wry observer has noted . . . that after he does so she gets up to feed them supper" (ibid. 91, n. 16). But surely Ehrman's statement—repeated in *Misquoting Jesus* (p. 138)—is simply a politically correct comment that is meant to suggest that for Jesus to restore the woman to a subservient role *cannot* be due to his compassion. Is not the point rather that the woman was fully healed, her strength completely recovered, even to the point that she could return to her normal duties and Jesus and his disciples? As such, it seems to function similarly to the raising of the synagogue ruler's daughter, for as soon as her life was restored Mark tells us that "the girl got up at once and began to walk around" (Mark 5:42).

Third, in more than one healing narrative in the Synoptic Gospels—including the healing of Peter's mother-in-law—we see strong hints of compassion on Jesus' part when he grabs the person's hand. In Matt 9:25; Mark 1:31; 5:41; 9:27; and Luke 8:54 the expression each time is κρατήσας / ἐκράτησεν τῆς χειρὸς. κρατέω with a *genitive* direct object, rather than an accusative direct object, is used in these texts. In the Gospels when this verb takes an accusative direct object, it has the force of "seizing, clinging to, holding firmly" (cf. Matt 14:3; 21:46; 22:6; 26:57; 28:9; Mark 6:17; 7:3, 4, 8; but when it takes a genitive direct object, it implies a gentle touch more than a firm grip, and is used only in healing contexts (note the translation in the NET of κρατήσας / ἐκράτησεν τῆς χειρὸς in Matt 9:25; Mark 1:31; 5:41; 9:27; and Luke 8:54). What is to be noted in these texts is not only that there is no difference between Mark on the one hand and Matthew and Luke on the other, but that Mark actually has more instances of this idiom than Matthew and Luke combined. How does this "gently taking her/him by the hand" not speak of compassion?

Fourth, to not see Jesus' compassion in texts that do not use *σπλαγχνίζομαι* or the like, as Ehrman is wont to do, borders on the lexical-conceptual equation fallacy in which a concept cannot be seen in a given text unless the word for such a concept is there. To take a simple example, consider the word for "fellowship" in the Greek NT, *κοινωνία*. The word occurs less than twenty times, but no one would claim that the concept of fellowship occurs so infrequently. Ehrman, of course, knows this and tries to argue that both the words for compassion and the concept are not to be seen in Mark's healing stories. But he leaves the impression that since he has established this point lexically by athetizing *σπλαγχνισθεῖς* in Mark 1:41, the concept is easy to dispense with.

Fifth, Ehrman's dismissal of all alternative interpretations to his understanding of why and at whom Jesus was angry in Mark 1:41 is too cavalier. His certitude that "even the commentators who realize that the text originally indicated that Jesus became angry are embarrassed by the idea and try to explain it away, so that the text no longer means what it says" ("A Leper in the Hands of an Angry Jesus" 86) implies that his interpretation surely must be right. (Although Ehrman makes quick work of various views, he does not interact at all with Proctor's view, apparently because he was unaware of Proctor's dissertation when he wrote his piece for the Hawthorne *Festschrift*. Proctor essentially argues that the healing of the leper is a *double* healing, which also implicitly involves an exorcism ["A Case for the Angry Jesus" 312–16]. Proctor summarizes his

“affect the interpretation of an *entire book* of the New Testament”? According to Ehrman’s own interpretation, ὀργισθεῖς only strengthens the image we see of Jesus in this Gospel by making it wholly consistent with the other texts that speak of his anger. If this reading is Exhibit A in Ehrman’s fifth chapter, it seriously backfires, for it does little or nothing to alter the overall portrait of Jesus that Mark paints. Here is another instance, then, in which Ehrman’s theological conclusion is more provocative than the evidence suggests.

