

Gnostic Corruptions in the Critical Texts

A Case Study of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, 21st Edition

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Introduction

There are a number of reasons for the informed Christian to be distrustful of the so-called "modern" versions of the Bible, such as the New International Version, the New American Standard Version, the Revised Version, the Revised Standard Version, and so on. Despite the claims to the contrary which are put forward by scholars such as Metzger and the Alands, there are indeed some very serious changes, **doctrinal changes**, which exist between the King James Version and these newer versions. It is often heard that "the differences are very minor" and that they "don't affect doctrine," but this is simply untrue, as ought to be obvious to anyone who takes the time to actually sit down and compare the King James against the modern revisions.

The reason for the differences, the changes one could say, has to do with the texts behind the translations. Often, when Christians think about the New Testament, they assume that the Greek manuscripts compiled in the editions used to translate various versions are all pretty much the same. This is not the case. The King James Version New Testament is translated from the *Textus Receptus*, a Greek textual edition which, except for a few notable exceptions (which are justified and supported from external evidences), is very close in form to the Majority text, which makes up roughly 90% of the total testimony of existing Greek manuscripts. The new versions of the New Testament are translated from a textual set which, while having primary representatives which are older than the majority of the texts, is comprised of manuscripts which are very disparate in individual readings and which show all the signs of corruption.

The Alexandrian Manuscripts - Are They Reliable?

It is common to see textual critics and other scholars make claims about the Alexandrian uncials which minimize, and often ignore, the scribal problems contained in these supposed "oldest and best" manuscripts. For instance, Ladd claims,

"Codex Vaticanus contains both Testaments, with only three missing portions, and most of the Apocrypha. Its *excellent text* is very close to that of Codex Sinaiticus."¹

The actual facts of the matter contradict this rather sanguine assessment. These manuscripts, which comprise the basis of all modern Greek editions, are indeed notorious for their unreliability and general poor quality of transmission. Hoskier noted over 3,000 points in the Gospels alone at which Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (the two primary Alexandrian witnesses) differ between themselves, not including spelling errors and variants between synonyms which could be attributed to "provincial exchange."² Concerning Vaticanus (also known as Codex B), Scrivener stated,

"One marked feature, characteristic of this copy, is the great number of its omissions...That no small portion of these are mere oversights of the scribe seems evident from the circumstance that this same scribe has repeatedly written words and clauses *twice over*, a

¹ G.E. Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism*, p. 63

² H.C. Hoskier, *Codex B and Its Allies*, Vol. 2, p.1

class of mistakes which Mai and the collators have seldom thought fit to notice...but which by no means enhances our estimate of the care employed in copying this venerable record of primitive Christianity."³

The other representatives of the Alexandrian exemplars used to critically challenge the Textus Receptus are not any better. Codex D (Bezae Cantabrigiensis) is well-known for its slipshod scribal errors and general unreliability, yet it still finds its weight used as a determiner when other preferred texts are found to differ at a point. Ephraemi Rescriptus (Codex C) likewise suffers from transmission issues, and is actually a palimpsest, having had a large portion of its original biblical text rubbed off and replaced with copies of sermons from the 5th century Syrian patristic Ephraem Syrus (which in and of itself ought to give an idea of the likely low esteem in which this text was held by 5th century Christians...). Pickering sums up the matter of reliability with the Alexandrian texts as follows,

"The variation between two 'Byzantine' MSS will be found to differ both in number and severity from that between two 'Western' MSS or two 'Alexandrian' MSS -- the number and nature of the disagreements between two 'Byzantine' MSS throughout the Gospels will seem trivial compared to the number (over 3,000) and nature (many serious) of the disagreements between Aleph and B, the chief 'Alexandrian' MSS, in the same space."⁴

Why then, it may be asked, would modern Greek editions from world-renowned textual scholars be based upon such poor representatives of the text? The answer is two-fold.

Is Oldest Best?

First, there is the somewhat uncritical reliance by modern textual critics upon a text's antiquity above everything else. Weight (a term describing the relative esteem accorded to a manuscript or other evidence in determining the original text) is accorded to a text's age, with other evidence receiving a far inferior status. The arguments made by scholars for this approach sound plausible when they are not examined in any great detail. An older text, one would naturally assume, should be more closely approximate to the reading of the original autographs. Sounds logical, right? Unfortunately, this assumption is just that: an assumption. When this argument is tested against the facts, we see that it does not really hold up.

The oldest representatives of the "purely" Alexandrian group of texts are the two "great" uncials, Sinaiticus and Vaticanus (Aleph and B, respectively). Both of these manuscripts date to the 4th century, with Vaticanus proffered as from the latter quarter of the century, and Sinaiticus being from around the middle of the century. Several scholars have even suggested that these uncials are two of the original 50 copies of the New Testament text which were made by Eusebius for official Church use at the behest of Emperor Constantine.⁵ Thus, the oldest pure

³ F.H.A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, p. 120

⁴ W.N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, p.54

⁵ See A. Souter, *The Text And Canon Of The New Testament*, pp.22-23; Ladd, *op. cit.*, p.63; etc.

Alexandrian manuscripts date to around 350 AD and after, nearly three centuries after the penning of the original autographs.

The problem for the antiquity interpretation of the modern textual scholars which immediately arises is that corruption (both accidental and purposeful) in the New Testament text was greatest in the first two centuries after the revelation of the New Testament (roughly 80-200 AD). Scrivener argues that the worst corruption to strike the New Testament texts occurred within a century of their composition.⁶ Further, Colwell states that "The overwhelming majority of readings were created before the year 200..."⁷ It was during this period, while many books were still in the process of filtering out to Christian communities all across the Empire, that heretical texts would have been easiest to introduce and pass off as legitimate Scripture. Kilpatrick argues that with the advent of the 3rd century, it then became nearly impossible to change the text of the New Testament in a way which would have been either accepted or unnoticed by Christians at large,

"Origen's treatment of Matt. 19:19 is significant in two other ways. First he was probably the most influential commentator of the Ancient Church and yet his conjecture at this point seems to have influenced only one manuscript of a local version of the New Testament. The Greek tradition is apparently unaffected by it. From the third century onward even an Origen could not effectively alter that text.

