CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE NEW TESTAMENT:
ITS ANONYMOUS AUTHORSHIP
AND CORRUPTION

Having dealt in the previous chapter with early Christian history, we now
arrive at the NT itself and ponder a few questions: who authored the
four gospels? Did they believe their works to be inspired, or was this idea
developed by later generations? In what ways was the text corrupted? And
perhaps first of all, how did the nature of these gospels differ from Jesus’
original teachings?

1. The Lost Gospel Q - A Challenge

Before the advent of the four gospels we know today, the earliest followers
of Jesus composed their own book. In this there were no dramatics about
the life of Christ, no narratives of spiritual sacrifice and redemption. The
focus was strictly on his teachings, on the ideas, etiquette and behavior he
expounded and the social reforms he called for. This work is now designated
as the Gospel of Jesus, Q. But Q was not a stable text, just as the earliest
Christians did not live in stable times, and so over the course of the first
century people living under desperate circumstances appended different
layers of text to Q. The original layer is most striking: it is full of simple,
eager words and wise counsel, with no calls for a new religion and no hint
of Jesus Christ as something more than prophet.

The second layer brings a shift in tone, portentously promising doom to
those who reject the movement. But to my mind the most startling shift
takes place in the third and final layer of Q, added by Christians during the
trying period of the First Jewish revolt (66-70 c.e.), under the shadow of
the Second Temple’s destruction by Roman troops. Here Jesus is upgraded

---

1 The lengthy quotes I utilise in this chapter, similar to Chapters 16 and 17, are (per-
haps with one exception) strictly from Jesus-Christian scholars, so that once again
they may reveal their own religion to the reader.
3 ibid, pp. 73-80.
4 ibid, p. 131.
5 ibid, p. 172.
from a wise prophet to the Son of God, heir to the Father’s Kingdom, who successfully battles the temptations in the wilderness.6

And so this book too proved susceptible to corruption, a victim of the myriad mythologies circulating in Christian circles about who Jesus truly was. Yet even in this third layer there is no call for the worship of Christ, no call to honor him as a deity or retain his memory through rituals and prayer. There is no crucifixion for the cause of the movement, let alone for the atonement of all mankind.7 Mark, Matthew, and Luke utilized Q when writing their gospels towards the end of the first century, but they willfully twisted the text (each in his own way) to achieve their desired aims.8 In any case, Q as an actual book was soon lost.9 The texts which displaced it, dramatic narratives of Christ’s life, led to a shift in focus and helped fuel the mythologies and speculations which have clouded about the figure of Jesus ever since.

2. The Authorship of the Present Four Gospels

These Jesus mythologies remained in circulation both during and after the loss of Q, and of the many works they inspired only four rose to prominence: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Their authors are all unknown. In the words of Sir E. Houskyns and N. Davey:

If it has been found difficult, in spite of a certain amount of evidence, to give names to the authors of the synoptic gospels, it is much more difficult to assign their writing to definite dates. Here there is no clear evidence at all; and accurate dating is simply impossible. The *terminus ad quem* must be somewhere about A.D. 100.10

Being the products of the primitive church, the gospels represent the oral tradition of the milieu in which they were conceived, and so will remain enigmatic in terms of authorship and date. Hoskyns and Davey argue that this uncertainty does not detract from the value of these documents, when they are treated in a scholarly fashion.11 But what guarantee of accuracy is there concerning such anonymous works? If the uncertainty of authorship does not devalue the gospel accounts, what about uncertainty of accuracy? This is a matter of tremendous doctrinal import. Bucaille quotes the reservations of Father Kainzinger, Professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris, who,

Wants that ‘one should not take literally’ facts reported about Jesus by the Gospels, because they are ‘writings suited to an occasion’ or ‘to combat’, whose authors ‘are writing down the traditions of their own community about Jesus.’ Concerning the Resurrection... he stresses that none of the authors of the Gospels can claim to have been an eye-witness. He intimates that, as far as the rest of Jesus’s public life is concerned, the same must be true because, according to the Gospels, none of the Apostles - apart from Judas Iscariot - left Jesus from the moment he first followed Him until His last earthly manifestations.12

These books of uncertain origin and questionable accuracy were later accorded greater authority by the early church through the claim that they were sacred works inspired by God, in an effort to corroborate Christian oral traditions.