4. *Matthew 24:36*. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus speaks about the time of his own return. Remarkably, he confesses that he does not know exactly when that will be. In most modern translations of Matt 24:36, the text basically says, “But as for that day and hour no one knows it—neither the angels in heaven, *nor the Son*—except the Father alone.” However, many manuscripts, including some early and important ones, lack οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός. Whether “nor the Son” is authentic or not is disputed.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, Ehrman again speaks confidently on the issue.<sup>57</sup> The importance of this textual variant for the thesis of *Misquoting Jesus* is difficult to assess, however. Ehrman alludes to Matt 24:36 in his conclusion, apparently to underscore his argument that textual variants alter basic doctrines.<sup>58</sup> His initial discussion of this passage

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argument as follows: “Given (1) popular first-century views regarding the link between demons and disease, (2) the exorcistic language of v 43, (3) the behavior of demoniacs and those associated with them elsewhere in the Gospel, and (4) Luke’s treatment of Mark 1:29–31, this seems to be a relatively safe assumption even though Mark makes [*sic*] does not explicitly describe the man as a demoniac” [pp. 325–26, n. 61.] Not only does Ehrman charge exegetes with misunderstanding Mark’s ὀργισθεῖς, he also says that Matthew and Luke do not understand: “[A]nyone not intimately familiar with Mark’s Gospel on its own terms . . . may not have understand why Jesus became angry. Matthew certainly did not; neither did Luke” (ibid. 98). Is it not perhaps a bit too brash to claim that the reason Matthew and Luke dropped ὀργισθεῖς was because they were *ignorant* of Mark’s purposes? After all, were they not also “intimately familiar with Mark’s Gospel”? Are there not any other plausible reasons for their omission?

Along these lines, it should be noted that not all interpretations are created equal, but the irony here is that Ehrman seems to want to have his cake and eat it, too. In the concluding chapter of *Misquoting Jesus* he says “meaning is not inherent and texts do not speak for themselves. If texts could speak for themselves, then everyone honestly and openly reading a text would agree on what the text says” (p. 216). He adds, “The only way to make sense of a text is to read it, and the only way to read it is by putting it in other words, and the only way to put it in other words is by having other words to put it into, and the only way you have other words to put it into is that you have a life, and the only way to have a life is by being filled with desires, longings, needs, wants, beliefs, perspectives, worldviews, opinions, likes, dislikes—and all the other things that make human beings human. And so to read a text, necessarily, is to change a text” (p. 217). I may be misunderstanding him here, but this sounds as though Ehrman cannot claim his own interpretation as superior to others since all interpretation changes a text, and if each interpretation changes the *text* then how is his interpretation of a text more valid than other interpretations? If I have misunderstood his meaning, my basic point still stands: his dismissal of other interpretations is too cavalier.

<sup>56</sup> See the discussion in the NET Bible’s note on this verse.

<sup>57</sup> *Orthodox Corruption* 92: “not only is the phrase οὐδὲ ὁ υἱός found in our earliest and best manuscripts of Matthew, it is also necessary on internal grounds.”

<sup>58</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 208 (quoted earlier).

certainly leaves this impression as well.<sup>59</sup> But if he does not mean this, then he is writing more provocatively than is necessary, misleading his readers. And if he does mean it, he has overstated his case.

What is not disputed is the wording in the parallel in Mark 13:32—"But as for that day or hour no one knows it—neither the angels in heaven, *nor the Son*—except the Father."<sup>60</sup> Thus, there can be no doubt that Jesus spoke of his own prophetic ignorance in the Olivet Discourse. Consequently, what doctrinal issues are really at stake here? One simply cannot maintain that the wording in Matt 24:36 changes one's basic theological convictions about Jesus since the same sentiment is found in Mark. Not once in *Misquoting Jesus* does Ehrman mention Mark 13:32, even though he explicitly discusses Matt 24:36 at least six times, seemingly to the effect that this reading impacts our fundamental understanding of Jesus.<sup>61</sup> But does the wording change our basic understanding of *Matthew's* view of Jesus? Even that is not the case. Even if Matt 24:36 originally lacked "nor the Son," the fact that the Father alone (εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ μόνος) has this knowledge certainly implies the Son's ignorance (and the "alone" is only found in Matt 24:36, not in Mark 13:32). Again, this important detail is not mentioned in *Misquoting Jesus*, or even in *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*.