"This brings us to the second significant point - his date. From the early third century onward the freedom to alter the text which had obtained earlier can no longer be practiced. Tatian is the last author to make deliberate changes in the text of whom we have explicit information. Between Tatian and Origen Christian opinion had so changed that it was no longer possible to make changes in the text whether they were harmless or not."⁸

Thus, even by the 3rd century, and definitely by the fourth, the Scriptures were more thoroughly distributed and Christians were better able to compare texts and reject heretical manuscripts. Once the faithfulness in transmission for the texts had solidified, the issue then becomes one of competing textual lines, between which Christians of that age had to choose. This is where the age of the Alexandrian exemplars actually works to the detriment of modern theories based upon antiquity. What needs to be understood about the ancient manuscripts is that there were basically two types of media for texts - vellum and papyrus. Neither of these media are especially durable. Vellum (dried skins of sheep or other animals) was more rugged and expensive, and was used in the copies of the Scriptures held for "official" use by the churches, and by more wealthy individuals. Both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are vellum manuscripts, and as such, were probably intended for use in Christian assemblies or liturgy. However, vellum scrolls will wear out over time through use and need to be replaced (just as a well-used Bible today will tend to do). Back in the day, they did not have rebinding services like we have for Bibles to give added years to the life of a scroll, so the scroll had to be transcribed into a new manuscript.

⁶ Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction*, Vol. 2, p. 264

⁷ E.C. Colwell, "The Origin of Texttypes of New Testament Manuscripts," *Early Christian Origins*, Ed. A. Wikgren, p. 138

⁸ G.D. Kilpatrick, "Atticism and the Greek New Testament," *Neutestamentliche Aufsätze*, pp. 129-130

Reason suggests that the old scrolls were then "put to rest," so to speak, through purposeful destruction as a means of giving reverence to them (the idea being that it would be a shame to just let a Biblical scroll fall to pieces through tatterage, almost a sign of carelessness and lack of concern).⁹

The obvious point to all this, then, is: "why are such old exemplars even still in existence and in the relatively good condition which they are, since they are over fifteen centuries old?" The answer suggested by numerous scholars such as Van Bruggen, Pickering, and others is that these scrolls are in good condition despite their age because they were never used. They did not endure the repetitious unrolling and rolling back up, the assault of sweaty hands and humid breath, the violence of tears and bends that come from constant use. Simply put, these exemplar manuscripts may have simply sat upon a shelf for most of their long lifetime. The next question becomes then: "Why?" The answer, logically, is that they were probably rejected from use by early Christians who understood them to be flawed, and refrained from relying upon them. Exactly this argument is presented by textual scholars including Van Bruggen.¹⁰

The case for the papyri, when viewed in this light, is even worse. Papyrus, basically having the consistency of low-grade paper, was even more fragile than vellum, though it was also much less expensive as it was relatively easy to make and was abundant (the Egyptians had been producing papyrus for at least two millennia before Christians came on the scene). Scholars believe that papyrus was used for personal copies of documents, which were less important than the corporately used manuscripts one would find in Christian meeting assemblies under the care of the pastor(s).¹¹ The fact that there exist several papyri, some in relatively good condition, from as early as c. 200 AD, seems even more strongly to suggest that these papyri were disdained and little used. That modern textual critics often rely upon certain of these papyri which are in better condition (because of their age and partial Alexandrian readings) does little to increase confidence in their methodology.

The papyri themselves are simply terrible witnesses, generally agreed by even staunch Westcott-Hortians to be full of scribal errors, additions, deletions, and many give evidence of having been transcribed by scribes who had little proficiency in Greek. Zuntz says about P⁴⁶,

"In spite of its neat appearance (it was written by a professional scribe and corrected - but very imperfectly - by an expert, P⁴⁶ is by no means a good manuscript. The scribe committed very many blunders...My impression is that he was liable to fits of exhaustion."¹²

⁹ See K. Lake, R.P. Blake, and S. New, "The Caesarean text of the Gospel of Mark," *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 21 (1928), p. 349

¹⁰ See J. Van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament*, pp. 26-27

¹¹ Early Christian church copies were probably in the care of the pastor/bishops. One of the stigmas against Christian bishops in North Africa, who had recanted during the 3rd century persecutions, which caused so much disdain from the Donatists was the willingness of these bishops to turn over their copies of the Scriptures to Roman persecutors in exchange for relief from persecution.

¹² G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles*, p. 18

He further says plainly that "P⁴⁶ abounds with scribal blunders, omissions, and also additions."¹³ Hoskier also noted the large number of omissions made in this papyrus.¹⁴ Other papyri are similarly poor quality reproductions. Colwell says of several of them,

"On these last and most important matters, our three scribes are widely divided. P⁷⁵ and P⁴⁵ seriously intend to produce a good copy, but it is hard to believe that this was the intention of P⁶⁶. The nearly 200 nonsense readings and 400 itacistic spellings in P⁶⁶ are evidence of something less than disciplined attention to the basic task. To this evidence of carelessness must be added those singular readings whose origin baffles speculation, readings that can be given no more exact label than carelessness leading to assorted variant readings. A hurried count shows P⁴⁵ with 20, P⁷⁵ with 57, and P⁶⁶ with 216 purely careless readings. As we have seen, P⁶⁶ has, in addition, more than twice as many 'leaps' from the same to the same as either of the others."¹⁵

When we consider these arguments, and note that the overwhelming majority of the extant Greek manuscripts available are of the "Byzantine" or "Syrian" text type (though they are generally much younger than the Alexandrians), it would seem to be apparent that this preponderance is due to a view among the ancients of the greater trustworthiness of the Byzantine text type. Just as a more successful human family will propagate itself and produce a far larger clan even within a few generations than a less successful family, the greater number of Byzantine texts suggest that **this** text type was the one which was initially preferred by very early Christians and which later grew into the preponderant mass of texts handed down to and multiplied by later generations.