3. Are the Gospels Inspired?

Inspiration, the idea that God manifestly imparts visions or abilities or revelations directly to a person, is a central concept of all monotheistic religions. But the NT never claims itself to be the work of inspiration. The sole passage to which appeal is made is 2 Timothy 3:16, that, "Every Scripture is inspired and useful for instruction". The reference here is to the OT, however, since the NT was not yet compiled in the way we know today. Elaborating on this idea, the 2nd century writer Justin Martyr further clarifies that this inspiration is attributed not to the actual Hebrew text, but only to the accuracy of its translation into Greek.13

Christian scholars often pepper their writings with the terminology of ‘inspiration’; for example P.W. Comfort states that, “certain individuals... were inspired by God to write Gospel accounts to substantiate the oral tradition.”14 And again, scribes copying the NT at a later stage “may have considered themselves to have been inspired by the Spirit in making certain

---

6 ibid, pp. 82, 89, 173-4.
7 ibid, pp. 4-3.
8 ibid, p. 177.
9 ibid, pp. 1-2. It is only due to text-critical analysis over the last century that the body of Q has been recognized and slowly reconstructed.
11 ibid, p. 201.
12 Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, The Qur’an and Science*, pp.47-48. This excellent book contains a wealth of information not only about science, but also Scriptural and Qur’anic history - much of which complements the chapters in this book.
adjustments to the exemplar. But the anonymous authors of the four gospels might well have argued their cases differently. The earliest gospel, Mark, was scavenged as source material by the later authors of Matthew and Luke, who altered, omitted, and abbreviated many of Mark's stories. Such treatment would never have transpired had they thought that Mark was inspired by God, or that his words were the unequivocal truth.

In this framework, inspiration easily operates as an excuse for amending the original text rather than preserving it, sanctified and unchangeable. Let us now assess how the Christian community up to the present day has handled these books, and consider whether this treatment is congruent with what a sacred text deserves.


According to Prof. Comfort, the gospels were first known in Christian circles orally before finding their way to the written page. Not a single book from the NT has survived in the original author's handwriting, the closest thing being a fragment dated c. 100-115 and containing six verses of John 18.

Copies of various books from the NT were made extensively throughout the first several centuries, generally by non-professionals who rarely checked for errors afterwards. There was little incentive to check anyway: almost all Christians during the first century expected the imminent return of Christ, and likely never grasped that they were preserving a text for the distant future. After some time, the texts in circulation no longer bore strict resemblance to the works that were originally authored, so that any scribe duplicating a parchment with great fidelity was not necessarily creating an accurate reproduction of the original. Additionally, "the early Christians did not necessarily treat the NT text as a 'sacred' text," one whose every letter was fixed and holy. They may have felt themselves inspired to alter the parchment that lay before them.

Regardless of whether they considered themselves inspired or not, all scribal interpolations must be recognized as corruption.

1. The Creation of Different Text Types

Scholars believe that the level of divergence (or corruption) within the NT text reached its pinnacle towards the end of the second century C.E. Each of the principal centers within the early church established its own textual variants of the NT, unique to that locality. Academics have grouped these divergent texts into four major types:

1. The Alexandrian Text

Alexandrian scribes generally shied away from changing the substance of the text, preferring instead grammatical and stylistic modifications. Their manuscripts are considered fairly accurate in meaning.

2. The Western Text

The 'Western' form, hailing from North Africa and Italy, was unchecked and popular. It suffered numerous interpolations at the hands of scribes who, forsaking accuracy, enriched the text with traditional and even non-biblical material.

3. The Caesarean Text

This text type was a compromise between the previous two, following the Alexandrian in substance while keeping any Western variants that did not seem too implausible.

4. The Byzantine Text

Working in Syria during the early 4th century, Lucian of Antioch compared various readings of the NT to produce a revised, critical form of the text. For this he relied consistently more on the Western than the Alexandrian, and resorted to harmonization and interpolation.