5. *John 1:18*. In John 1:18b, Ehrman argues that "Son" instead of "God" is the authentic reading. But he goes beyond the evidence by stating that if "God" were original the verse would be calling Jesus "the unique God." The problem with such a translation, in Ehrman's words, is that "[t]he term *unique* God must refer to God the Father himself—otherwise he is not unique. But if the term refers to the Father, how can it be used of the Son?"<sup>62</sup> Ehrman's sophisticated grammatical argument for this is not found in *Misquoting Jesus*, but is detailed in his *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*:

The more common expedient for those who opt for [ὁ] μονογενῆς θεός, but who recognize that its rendering as "the unique God" is virtually impossible in a Johannine context, is to understand the adjective substantivally, and to construe the entire second half of John 1:18 as a series of appositions, so that rather than reading "the unique God who is in the bosom of the Father," the text should be rendered "the unique one, who is also God, who is in the bosom of the Father." There is something attractive about the proposal. It explains what the text might have meant to a Johannine reader and thereby allows for the text of the generally superior textual witnesses. Nonetheless, the solution is entirely implausible.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 95: "Scribes found this passage difficult: the Son of God, Jesus himself, does not know when the end will come? How could that be? Isn't he all-knowing? To resolve the problem, some scribes simply modified the text by taking out the words 'nor even the Son.' Now the angels may be ignorant, but the Son of God isn't."

<sup>60</sup> Codex X, one Vulgate manuscript, and a few other unnamed witnesses (according to the apparatus of Nestle-Aland<sup>27</sup>) drop the phrase here.

<sup>61</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 95, 110, 204, 209, 223 n. 19, 224 n. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 162.

. . . It is true that *μονογενής* can elsewhere be used as a substantive (= the unique one, as in v. 14); all adjectives can. But the proponents of this view have failed to consider that it is never used in this way when it is immediately followed by a noun that agrees with it in gender, number, and case. Indeed one must here press the syntactical point: when is an adjective *ever* used substantivally when it immediately precedes a noun of the same inflection? No Greek reader would construe such a construction as a string of substantives, and no Greek writer would create such an inconcinnity. To the best of my knowledge, no one has cited anything analogous outside of this passage.

The result is that taking the term *μονογενής θεός* as two substantives standing in apposition makes for a nearly impossible syntax, whereas construing their relationship as adjective-noun creates an impossible sense.<sup>63</sup>

Ehrman's argument assumes that *μονογενής* cannot normally be substantival, even though it is so used in verse 14—as he admits. There are many critiques that could be made of his argument, but chief among them is this: his absolutizing of the grammatical situation is incorrect. His challenge (“no one has cited anything analogous outside of this passage”) is here taken up. There are, indeed, examples in which an adjective that is juxtaposed to a noun of the same grammatical concord is not functioning adjectivally but substantivally.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption* 81.

<sup>64</sup> Another criticism is that Ehrman has too hastily asserted that *μονογενής* cannot have the implied force of “unique son” as in “the unique Son, who is God” (ibid. 80–81):

The difficulty with this view is that there is nothing about the word *μονογενής* itself that suggests it. Outside of the New Testament the term simply means “one of a kind” or “unique,” and does so with reference to any range of animate or inanimate objects. Therefore, recourse must be made to its usage within the New Testament. Here proponents of the view argue that *in situ* the word implies “sonship,” for it always occurs (in the New Testament) either in explicit conjunction with *υἰός* or in a context where a *υἰός* is named and then described as *μονογενής* (Luke 9:38, John 1:14, Heb 11:17). Nonetheless, as suggestive as the argument may appear, it contains the seeds of its own refutation: if the word *μονογενής* is understood to mean “a unique son,” one wonders why it is typically put in attribution to *υἰός*, an attribution that then creates an unusual kind of redundancy (“the unique-son son”). Given the fact that neither the etymology of the word nor its general usage suggests any such meaning, this solution seems to involve a case of special pleading.