The Byzantine Textual Set - Early Evidence

One argument presented by Critical Text supporters is the suggestion that the Byzantine text was a relatively late development (thus explaining its lack of very ancient exemplars) which was evolved through the conflation of earlier text types in Syria sometime in the 4th-5th centuries. This argument is supported by pointing out that the Greek patristic writer and orator John Chrysostom demonstrates a clear testimony to his reliance upon the Byzantine text type in his writings and sermons, and the claim then follows that John was the **first** to do so. This argument, however, ignores the fact that many patristic writers, some centuries before Chrysostom, also demonstrate a marked preference for the Byzantine readings, even if not always as purely as he. Pickering, citing the studies in patristic quotation carried out by Dean Burgon and Edward Miller, demonstrates that a number of patristic writers, some of them dating back to the 1st century, displayed not only a knowledge but also a preference for Byzantine readings.¹⁶ Strouse likewise catalogues a number of specific examples of signal Byzantine

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 212

¹⁴ H.C. Hoskier, "A Study of the Chester-Beatty Codex of the Pauline Epistles," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 38 (1937), p. 162

¹⁵ E.C. Colwell, "Scribal Habits in Early Papyri: A Study in the Corruption of the Text," *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, Ed. J.P. Hyatt, pp. 378-9

¹⁶ See Pickering, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-76 for more detail

readings which appear in pre-Chrysostom patristics as far back as Ignatius (c. 35-115 AD).¹⁷ Dean Burgon, the original compiler of the patristic study, which was posthumously edited and prepared by Miller, determined that from the citations of pre-Chrysostom patristics, the ratio of Byzantine citations versus all others was 3:2.¹⁸ Miller summarizes by asking,

"As to the alleged absence of readings of the Traditional Text from the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Dr. Hort draws largely upon his imagination and his wishes. The persecution of Diocletian is here also the parent of much want of information. But is there really such a dearth of these readings in the works of the Early Fathers as is supposed?"¹⁹

Likewise, Byzantine readings can be found at many points in even the earliest papyri which are usually considered and catalogued as "Alexandrian." Regarding the papyri, Zuntz states,

"To sum up, a number of Byzantine readings, most of them genuine, which previously were discarded as 'late', are anticipated by P⁴⁶....How then - so one is tempted to go on asking - where no Chester Beatty papyrus happens to vouch for the early existence of a Byzantine reading? Are all Byzantine readings ancient? In the cognate case of the Homeric tradition G. Pasquali answers the same question in the affirmative."²⁰

Colwell likewise concurs with Zuntz, stating that most of the readings of the Byzantine text "existed in the second century," according to his reckoning.²¹ Several of the other ancient papyri likewise demonstrate Byzantine readings. Colwell states concerning p⁶⁶ (c. 200 AD),

"The Bodmer John (P⁶⁶) is also a witness to the early existence of many of the readings found in the Alpha-text type (Hort's "Syrian"). Strangely enough to our previous ideas, the contemporary corrections in that papyrus frequently change an Alpha-type reading to a Beta-type reading (Hort's "Neutral") [ed. note - our "**Alexandrian**"]. This indicates that at this early period readings of both kinds were known, and the Beta-type were supplanting the Alpha-type - at least as far as this witness is concerned."²²

Thus, we see that the Byzantine textual type certainly existed for far longer than its critics claim. Further, Pickering has done an excellent job of addressing the charge of conflation, and demonstrates that those readings which are claimed as conflations in the Byzantine text set are not, and that many readings found in the various other sets (Alexandrian included) in fact are the conflations, through an examination of 110 examples.²³ Pickering states elsewhere that in his

¹⁷ T.M. Strouse, *Forever Settled: A Survey of the Documents and History of the Bible*, pp. 73-74, Ed. J. Moorman

¹⁸ J.W. Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*, pp. ix-x

¹⁹ E. Miller, *A Guide to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 53

²⁰ Zuntz, *op. cit.*, p. 55

²¹ E.C. Colwell, *What is the Best New Testament?*, p. 70

²² E.C. Colwell, "The Origin of Texttypes of New Testament Manuscripts," *Early Christian Origins*, Ed. A.

Wikgren

²³ Pickering, *op. cit.*, Appendix D, pp. 171-202

quotation of I Corinthians 14:19, Marcion (in the 2nd century) actually conflates the "Byzantine" reading with the "Neutral-Western" reading.²⁴

Another argument, forwarded by Scrivener, to explain the paucity of very early Byzantine exemplars rests on the destruction of large numbers of Biblical manuscripts at the hands of Imperial officials during the various persecutions which struck the churches in the first three and a half centuries of their existence.²⁵ If this were a major factor, then the overwhelming preponderance of Byzantine daughter manuscripts argues even more strongly for preponderance of this text type among very early manuscripts, since they still predominate even through the winnowing of persecution.