---

15 Ibid., p. 6.
17 Comfort, p. 3.
18 Ibid., pp. 3-4. Here I must interject that this date is pure guesswork, a subjective enterprise that occasionally runs with a marginal difference of decades to centuries. Among the earliest Greek manuscripts of the NT to actually bear a date is one written in the Year of the World 6457 (i.e. 490 C.E.). (Vaticant Library No. 345. See Bruce M. Metzger, The Text of the New Testament, Its Transmission, Corruption, And Restoration, 3rd edition, Oxford Univ Press, 1992, p. 56. Cited thereafter as Metzger.) The manuscript does not contain any Christian date, because the Anno Domini ("Year of the Lord") calendar system had yet to be invented. See also pp. 275 - 76, where the Leningrad Codex mentions a slew of dates, none of them Christian. This reaffirms that, until at least the 11th century C.E. (if not beyond), no Christian calendar system existed or at least was not in use.
19 Ibid., p. 6.
as needed. The end result soon achieved great popularity throughout the Mediterranean, becoming the favored text of the Greek Orthodox Church; it underwent further revisions for the next four centuries until it was standardized.26

So the most widespread of these, the Byzantine, relied heavily on what is acknowledged to be the least trustworthy of the four, the Western. It is inevitable that Lucian incorporated into his text at least some of the interpolations which form a hallmark of the Western type. In fact the overall reach of this Western text is alarming; even the originators of the Caesarean text adulterated the relative purity of the Alexandrian with popular elements from the Western, though ostensibly aware of the latter’s inferiority.

ii. Dates of Recensions

Recension is the process of scrutinizing all available copies of a document, and selecting the most trustworthy among these as the basis for a critically-revised text. Naturally the later the date of the first attempted recension, the more likely that the manuscripts being collated will harbor corruptions. George D. Kilpatrick of Queen’s College, Oxford “declares that by about a.d. 200 the great majority of the deliberate changes had been introduced into the [NT] textual stream, and that thereafter scribes transmitted the several forms of text with great fidelity”.27 Modern scholars agree that there is no credible evidence of any recensions even during the 3rd century.28 As this indicates that the vast majority of theological alterations slipped into the text before any attempt at recension,29 we can say that many of these changes have lodged themselves permanently into the NT. And as we shall see in the case of the Comma Johanneum, a deliberate and major theological corruption was to take place even as late as the 16th century.30

5. Textual Corruption

i. Variant Readings in the New Testament

Greek handwriting in antiquity consisted of two styles. The first was cursive, written rapidly and used for everyday affairs. The second, much more formal, was called uncial.31

26 Comford, pp. 13-14.
27 Metzger, p. 177.
28 Comford, p. 9.
29 ibid, p. 15
31 Metzger, pp. 8-9.
One notable quality of the Greek uncial was its lack of a separator, between adjacent words as well as sentences, even though separation between words had been used previously in Hebrew writings and was therefore known. This flaw resulted in a divergence of meanings or interpretations for certain verses. Among the most serious examples of this is Manuscript p.15 (Bodmer Papyrus xiv-xv),35 where John 1:18 can be read as either “an only One, God, or God, the only begotten.” There is clearly a profound difference between the two choices; whilst the latter implies the existence of a Trinity, nothing in the former supports it (see Figure 18.3). In fact the literal translation is “a unique God,” though it is never given as such.36

Additional divergence can be found through intentional and unintentional alterations in the text, creating variants in some particularly sensitive passages. Examples include:

- John 1:18: The line “an only One, God (or its alternate reading God, the only begotten) has a variant, the only begotten Son.”37

35 This papyrus codex – preserved at the Foundation Martin Bodmer (near Geneva) – has 51 surviving leaves containing parts of Luke and John. It is in uncial script and has been dated to around 200 C.E.
36 Comfort, p. 105.
37 Ibid., p. 105.

- John 1:34: “The Son of God also has the variant the chosen One of God.”38
- John 7:53-8:11: The entire story of Jesus and the adulterous woman is, with a single exception, not present in any Greek manuscript until the ninth century. Nevertheless it is now included in all versions of the New Testament due to its fame, though generally ending in a cautionary footnote.39
- John 8:16: “The phrase the Father who sent me has a variant, he who sent me.”40
- John 9:33: Jesus’ appellation the Son of God has a variant of greater documentary evidence, the Son of Man (a surrogate term for Messiah).41
- Mark 16:9-20: The concluding twelve verses of Mark are replaced by a much shorter ending in several manuscripts, negating any reference to Jesus’ reappearance to his disciples and his subsequent ascension.42