The problem with this assertion is threefold: (1) If in the three texts listed above *μονογενής* does, in fact, have both a substantival force and involves the implication of sonship, then to argue that this could be the case in John 1:18 is not an instance of special pleading because there is already clear testimony within the NT of this force. (2) Ehrman's argument rests on going outside of biblical Greek for the normative meaning of a term that seemed to have special nuances within the Bible. But since in the NT (Heb 11:17)—as well as patristic Greek (see n. 62) and the LXX (cf. Judg 11:34 where the adjective is used *prior* to the noun that speaks of Jephthah's daughter; Tobit 3:15 is similar; cf. Tobit 8:17)—*μονογενής* often both bears the connotation of “son” (or child) *and* is used absolutely (i.e. substantivally), to argue for a secular force within the Bible looks like special pleading. (3) To argue that an implied lexical force becomes “an unusual kind of redundancy” when the implication is brought out explicitly in the text requires much more nuancing before it can be applied as any kind of normative principle: on its face, and in application to the case in hand, it strikes me as almost wildly untrue. In grammar and lexeme, the NT is filled with examples in which the ebb and flow of implicit and explicit meaning intertwine with one another. To take but one example from the grammatical side: εἰσέρχονται εἰς is a generally hellenistic expression in which the increased redundancy (by the doubling of the preposition) gets the point across. It is found over 80 times in the NT, yet it does not mean “come-into into”? Yet, it means the

- John 6:70: καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν εἷς διάβολός ἐστιν. Here διάβολος is functioning as a noun, even though it is an adjective. And εἷς, the pronominal adjective, is the subject related to διάβολος, the predicate nominative.
- Rom 1:30: καταλάλους *θεοστυγεῖς* ὑβριστὰς *ὑπερηφάνους* ἀλαζόνας, ἐφουρετὰς κακῶν, γονεῦσιν *ἀπειθεῖς* (“slanderers, *haters of God*, insolent, *arrogant*, boastful, inventors of evil, *disobedient* to parents”—true adjectives in italics)
- Gal 3:9: τῷ πιστῷ **Ἀβραάμ** (“with Abraham, the believer” as the NASB has it; NRSV has “Abraham who believed”; NIV has “Abraham, the man of faith”). Regardless of how it is translated, here is an adjective wedged between an article and a noun that is functioning substantivally, in apposition to the noun.
- Eph 2:20: ὄντος **ἀκρογωνιαίου** αὐτοῦ **Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ** (“Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone”): although ἀκρογωνιαῖος is an adjective, it seems to be functioning substantivally here (though it could possibly be a predicate adjective, I suppose, as a predicate genitive). LSJ lists this as an adjective; LN lists it as a noun. It may thus be similar to μονογενῆς in its development.
- 1 Tim 1:9: δικαίῳ νόμος οὐ κεῖται, ἀνόμοιοι δὲ καὶ ἀνυποτάκτοις, ἀσεβέσι καὶ ἀμαρτωλοῖς, *ἀνοσίοις* καὶ *βεβήλοισ*, *πατρολόγαις* καὶ *μητρολόγαις*, ἀνδροφόνοις (law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are *lawless* and *rebellious*, for the *ungodly* and *sinner*s, for the *unholy* and *profane*, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers [adjectives in italics]): this text clearly shows that Ehrman has overstated his case, for βεβήλοισ does not modify πατρολόγαις but instead is substantival, as are the five previous descriptive terms.
- 1 Pet 1:1: ἐκλεκτοῖς *παρεπιδήμοις* (“the elect, sojourners”): This text is variously interpreted, but our point is simply that it could fit either scheme for John 1:18. It thus qualifies for texts of which Ehrman says “no one has cited anything analogous outside of this passage.”
- 2 Pet 2:5: ἐφείσατο ἀλλὰ ὄγδοον **Νῶε** δικαιοσύνης **κήρυκα** (“did not spare [the world], but [preserved] an eighth, Noah, a preacher of righteousness”). The adjective “eighth” stands in apposition to Noah; otherwise, if it modified Noah, the force would be “an eighth Noah” as though there were seven other Noahs!<sup>65</sup>