Perhaps the strongest argument against critical claims to a late Byzantine appearance is summed up through an analogy drawn by Van Bruggen, who speaking first of the Byzantine text type says,

"The fact that this text-form is known to us via later manuscripts is as such no proof for a late text type, but it does seem to be proof when at the same time a different text is found in all older manuscripts. The combination of these two things seems to offer decisive proof for the late origin of the traditional text."²⁶

However, he then follows by saying,

"Let us make ourselves aware of *what* we have presupposed with this seemingly convincing argumentation. What conditions must be satisfied if we wish to award the prize to the older majuscules? While asking this question we assumed wittingly or unwittingly that we were capable of making a fair comparison between manuscripts in an earlier period and those in a later period. After all, we can only arrive at positive statements if this is the case. Imagine that someone said: in the Middle Ages mainly cathedrals were built, but in modern times many smaller and plainer churches are being built. This statement seems completely true when we today look around in the cities and villages. Yet we are mistaken. An understandable mistake: many small churches of the Middle Ages have disappeared, and usually only the cathedrals were restored. Thus, a great historical falsification of perspective with regard to the history of church-building arises. We are not able to make a general assertion about church-building in the Middle Ages on the basis of the surviving materials. If we would still dare to make such an assertion, then we wrongly assumed that the surviving materials enabled us to make a fair comparison. But how is the situation in the field of New Testament manuscripts? Only if that is the case, do we have the right to make conclusions and positive statements. Yet it is just at this point that difficulties arise. The situation is even such that we know with certainty that we *do not* possess a representative number of manuscripts from the first centuries."²⁷

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60

²⁵ F.H.A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction*, Vol. I, pp. 265-266

²⁶ Van Bruggen, *op. cit.*, p. 24

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25

We "do not" have enough manuscript evidence available to rule out the existence and preponderance of the Byzantine text type from around the time when the oldest Alexandrian exemplars were produced. Given the patristic evidence and the readings found in the papyri, the opposing suggestion that Byzantine texts were present in good numbers can be quite reasonably advanced.

The Human Element

The second reason why modern textual critics rely upon the antiquated Alexandrians at the expense of the rest of the evidence is more human. The trend in textual criticism since Westcott and Hort (who, it can be quite reasonably argued, won the day because of their personalities, not their correctness) has been strict adherence to the preference for Alexandrian textual readings above all. Much has been said about the hatred of those two men for "that vile Textus Receptus."²⁸ Little more needs to be added onto this here, other than to note that this attitude has filtered down, in a somewhat less vitriolic form, into this century's textual scholarship.

The original preference by Westcott and Hort for their exemplars lay in that their readings were more in line with the heretical leanings of these two men. They concluded, prejudicially, that these readings were the correct ones, and inextricably linked this view with the "oldest is best" argument dealt with above. The Westcott-Hortian textual critical theories are engineered to give the desired results, and are often supported with "bandwagon" arguments, even when these seem to be in opposition to common sense. This is done in much the same way in which evolutionists will buttress their faith in evolution with the argument that "most scientists believe in evolution," even when some of the leading evolutionist explanations fly right in the face of experimentally determined facts which are taught in basic undergraduate science courses.

Remember, not all the ancient texts can possibly be available to us. Due to destruction, wearing out, simply being lost, etc. we don't have the sum total of all the ancient Greek manuscripts that have been copied and existed. For critics to claim, on the basis of a few disused ancient texts, that we can overturn the vast majority of texts (which often have reasonably good age attestation themselves) is ludicrous. Further, Metzger and Co. do not know the history behind the various texts before they were discovered at each point by modern researchers. Simple reliance on "older" texts is not wise, considering that they may be older because they were unused, as was argued above.

Because of the critical predisposition, and because of the intellectual, theological, and reputational capital which many textual critics have invested in promotion of the Critical Text sets, most Christians who enter into the realm of textual study are immediately presented with a one-sided view against the Textus Receptus and the Byzantine text set. This opposition is presented as the only "intellectual" position to take, and even can be viewed as "fashionable." Support for the Byzantine textual line is quarantined, remanded to the care of a few backwards

²⁸ F.J.A. Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, Vol. 1, p. 211

and anti-intellectual fundamentalists who would probably like to burn Bruce Metzger and F.F. Bruce as witches (you may laugh, but I've actually seen this sort of ridiculous tripe bandied about in pretentious Evangelical and even pseudo-fundamentalist literature before). That Bruce Metzger and Co. only tell part of the tale is often swept under the rug, and is probably not even known by the large majority of Christians who take it upon themselves to become informed about textual matters, either formally or informally.

A More Common Sense Approach to Weighing the Evidences

Briefly (as I am getting off topic here somewhat), Pickering has presented a rational means by which to measure the value and weight of evidences used in the textual realm, upon which I would like to comment.²⁹

Antiquity, or Primitiveness - While not all-consuming, the age of a text, relative to its companions, should be noted because this evidence can yield clues to when a possible addition or deletion occurred, and so forth.

Consent of Witnesses, or Number - As seen above, the number of witnesses can point to which text type was relied upon more heavily by early Christians. However, this also is not all-encompassing, since the possibility exists that one single text or a small number of like texts were simply copied extensively.

Variety of Evidence, or Catholicity - The measure of the various locations and types of witness which a text or reading enjoys. A textual type (such as the Byzantine) which is found distributed over a far wider geographical range, and which is found present in numerous other ancient versions and widely dispersed patristic writers, enjoys the claim of authenticity more fully than one which is geographically limited (such as the Alexandrian texts are). The weight which this point lends to the Byzantine textual line would tend to negate the possibility of extensive copying of a few exemplars which was presented in the point immediately above.

Continuity, or Unbroken Tradition - The Byzantine text enjoys great continuity - from readings found in large part even in so-called "Alexandrian" papyri and 2nd century patristics, all the way down to the Textus Receptus of the 16th century. The Alexandrian line seems to have largely died out, and was so little known that until the 18th century this textual line was virtually ignored. Erasmus actually rejected using Vaticanus, the only text of this type which he apparently knew about, in his Greek editions because of its great differences from the textual mass with which he was acquainted.