38 Ibid., p. 107.
39 Ibid., p. 115.
40 Ibid., p. 117.
41 Ibid., p. 118.
42 See p. 330.
• Luke 3:22. You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased has a variant, You are my Son; this day I have begotten you.  
• Luke 23:34. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." This passage is omitted in several diverse manuscripts, the earliest of these from c. 200 C.E. This verse was most likely never part of Luke's original autograph, a snipper of oral tradition that was inserted subsequently. But the phrase has proven so popular that translators are unwilling to excise it, opting instead for an advisory footnote.  
• Luke 24:6 and 24:12. He is not here but is risen and all of verse 12 (where Peter discovers Jesus' burial clothes but no body) are excluded from a few older manuscripts.  
• Luke 24:51 and 24:52. And [Jesus] was carried up into heaven and they worshipped him are not present in certain early manuscripts.

ii. Scribal Alterations

These variants are a direct consequence of scribal alterations, both conscious and otherwise. Further exploration of this subject presents us with a flavor for the range of errors which confront the modern scholar.

In explaining away unintentional changes, scholars use psychology most skillfully in retracing the mental workings of scribes who died well over ten centuries ago. Astigmatism is blamed for the manuscript in which similar Greek letters are often transposed; a momentary wandering of the eye explains the deletion or repetition of an entire passage. Confusion when copying from dictation, mental distractions that lead to a change in the sequence of words, and even sheer stupidity, are all invoked in resolving how these blunders came to be.  

As with the OT, however, it is the deliberate alterations which are most troubling. Comfort divides these into seven categories:

i. Material taken from oral traditions (such as the passage concerning the adulteress in John 7:53-8:11).  
ii. Additions meant for liturgical use.  
iii. Additions due to the spread of asceticism (such as the insertion of 'and fasting' after 'prayer' in Mark 9:29).

6. The Erasmus Bible and the Comma Johanneum

A Dutch scholar and theologian, Erasmus published his first Greek NT in 1516 and the second edition three years later. Among the most serious criticisms leveled at this Bible was that it lacked the Trinitarian statement at the end of 1 John, which reads that the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost are three in one (1 John 5:7). Insisting that he had yet to find these words in any of the Greek manuscripts he had examined, he nevertheless buckled to pressure and agreed to add the Comma Johanneum (as it is known) if a single Greek manuscript with this passage could be uncovered. Shortly afterwards...
such a manuscript was indeed handed to him. In all likelihood it was a fabrication however, written by a Franciscan friar in Oxford around 1520. Though Erasmus remained true to his word and inserted the passage in his third edition, he felt it necessary to append a lengthy footnote, expressing his suspicion that the manuscript was a forgery.55

Since the time of Erasmus only three Greek manuscripts have been found to contain the Canons Johannei, the earliest of these is from the 12th century, but has the passage inserted in the margin by a 17th century hand.54 The theological significance of this Trinitarian statement is immense. Its interpolation into Greek manuscripts so late in history (during the Renaissance) is indicative of an alarming fluidity in the text. And what was the fate of these spurious verses? In the English language they found their way into the Authorised King James Version, printed in 1611. No critical revisions to this much-admired work were attempted until 1881, and in fact the edition in my library (Authorised Version © 1983) still contains this passage:

6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. 7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. 8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.55

Interestingly the Revised Standard Version – which is the 1946 revision of the 1901 American version of the 1881 revised edition of the 1611 King James Version – omits some crucial words:

6 This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. 7 And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. 8 There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree.56

From this we deduce that English translations of the Bible waited at least three centuries, if not more, before removing a spurious passage which had been inserted as late as the 16th century.

55 Meretger, pp. 101-2.
56 ibid, p. 102.
54 RSV, 1 John 5:6-8.

7. Contemporary Corruption of the Text

Thus far I have limited myself to briefly discussing the corruption of the NT in Greek manuscripts. Perhaps there are those who will argue that, beginning with the Revised King James Version in 1881, every mainstream edition has sought to purify the biblical text through critical examination of early manuscripts; in other words, that these successive editions are approaching closer to the original biblical text, rather than moving away from it through intentional or accidental corruptions. This is not universally the case. Every translation is the child of a specific time and place, shaped by the social or political issues then current in the translator’s psyche. Regardless of textual criticism, concern over such issues can be sufficient to push the final product further from the original text rather than pulling it nearer.