In light of these examples (which are but a few of those found in the NT), we can thus respond directly to the question that Ehrman poses: “when is

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same thing as ἔρχομαι εἰς, a phrase that occurs over 70 times in the NT. English examples readily come to mind as well. In colloquial speech, we often hear “foot pedal” (is there any other kind of pedal besides one for the feet?).

<sup>65</sup> Added to my examples are those that a doctoral student at Dallas Seminary, Stratton Ladewig, has culled from elsewhere in the NT: Luke 14:13; 18:11; Acts 2:5. As well, he has found several inexact parallels. See his Th.M. thesis, “An Examination of the Orthodoxy of the Variants in Light of Bart Ehrman’s *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*” (Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000).

an adjective *ever* used substantivally when it immediately precedes a noun of the same inflection?" His remark that "[n]o Greek reader would construe such a construction as a string of substantives, and no Greek writer would create such an inconcinnity" is simply not borne out by the evidence. And we have only looked at a sampling of the NT. If NT authors can create such expressions, this internal argument against the reading *μονογενῆς θεός* loses considerable weight.

It now becomes a matter of asking whether there are sufficient *contextual* clues that *μονογενῆς* is in fact functioning substantivally. Ehrman has already provided both of them: (1) in John, it is unthinkable that the Word could become the *unique* God in 1:18 (in which he alone, and not the Father, is claimed to have divine status) only to have that status removed repeatedly throughout the rest of the Gospel. Thus, *assuming* that *μονογενῆς θεός* is authentic, we are in fact almost driven to the sense that Ehrman regards as grammatically implausible but contextually necessary: "the unique one, himself God." (2) The fact that *μονογενῆς* is already used in verse 14 as a substantive<sup>66</sup> becomes the strongest contextual argument for seeing its substantival function repeated four verses later. Immediately after Ehrman admits that this adjective can be used substantivally and is so used in verse 14, he makes his grammatical argument which is intended to lay the gauntlet down or to shut the coffin lid (choose your cliché) on the force of the connection with verse 14. But if the grammatical argument will not cut it, then the substantival use of *μονογενῆς* in verse 14 should stand as an important contextual clue. Indeed, in light of the well-worn usage in *biblical* Greek, we would almost expect *μονογενῆς* to be used substantivally and with the implication of sonship in 1:18.

Now, as our only concern here is to wrestle with what *μονογενῆς θεός* would mean if it were original, rather than argue for its authenticity, there seems to be sufficient evidence to demonstrate a force such as "the unique one, himself God" as a suitable gloss for this reading. Both the internal and external evidence are on its side; the only thing holding back such a variant is the interpretation that it was a modalistic reading.<sup>67</sup> But the basis for that is a grammatical assumption that we have demonstrated not to have weight. In conclusion, both *μονογενῆς υἱός* and *μονογενῆς θεός* fit comfortably within orthodoxy; no seismic theological shift occurs if one were to pick one reading over the other. Although some modern translations have been persuaded by Ehrman's argument here, the argument is hardly airtight. When either variant is examined carefully, both are seen to be within the realm of orthodox teaching.

<sup>66</sup> A quick look at Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* also reveals that the substantival function of this adjective was commonplace: 881, def. 7, the term is used absolutely in a host of patristic writers.

<sup>67</sup> Ehrman is not altogether clear in his argument that *μονογενῆς θεός* was an anti-adoptionistic reading. If his construal of the meaning of the text is correct, it looks more modalistic than orthodox. Yet, since its pedigree is solidly Alexandrian, it would seem to go back to an archetype that antedated the roots of the Sabellian heresy. In other words, the motivations for the reading, assuming Ehrman's interpretation, are muddled at best.