Respectability of Witnesses, or Weight - How internally consistent and externally agreeable is the witness? As seen above, the Alexandrian exemplars disagree with each other egregiously, and they often will present at certain passages as many alternative readings as there are witnessing manuscripts. Further, they disagree on numerous occasions (often quite seriously)

²⁹ See Pickering, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-147

with the vast majority of Greek manuscripts (i.e. the Byzantine set). Additionally, they are often blatantly unreliable in their evidence of scribal sloppiness.

Evidence of the Entire Passage, or Context - The Byzantine text set suffers from far fewer context problems regarding its readings than do the competing set. In other words, the Byzantine readings more often "make sense" than do their competitors in the contexts in which the passages exist.

Internal Considerations, or Reasonableness - The Byzantine text lacks many of the numerous "impossible" readings found in the Alexandrian exemplars. Pickering points out³⁰ that this point rarely needs to be addressed, at least for the reasons he mentions (grammatically, logically, geographically, and scientifically "impossible" readings). I would add, however, that this point would find some traction within the purposes of this article, which is to show that certain **theologically** "impossible" changes have been introduced into the Alexandrian stream, and subsequently into the Critical Text set preferred for the modern Bible versions.

As sums up the issue,

"When the textual critic looks more closely at his oldest manuscript material, the paucity of his resources is more fully realized. All the earlier witnesses, papyrus or parchment, come from Egypt alone. Manuscripts produced in Egypt, ranging between the third and fifth centuries, provide only a half-dozen extensive witnesses (the Beatty Papyri, and the well-known uncials, Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Ephraem Syrus, and Freer Washington)."³¹

The Alexandrian textual set, and thus the Critical Text editions, were used pretty much in Egypt only (with some spillover into Palestine and North Africa). They enjoy only a very small number of texts in their support, and even these texts are disparate in their consistency with each other. Further, their location, coupled with the apparent disdain which early Christians held them in, opens up the possibility of influence upon these texts from the various heresies which so permeated Egypt for the first four centuries of Christianity, which may have been recognized by early orthodox Christians.

Gnostic Influences on the Alexandrian Texts?

One of the charges often made against the Critical Text set and its representatives, is that these manuscripts show evidence of corruption at the hands of Gnostics. This charge is not made without reason. Gnosticism is a term which encompasses a large and varied group of speculative belief systems that existed in the first four-five centuries of the Christian era in the Roman Empire (and also in the Persian/Parthian Empires, but much less important to our discussion here). While varied, these groups yet held tenets in common. It is not the purpose of this

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147

³¹ K.W. Clark, *The Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament*, p.3 - Pickering notes, p.122, that the Bodmer papyri must now be added to this list

monograph to delve the nature of the Gnostic speculations in depth, preferring to instead discuss individual tenets as they arise in the discussion below. The reader wishing to learn more along this line is invited to read *The Gnostic Religion*, by Dr. Hans Jonas, as well as other recent works on this subject.

In comparison with the Textus Receptus, the Critical Texts which make up the apparatus used by modern textual critics enamored with the new versions at several points display signs of potential corruption at the hands of Gnostics. It is the purpose of this article to demonstrate a sampling of these possible corruptions, through comparing the Critical Text with the Majority Text/Textus Receptus, and to provide elucidation by showing how the Critical Text demonstrates Gnostic theology and how this corruption conflicts with other portions of Scripture which can be agreed upon by all.

Keep in mind, however, that I am not going to lay claim to absolute knowledge of Gnostic corruption in any of these passages below. This is for the same reason which I stated above in criticism of those modernist textual critics who believe that they can overturn an overwhelming majority of Greek witnesses on the basis of a few eclectic texts: we simply don't **know** the history behind all the texts. I don't know that Gnostics got ahold of each of the Alexandrian texts which are currently relied upon. It may very well be possible that the errors found in these texts (and I **do** believe it is reasonable to state that these variances from the Byzantine text set are errors, however they may have entered into the texts) really are simple scribal errors. However, due to the facts that these particular variants in the Alexandrians from the Byzantine majority do not constitute very natural and likely scribal errors,³² and that the variants discussed below quite naturally would fit into Gnostic speculative theology, I consider the possibility that these particular variants **are** evidences of Gnostic corruption to indeed be strong. Perhaps some of the alterations are Gnostically-derived, while others are not. Perhaps the alterations derive variously from different schools of Gnostic thought. The object is not to dogmatically declare that these changes **must** be Gnostic in origin, but instead to invite the thoughtful reader to consider the **possibility** and even the **probability** that they are such. Rather than simply dismiss the "Gnostic corruption" argument out of hand as many Critical Text supporters do in an uninquiring way, I am asking them to consider how these differences in reading between textual sets appear in light of the general tenets of various common "Christian" Gnostic systems which existed in the early church during that first two hundred years when tampering with the text was so rampant.

The bases for the claims of possible corruption made through this comparison rests on the arguments and facts enunciated above. The Byzantine text-type, represented in the Majority Text and the Textus Receptus, far outweighs and outnumbers the eclectic Alexandrian texts and will be considered as the standard by which the readings should be measured.

The readings from the Textus Receptus are taken from Η ΚΑΙΝΗ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ, published by the Trinitarian Bible Society

³² See Pickering, *op. cit.*, pp. 80, 83 for discussion on the tendency of scribes to err through omission, not addition, and that many scribes show evidence of **deliberate** omission among their mistakes

The readings from the Critical Text utilize the Nestle-Aland 21st Edition of the Greek New Testament, published by Zondervan Publishing House. This is the Critical Text edition behind the translation of the New International Version.

I apologize in advance to the reader for the lack of accent and breathing marks on the following Greek reproductions. I do not at present have the proper fonts and browser add-ons to enable that sort of reproduction, and am forced to make do with the "Symbol" font.