In an article entitled “The Contemporary English Version: Inaccurate Translation Tries to Soften Anti-Judaic Sentiment”, J. Blenkinsopp points out just such an example:

The Contemporary English Version of the Bible (CEV), published last year by the American Bible Society... is being actively sponsored by the American Interfaith Institute... as the first Bible to contain no anti-Judaism. The claim is presumably based on the retrenching, or in some cases the paraphrasing or simply omitting, of certain prejudicial allusions to Jews in the New Testament.57

He goes on to cite examples where ‘the Jews’ has been changed to ‘the people’, ‘a great crowd of the Jews’ to ‘a lot of people’ and so on, as well as the watering down of ‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!58 to ‘You Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses are in for trouble! You’re nothing but show-offs’. The translator’s aim, he concludes, must be to adhere faithfully to the text, not to cajole it into saying what the translator wants it to say.59

Barclay Newman, chief translator of the CEV, responds by insisting that he and his team were faithful to the intent of the Greek text.60

In most of the New Testament, ‘the Jews’ is best understood to mean ‘the other Jews’ or ‘some of the Jews’ or ‘a few of the Jews’ or ‘the Jewish leaders’ or ‘some of the Jewish leaders’ or ‘a few of the Jewish leaders’. Never does it refer to the nation as a whole... It was

58 This is as it appears in the Revised Standard Version, Matthew 23.
Pontius Pilate - the Roman governor - who sentenced Jesus to death. And those men who nailed Jesus to a cross were Roman soldiers.61

Newman adds that Jesus’ message was meant to unite Jews and Gentiles rather than provoke anti-Jewish sentiments. A faithful rendition of the NT requires a search for “ways in which false impressions may be minimized and hatred overcome.”62 In pursuing this goal, however, which in itself is in stark contrast to the Talmudic stance on Jesus,63 the CEV team often creates its own false impressions by swinging in the opposite direction. For example:

- The King James Version provides this translation of 2 Chronicles 21:11-13:

  11 Moreover [Jehoram] made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and compelled Judah thereto.

  12 And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, ‘Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father. Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah,

  13 But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a-whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father’s house, which were better than thyself.

  Both the Revised Standard Version and the New World Translation provide roughly the same meaning (“unfaithfulness” and “immoral intercourse” respectively). I consulted these because the CEV rendering struck me as being so different:

  11 Jehoram even built local shrines in the hills of Judah and let the people sin against the Lord by worshiping foreign gods.

  12 One day, Jehoram received a letter from Elijah the prophet that said: I have a message for you from the Lord God your ancestor David worshiped. He knows that you have not followed the example of Jehoshaphat your father or Asa your grandfather.

61 Ibid. p. 43.
62 Ibid. p. 43.
63 Israel Shahak writes, “According to the Talmud, Jesus was executed by a proper rabbinical court for idolatry, inciting other Jews to idolatry and contempt of rabbinical authority. All classical Jewish sources which mention his execution are quite happy to take responsibility for it: in the Talmudic account the Romans are not even mentioned” [Jewish History, Jewish Religion, pp. 97-98.] And as to Jesus’ fate, “the Talmud states that his punishment in hell is to be immersed in boiling excrement” [Ibid. pp. 20-21.]

13 Instead you have acted like those sinful kings of Israel and have encouraged the people of Judah to stop worshiping the Lord, just as Ahab and his descendants did. You even murdered your own brothers, who were better men than you.

Omitting the references to fornication and whoredom seems to have no basis, unless it be to keep the reader’s opinion of morality during the Divided Kingdoms from slipping too far into the negative.

- Here are two verses from Isaiah, taken from the King James Version: (36:1) Then said Eliakim and Shebna and Joah unto Rab-shakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language: for we understand it; and speak not to us in the Jews’ language, in the ears of the people that are on the wall. (36:13) Then Rab-shakeh stood, and cried with a loud voice in the Jews’ language, and said, Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria.

This same phrase (“the Jew’s language” or “the language of Canaan”) can also be found in Isaiah 19:18, 2 Kings 18:26, and 2 Ch 32:18; that none of these verses cites the language in question as Hebrew is telling.65 Both the New World Translation and the Revised Standard Version follow roughly the same phraseology. The CEV, however, renders all five instances as Hebrew, with no further annotation, bolstering false assumptions in the reader’s mind with ease.