Suffice it to say that if “God” is authentic here, it is hardly necessary to translate the phrase as “the unique God,” as though that might imply that Jesus alone is God. Rather, as the NET renders it (see also the NIV and NRSV), John 1:18 says, “No one has ever seen God. The only one, *himself God*, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known.”

In other words, the idea that the variants in the NT manuscripts alter the theology of the NT is overstated at best.<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, as careful a scholar as Ehrman is, his treatment of major theological changes in the text of the NT tends to fall under one of two criticisms: Either his textual decisions are wrong, or his interpretation is wrong. These criticisms were made of his earlier work, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, from which *Misquoting Jesus* has drawn extensively. For example, Gordon Fee said of this work that “[u]nfortunately, Ehrman too often turns mere *possibility* into *probability*, and probability into *certainty*, where other equally viable reasons for corruption exist.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, the conclusions that Ehrman put forth in *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* are still offered in *Misquoting Jesus* without recognition of some of the severe criticisms of his work the first go-around.<sup>70</sup> For a book geared toward a lay audience, one would think that Ehrman would want to have his discussion nuanced a bit more, especially with all the theological weight that he says is on the line. One almost gets the impression that Ehrman is encouraging the Chicken Littles in the Christian community to panic at data with which they are simply not prepared to wrestle. Time and time again in the book, highly charged statements are put forth that Ehrman knows the untrained person simply cannot adequately process. And that approach resembles more an alarmist mentality than what a mature, master teacher is able to offer. Regarding the evidence, suffice it to say that *significant textual variants that alter core doctrines of the NT have not yet been produced*.

Yet Ehrman apparently thinks they have. When discussing Wettstein’s views of the NT text, Ehrman notes that “Wettstein began thinking seriously

<sup>68</sup> For the case that the NT speaks clearly of Christ’s deity, see Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*.

<sup>69</sup> Gordon D. Fee, review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* in *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 8 (1995) 204.

<sup>70</sup> See J. K. Elliott, review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, by Bart D. Ehrman, in *NovT* 36/4 (1994) 405–6; Michael W. Holmes, review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, by Bart D. Ehrman, in *RelSRev* 20/3 (1994) 237; Gordon D. Fee, review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, by Bart D. Ehrman, in *CRBR* 8 (1995) 203–6; Bruce M. Metzger, review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, by Bart D. Ehrman, in *PSB* 15/2 (1994) 210–12; David C. Parker, review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, by Bart D. Ehrman, in *JTS* 45/2 (1994) 704–8; J. N. Birdsall, Review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, by Bart D. Ehrman, in *Theology* 97/780 (1994) 460–62; Ivo Tamm, *Theologisch-christologische Varianten in der frühen Überlieferung des Neuen Testaments?* (Magisterschrift, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, n.d.); Ladewig, “An Examination of the Orthodoxy of the Variants.”

about his own theological convictions, and became attuned to the problem that the New Testament rarely, *if ever*, actually calls Jesus God.<sup>71</sup> Remarkably, Ehrman seems to represent this conclusion as not only Wettstein's, but his own, too. To the extent that Wettstein was moving toward the modern critical text and away from the *TR*, his arguments against the deity of Christ were unfounded because Christ's deity is actually more clearly seen in the critical Greek text than in the *TR*.<sup>72</sup> Although Ehrman does not discuss most of the passages that he thinks are spurious, he does do so in *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (especially pp. 264–73). But the discussion is not really fleshed out and involves internal contradictions. In short, Ehrman does not make out his case. The deity of Christ is undisturbed by any viable variants.