In the scheme below, text in the Textus Receptus marked **red** indicates the pertinent change which will be discussed in detail, whether omission or alternate reading. Text in **blue** denotes non-pertinent omissions from the TR made in the NA21. Text in **green** indicates non-pertinent word/spelling changes from the TR to the NA21 which do not involve omission. Text in **orange** denotes text found in the NA21 which is not found in the TR. Where a full accounting of individual manuscript evidences is given, the information comes from *A Student's Guide to New Testament Textual Variants*, by Bruce Terry.

The Textual Comparisons

Matthew 8:29

Textus Receptus –

και ιδου, εκραξαν λεγοντες, Τι ημιν και σοι, **Ιησου**, υιε του Θεου; ηλθες ωδε προ καιρου βασανισαι ημας.

(And behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? - KJV)

NA 21 –

και ιδου εκραξαν λεγοντες, τι ημιν και σοι, υιε του Θεου, ηλθες ωδε προ καιρου βασανισαι ημας.

("What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" - NIV)

The support for the CT reading here is from Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and Ephraemi Rescriptus. The TR reading is supported by the vast majority of Byzantine mss. and the rest of the textual sets.

In the Alexandrian reading at this point, it should be noted that the demons being cast out of the swine by Jesus Christ are not denying that their exorciser is the "Son of God," only that He is **JESUS** the Son of God. This alternate reading seems to promote the sort of Gnosticism which is exemplified in *The Gospel of Peter*. This vein of Gnosticism believed that Jesus Christ was a

dualistic being, having an earthly nature (Jesus) and a heavenly nature (Christ). The heavenly Christ descended into the material world from the spiritual realm of the Everlasting, and became temporarily united with the earthly Jesus, a creature of the material world of creation. This fits the general Gnostic teaching of the "alien man" sent from above to call the lost portions of the Light back out of the material realm into unity with the Everlasting in the realm of Light.³³ In *The Gospel of Peter*, the separation of the heavenly Christ from the earthly Jesus is depicted in that work's account of the crucifixion,

"Many went around with lamps; they thought it was night. They fell. And the Lord cried out, "My power, my power, you have left me." He said this and was taken up. That same hour the veil of the Jerusalem Temple was split in two."³⁴

Here is depicted Christ being taken up, while Jesus is later shown to be placed in the tomb.

The Alexandrian change at this point seems to reflect the attempt by Gnostics in the Roman world to draw a distinction between the earthly Jesus and the heavenly Christ, which would include the understanding that the "Son of God," being from the realm of Light above, would not be addressed using the name "Jesus," which represented the earthly, material (and therefore intranscendent, corrupt, and imprisoning) body.

Matthew 19:17

Textus Receptus -

ο δε ειπεν αυτω, Τι με λεγεις αγαθον; ουδεις αγαθος, ει μη εις, ο Θεος. ει δε θελεις [εισελθειν εις την ζωην]¹, τηρησον τας εντολας.

(And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. - KJV)

NA 21 -

(ο δε ειπεν αυτω)². τι με ερωτας περι του αγαθου; εις εστιν ο αγαθος. ει δε θελεις εις την ζωην εισελθειν τηρει τας εντολας.

("Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." - NIV)

³³ See H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, pp. 75-80 for a general overview of this sort of teaching

³⁴ D.R. Cartlidge and D.L. Dungan, "The Gospel of Peter," 5:18-20, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, p. 84

- 1 - Rearranged in NA21 as [2-3-4-1]
- 2 - Appears as part of verse 16 in the NA21.

Support for TR reading

- Ephraemi Rescriptus (5th c. uncial, Alex.)
- K (9th c.)
- W. (5th c., Byz. in Matthew)
- Delta (9th c., Alex.)
- f13 (11th-13th c. family of mss., Caes.)
- 28 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 33 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 565 (9th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 1010 (12th c. miniscule)
- The large majority of Byzantine texts
- The large majority of Greek lectionaries
- Two Old Latin mss.
- The Peshitta Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- The Harclean Syriac mss. set (7th c.)
- The Southern Coptic mss. set (3rd c.)
- Some Northern Coptic mss. (4th c.)

Support for the Critical Text Reading

- Codex Sinaiticus (4th c. uncial)
- Codex Vaticanus (4th c. uncial)
- Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis [D] (5th-6th c. uncial, West.)
- L (8th c. uncial, Alex.)
- Theta (9th c. uncial, Caes.)
- f1 (12th-14th c. family of mss., Caes.)
- 700 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 892 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- Two Old Latin mss.
- The Sinaitic Syriac mss. set (4th c.)
- Some Palestinian Syriac mss. (5th c.)

Additionally, there exists an apparently conflated reading which seems to combine the two readings under discussion to say "Why do you ask me about what [is] good? There is [only] One who is good, [that is], God." thus retaining most of the character of the Alexandrian reading, but yet including the explicit statement about God being the one who is good which is enunciated in the Byzantine reading. This reading is supported by:

- The majority of the Old Latin mss. set
- The Latin Vulgate mss. set

- The Curetonian Syriac mss. set (4th c.)
- Some of the Palestinian Syriac mss. (5th c.)
- Most of the Northern Coptic mss. (4th c.)

In this passage, usually pointed to as a proof text **for** the deity of Christ, we see that the wording is changed to subvert the implicit testimony of Christ to Himself as being good, and hence, God. It should be noted first, of course, that "God" is removed from being "good," which is in line with the interpretation often held by Gnostics that the name "God" was to be equated with the Old Testament God (distinct from the New Testament Father), and hence, the Demiurge, whom the Gnostics certainly did not view to be "good."