These examples were stumbled upon in the course of writing earlier portions of this book, and naturally anyone given the inclination and the time will find many additional verses where the translators have fostered new false impressions. The CEV is only a recent test case; over forty English translations alone are in print, each bearing its own peculiarities. For example many evangelists deemed initial editions of the Revised Standard Version too liberal; the New Testament in Modern English employs unusual wording: the Living Bible mixes text with interpretation, inserting words which make the text conform to a fundamentalist viewpoint. Most Bibles adopt a distinct theological view of Christ by choosing certain readings over others: “a young woman shall conceive” for “a virgin shall conceive” (Isaiah 7:14), “the only Son” for “only begotten Son” (John 1:14,18), “Jesus Christ” for “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1), and so on. The diversity of theological implications found in these Bibles - resulting from insertions, substitutions or omissions, let alone selective use of variants - can only be branded as a corruption of the original text.

65 A topic covered previously in pp. 270-71.
8. Early Manuscripts Negate Prevalent Christian Doctrines

Whether through ongoing corruptions or the purging of impurities which had previously infiltrated the text, the NT as it now stands is often a sharp antagonist of the very Christian doctrines it purportedly supports. To begin with, the majority of Christians are only familiar with the few select passages that are regularly read or commented on during sermons. As Maurice Bucaille notes, "With the exception of the Protestants, it was not customary for Christians to read the Gospels in their entirety... At a Roman Catholic school I had copies of the works of Virgil and Plato, but I did not have the New Testament."66 Now we discover that many of these choice passages, traditional favorites of evangelists and the bedrock of the average Christian's knowledge of his own religion, are in fact spurious or at best unreliable, and have either been weakened through cautionary footnotes in present-day Bibles, or altogether omitted. These passages touch the very essence of Christian doctrine.

- The Trinity.

We have already discussed at length the 16th century interpolation of the *Comma Johanneum* into 1 John 5:7, the statement of Trinity concerning "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one". So well-acknowledged is this interpolation that I am unaware of any Bible, save the original 1611 Authorized King James Version, which still includes this passage. The sole remaining Trinitarian passage of any clarity is Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you".67 Accordingly.

This late post-resurrection saying, not found in any other Gospel or anywhere else in the NT, has been viewed by some scholars as an interpolation into Matthew. It has also been pointed out that


the idea of 'making disciples' is continued in 'teaching them,' so that the intervening reference to baptism with its trinitarian formula was perhaps a later insertion into the saying.68

- The Deity of Jesus.

Whether Jesus ever referred to himself as the Son of God depends almost exclusively on Luke 10:22:

> No one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

These words are repeated verbatim in Matthew 11:27, the reason being that Luke and Matthew both lifted this passage out of Q.69 But these words emanate from the third layer of Q, the layer added by Christians around 70 C.E.70 Neither of the two earlier layers, including the original Q as kept by the very first followers of Jesus, contains anything about the deity of Christ. Additionally, the phrase 'Son of God' is found in the OT under several different guises and meanings, none of which imply a direct Sonship since that would run counter to Jewish monotheism.71 In Jewish thought 'the Son of God' refers to a man who bears a moral (rather than physical) connection to God.72 and so it is possible that early Christians used this appellation for Jesus in that sense, having been brought up in the Jewish tradition. The lure of Hellenism, wherein emperors viewed themselves as direct descendants of the gods, may be to blame in switching the perception of later Christians from the idea of a moral bond to that of one directly physical.

Returning to the NT, the King James Version's rendering of 1 Timothy 3:16 espouses the divinity of Jesus in human form: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh..." Modern textual analysis has cast this reading into doubt, with all current versions opting instead for "He [or Who or Which] was manifest in the flesh". Other instances of textual criticism weakening Jesus' divinity are Mark 1:1 ("the Son of God" omitted); John 6:69 ("Christ, the Son of the Living God" to "the Holy One of God"); Acts 8:37 (the entire verse, including "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God", omitted);73 and 1 Corinthians


69 See pp. 313 - 14.


71 See for example Genesis 6:2, Job 38:7, and Exodus 4:22.

72 *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 143.