6. *1 John 5:7–8*. Finally, regarding 1 John 5:7–8, virtually no modern translation of the Bible includes the “Trinitarian formula,” since scholars for *centuries* have recognized it as added later. Only a few very late manuscripts have the verses. One wonders why this passage is even discussed in Ehrman's book. The only reason seems to be to fuel doubts. The passage made its way into our Bibles through political pressure, appearing for the first time in 1522, even though scholars then and now knew that it was not authentic. The early church did not know of this text, yet the Council of Constantinople in AD 381 explicitly affirmed the Trinity! How could they do this without the benefit of a text that did not get into the Greek NT for *another millennium*? Constantinople's statement was not written in a vacuum: the early church put into a theological formulation what they got out of the NT.

A distinction needs to be made here: just because a *particular* verse does not affirm a cherished doctrine does not mean that that doctrine cannot be found in the NT. In this case, anyone with an understanding of the healthy patristic debates over the Godhead knows that the early church arrived at their understanding from an examination of the data in the NT. The Trinitarian formula found in late manuscripts of 1 John 5:7 only *summarized* what they found; it did not *inform* their declarations.

## V. CONCLUSION

In sum, Ehrman's latest book does not disappoint on the provocative scale. But it comes up short on genuine substance about his primary contention. I beg your indulgence as I reflect on two pastoral points here.

First is my plea to all biblical scholars to take seriously their responsibility in caring for God's people. Scholars bear a sacred duty not to alarm lay readers on issues of which they have little understanding. Indeed, even agnostic teachers bear this responsibility. Unfortunately, the average layperson will leave *Misquoting Jesus* with far greater doubts about the wording and teachings of the NT than any textual critic would ever entertain. A

<sup>71</sup> *Misquoting Jesus* 114 (italics mine).

<sup>72</sup> See, e.g., D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 64.

good teacher does not hold back on telling his students what is what, but he also knows how to package the material so they do not let emotion get in the way of reason. The irony is that *Misquoting Jesus* is supposed to be all about reason and evidence, but it has been creating as much panic and alarm as *The Da Vinci Code*. Is that really the pedagogical effect Ehrman was seeking? I have to assume that he knew what kind of a reaction he would get from this book, for he does not change the impression at all in his interviews. Being provocative, even at the risk of being misunderstood, seems to be more important to him than being honest even at the risk of being boring. But a good teacher does not create Chicken Littles.<sup>73</sup>

Second, I grieve for what has happened to an acquaintance of mine, a man I have known and admired—and continue to admire—for over a quarter of a century. It gives me no joy to put forth this review. But from where I sit, it seems that Bart's black-and-white mentality as a fundamentalist has hardly been affected as he slogged through the years and trials of life and learning, even when he came out on the other side of the theological spectrum. He still sees things without sufficient nuancing, he overstates his case, and he is entrenched in the security that his own views are right. Bart Ehrman is one of the most brilliant and creative textual critics I have ever known, and yet his biases are so strong that, at times, he cannot even acknowledge them.<sup>74</sup> Just months before *Misquoting Jesus* appeared, the fourth edition of Metzger's *Text of the New Testament* was published. The first three editions were written solely by Metzger and bore the title *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. The fourth edition, now co-authored with Ehrman, makes such a title seem almost disingenuous. The reader of *Misquoting Jesus* might be tempted to think that the subtitle of Metzger's fourth edition should have been called simply *Its Transmission and Corruption*.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Although Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus* may well be the first lay introduction to NT textual criticism, in June 2006 a second book that deals with these issues (and some others) was released. See Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, for a more balanced treatment of the data.

<sup>74</sup> I am reminded of Martin Hengel's insight about the parallel dangers from "an uncritical, sterile apologetic fundamentalism" and "from no less sterile 'critical ignorance'" of radical liberalism. At bottom, the approaches are the same; the only differences are the presuppositions (Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995] 57–58). I am not saying that Ehrman is there, but he no longer seems to be the true liberal that he once aspired to be.

<sup>75</sup> It should be noted that *Misquoting Jesus* is dedicated to Bruce Metzger, whom Ehrman describes as "the world's leading expert in the field [of NT textual criticism]" (*Misquoting Jesus* 7). Yet Metzger would fundamentally disagree with Ehrman's thesis in this book.