Further, we note that this passage also would lend support to the often-held Gnostic notion of the "saved Savior." In many speculative systems, the alien Savior who enters the material realm in his quest to bring *gnosis* to the lost pneumatic spirits of men and aid them to escape the material *cosmos* often becomes "poisoned" or "entrapped" by the material world itself, and himself becomes lost. Thus, the Savior himself becomes impure, lost, asleep, and intoxicated, and in need of rescuing from the evil of the material realm.³⁵ Jesus' separation of Himself from the "One who is good" could be taken as a testimony to His own need to be restored from the evil material world.

Mark 1:1

Textus Receptus –

Αρχη του ευαγγελιου Ιησου Χριστου, **υιου του Θεου.**

(The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. - KJV)

NA 21 -

Αρχη του ευαγγελιου Ιησου Χριστου.

(The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. - NIV, with note reading "Some manuscripts do not have the Son of God")

Support for the TR Reading:

- A 4th century corrector of Codex Sinaiticus
- Codex Alexandrinus (5th c. uncial)
- Codex Vaticanus (4th c. uncial)

³⁵ See Jonas, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-20 for commentary concerning this belief as found in "The Hymn of the Pearl," part of the collection of *The Acts of Thomas*

- Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (5th-6th c. uncial)
- K (9th c. uncial)
- L (8th c. uncial, Alex.)
- W (5th c. uncial, West. in Mark 1:1-5:30)
- Delta (9th c. uncial, Alex.)
- Pi (9th c. uncial)
- f1 (12th-14th c. family of mss., Caes.)
- f13 (11th-13th c. family of mss., Caes.)
- 33 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 565 (9th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 700 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 892 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 1010 (12th c. miniscule)
- The large majority of the Byzantine mss. set
- The large majority of the Greek lectionaries
- The Old Latin mss. set
- The Latin Vulgate mss. set
- The Peshitta Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- The Harclean Syriac mss. set (7th c.)
- The Coptic mss sets (3rd-5th c.)

Support for the CT reading:

- Codex Sinaiticus (4th c. uncial)
- Theta (9th c. uncial, Caes.)
- 28 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- The Palestinian Syriac mss. set (5th c.)

This omission is not reflected in the actual text of the NIV and other modern English versions, though it IS omitted from the various Greek editions underlying these translations. Modern versions usually include a comment in the notes to the effect that "some early mss. omit *Son of God*."

The alternative Alexandrian reading here (not supported, as is seen, by the full set) seems to reflect a later corruption of the reading, dating from the 4th century. It appears in the 4th century Codex Sinaiticus, but this is antedated by the appearance of the Byzantine reading in the Old Latin tradition (translated around the middle of the 2nd century) and in the Sahidic Coptic manuscript set (3rd century). The Bohairic manuscript set agrees with the Byzantine reading, and dates from the 4th century. A scribal correction to Sinaiticus, also said to date to the 4th century, seems to suggest that a scribe from that time was aware that the original Sinaiticus reading was in error, and attempted an appropriate change.

The deletion of "the Son of God" would be acceptable to many Gnostic groups as it would remove a reference to the docetic "Jesus Christ" combination being "the Son of God," which (in the cases of some speculative systems where "God" was not referring to the Demiurge)

was reserved for the heavenly and spiritual alien Savior, Christ, alone. Concurrently, it would still allow them to persist in speculations about the duality of an earthly Jesus and heavenly Christ in the alien Savior.

Luke 4:4

Textus Receptus –

Και απεκριθη [Ιησους προς αυτον]¹, λεγων, Γεγραπται οτι Ουκ επ αρτω μονω ζησεται ο ανθρωπος, **αλλ επι παντι ρηματι Θεου.**

(And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. - KJV)

NA 21-

και απεκριθη προς αυτον ο Ιησους, γεγραπται οτι ουκ επ αρτω μονω ζησεται ο ανθρωπος.

(Jesus answered, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone." - NIV)

1 - Rearranged in NA 21 as [2-3-0-1].

Support for the omission made in the Critical Text is found on in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. The inclusion found in the TR is present in the vast majority of the rest of the Greek mss., including Codex Alexandrinus.

This alteration removes Luke's record that Christ referred to and relied upon the Old Testament scriptures as "the Word of God." In this passage, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 as being authoritative scripture from God, and in turn certifies this body of scripture as being "the Word of God." The alteration weakens this clear statement, and points to the influence of a semi-Gnostic sect which was started by Marcion in Rome around 144 AD, but which continued in the East for several centuries afterward. Beginning with Cerdo, said by Irenaeus to have come to Rome during the episcopate of Hyginus (138-142 AD),³⁶ the teaching was propagated that the God of the Old Testament was a known God of unmerciful justice, while the Father of Jesus Christ was an unknown God of mercy and benevolence. Marcion took this interpretation a step further and taught that the God of the Old Testament was inferior to the Father of Jesus Christ, and was in fact the author of evil, the *Cosmocrator*, the Lord of the cosmos comprising the inferior created world. Irenaeus remarks about the followers of Marcion,

³⁶ See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies.*, Bk. 1, Ch. 27.1

"Marcion of Pontus succeeded him, and developed his doctrine. In so doing, he advanced the most daring blasphemy against Him who is proclaimed as God by the law and the prophets, declaring Him to be the author of evils, to take delight in war, to be infirm of purpose, and even to be contrary to Himself. But Jesus being derived from that father who is above the God that made the world, and coming into Judaea in the times of Pontius Pilate the governor, who was the procurator of Tiberius Caesar, was manifested in the form of a man to those who were in Judaea, abolishing the prophets and the law, and all the works of that God who made the world, whom also he calls Cosmocrator. Besides this, he mutilates the Gospel which is according to Luke, removing all that is written respecting the generation of the Lord, and setting aside a great deal of the teaching of the Lord, in which the Lord is recorded as most dearly confessing that the Maker of this universe is His Father. He likewise persuaded his disciples that he himself was more worthy of credit than are those apostles who have handed down the Gospel to us, furnishing them not with the Gospel, but merely a fragment of it. In like manner, too, he dismembered the Epistles of Paul, removing all that is said by the apostle respecting that God who made the world, to the effect that He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also those passages from the prophetic writings which the apostle quotes, in order to teach us that they announced beforehand the coming of the Lord."³⁷

That the Alexandrian alteration effectively negates Christ's reliance upon the word of the Old Testament which God gave through Moses seems reflective of anti-Semitic Marcionite tendencies, which were characterized by a strong disdain for the Hebrew scriptures and the denial that God in the Old Testament is the same as the Father of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. From the standpoint of Marcion and his followers, Jesus would not have quoted from Hebrew scriptures handed down by the inferior Jewish god of evil, nor specifically called them "the Word of God."