73 Comfort believes the verse to be an obvious interpolation [p. 128].
15:47 ("the second man is the Lord from heaven" to "the second man is from heaven").

- **Atonement.**
  This refers to the expiation of humanity's original sin by Jesus, for those who believe that Christ died for their collective sins. As such it constitutes the ultimate display of love and sacrifice in Christianity, with Jesus interceding for all mankind at the moment of greatest pain:

  "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Yet this climactic utterance in Luke 23:34 (surely one of the most quoted verses in the Bible) is altogether absent from numerous ancient manuscripts, the earliest of these c. 200 C.E. Comfort remarks that "rather, it appears that this text was not part of Luke's original writing, but was added later...from an oral tradition". So pivotal is this verse to the gospel accounts however that all publishers include it, inserting an explanatory footnote afterwards. Similarly we note John 6:47 (KJV rendering: "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life"), where textual critique has led many modern Bibles to drop "on me" so that the verse no longer distinguishes Christ as Redeemer.

- **The Ascension.**
  None of the four Gospels relates Christ's ascent to heaven after the Resurrection with any reliability. Matthew and John both conclude without reference to an ascension. Luke 24:51 ("and was carried up into heaven") is missing from various early manuscripts, and is therefore often relegated to a footnote. But certainly the strangest of all in this regard is Mark, in which the whole of twelve verses of Mark 16:19-20 - including the Ascension - is nowhere to be found in numerous manuscripts, leaving contemporary Bibles in the clumsy situation of having to provide both an extended and an abbreviated ending. The result is that not a single verse touching on the Ascension has survived textual scrutiny in the four gospels.

---

74 All examples are taken from the Revised Standard Version.
76 ibid., p. 101.
77 ibid., p. 103.
78 In the RSV Mark 16:19-20 has been demoted to a footnote with a cautionary remark. The CEV meanwhile provides two endings under the headings "One Old Ending to Mark's Gospel" and "Another Old Ending to Mark's Gospel".
79 The Qur'an however is explicit concerning the ascension (4:158), and so Muslims believe that Jesus—though never crucified—did indeed ascend.

---

9. Conclusion

There are other examples besides, but the point is clear enough: some of the very foundations of Christian doctrine, supposedly derived from biblical accounts of Christ's life, have either marginal or no support in the textually revised modern editions of the four gospels. What then is the basis of this new, theologically weakened Christianity? And what are the basic doctrines and principles to which the Church can still adhere to today with tenacity?

Previously we discerned that Jewish political history was wholly unfavorable for the preservation of the OT, with most Jewish rulers encouraging polytheism on a wide scale. The text repeatedly vanished and, after its final discovery (from whatever sources) in the 5th century B.C., was continuously subjected to alterations.

Now we see that history was no mere kind towards the NT. The very fount of Christianity is a figure whose existence cannot be proven through primary sources. Some of his original teachings found their way into Q, only for Q to suffer interpolations within a few decades and disappear under the weight of all sorts of Jesus mythologies. Towards the end of the first century a few biographical works appeared; the authors were anonymous, none had any first-hand knowledge of Jesus' life, and none disclosed their sources of information. Rival sects emerged, each bearing no scruples in altering the necessary verses to strengthen its unique vision of Christ. Text types developed, diverged, gave birth to new ones, became popularized. Recensions commenced, interpolations persisted, textual analysis began casting out many significant passages. And to this day each Bible can carefully choose its variants, its wording, and so arrive at a slightly different Jesus.

Those who argue that some of Jesus' teachings still live on in the gospels miss the point that these are words devoid of their intended spirit, divorced from a proper context. While edicts concerning charity and love remain, the religion itself has been subverted from Jesus' original aims (as witnessed in Q) to that of the worship of Christ as the Son of God and of salvation through the belief that he was crucified for the sins of all mankind.

We have come very far indeed from the world of irnāqād, reading certificates, the law of witness, personal contact, the ḥuṣūq, 'Uṯmān's Muḥāfāz, and a holy text that has remained unequivocally pure for over fourteen centuries. The disparity is midday sunshine versus the deepest shades of night. This contrast fuels the efforts of those who are accustomed to the biblical Scriptures, who find it inconceivable that another Book received far greater care from the Almighty and successfully escaped the pitfalls of time.