Luke 22:43-44

Textus Receptus –

ωφθη δε αυτω αγγελος απ ουρανου ενισχυων αυτον. και γενομενος εν αγωνια, εκτενεστρον προσηυχετο, εγενετο δε ο ιδρωσ αυτου ωσει θρομβοι αιματος καταβαινοντες επι την γην.

(And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed the more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. - KJV)

NA 21 –

³⁷ *Ibid.* Ch. 27.2

[ωφθη δε αυτω αγγελος απ ουρανου ενισχυων αυτον. και γενομενος εν αγωνια, εκτενεστρον προσηυχετο, και εγενετο ο ιδρωσ αυτου ωσει θρομβοι αιματος καταβαινοντες επι την γην.]

(An angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. - NIV, with note reading "Some early manuscripts do not have verses 43 and 44")

The verses are bracketed in the NIV, and are excluded from many later Critical Text editions.

Support for the inclusion of these verses, as found in the TR:

- Codex Sinaiticus (4th c. uncial)
- Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (5th-6th c. uncial, West.)
- K (9th c. uncial)
- L (8th c. uncial, Alex.)
- X (10th c. uncial, Alex.)
- Delta (9th c. uncial, Alex.)
- Theta (9th c. uncial, Caes.)
- Pi (9th c. uncial)
- Psi (8th-9th c. uncial, Alex.)
- 0171 (4th c. uncial, West.)
- f1 (12th-14th c. mss. family set, Caes.)
- 565 (9th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 700 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 892 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 1010 (12th c. miniscule)
- 1241 (12th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- The large majority of the Byzantine mss. set
- Most of the Old Latin mss.
- The large majority of Latin Vulgate mss.
- The Curetonian Syriac mss. set (4th c.)
- The Peshitta Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- The Harclean Syriac mss. set (7th c.)
- The Palestinian Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- Some Northern Coptic mss. (4th c.)

Support for the omission of these verses:

- p^{69vid} (3rd c.) - apparent, ms. difficult to ascertain at this point
- p⁷⁵ (3rd c.)
- 4th century correction to Codex Sinaiticus
- Codex Alexandrinus (5th c. uncial)
- Codex Vaticanus (4th c. uncial)
- T (5th c. uncial, Alex.)

- W (5th c. uncial, Byz. in Luke 8:13-24:53)
- Some of the Greek lectionaries
- One Old Latin ms.
- The Sinaitic Syriac mss. set (4th c.)
- Most of the Coptic mss. (3rd-5th c.)

Further, some of the Greek lectionaries, as well as f13 (11th-13th c. family of Caesarean mss.), insert these two verses after Matthew 26:39, rather than in Luke's Gospel.

The omission of these verses is suggestive of the strain of Gnosticism heavily influenced by docetism which taught that Christ did not have a physical body, but spiritual only. Certain Gnostics even taught that Christ left no footprints when He walked, as indicative of His spiritual nature and complete separation from the physical, material realm.³⁸ Given the context of this passage, that the Savior had just before addressed His prayer to the Father (v. 42), from a Gnostic viewpoint, this passage would have to be dealing with the prayer of the purely spiritual, pneumatic Christ. Sweating great drops falling to the ground, as well as enduring human frailty such that He needed the strengthening of angels, thus demonstrating humanity and physical existence, would be incompatible with the Gnostic view of the pneumatic, heavenly Savior separated from material creation. Likewise, the interaction of Christ with the material world, demonstrated in the falling of these drops of bloody sweat to the ground, would have been unacceptable to many Gnostic speculative systems.

John 1:18

Textus Receptus –

Θεον ουδεις εωρακε πωποτε. ο μονογενης υιος, ο ων εις τον κολπον του πατρος, εκεινος εξηγησατο.

(No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. - KJV)

NA 21 –

Θεον ουδεις εωρακεν πωποτε. μονογενης θεος ο ων εις τον κολπον του πατρος, εκεινος εξηγησατο.

(No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. - NIV)

Support for TR reading

³⁸ See D. Groothuis, "Gnosticism and the Gnostic Jesus," *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1990, p. 8

- Codex Alexandrinus (5th c. uncial, Byz. in Gospels)
- 9th c. correction to Ephraemi Rescriptus (Codex C)
- Codex K (9th c. uncial)
- Codex X (10th c. uncial, Alex. in Gospels)
- Codex W (5th c. uncial, Alex. in John)
- Delta (9th c. uncial, Alex.)
- Theta (9th c. uncial, Caes.)
- Pi (9th c. uncial)
- Psi (8th/9th c. uncial)
- f1 (12-14th c. group of mss., Caes.)
- f13 (11th-13th c. group of mss., Caes.)
- 28 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 565 (9th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 700 (11th. c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 892 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 1010 (12th c. miniscule)
- 1241 (12th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- The vast majority of the Byzantine text body
- The majority of Greek lectionaries
- Most of the Old Latin mss. body
- Most of the Latin Vulgate mss. body
- The Curetonian Syriac mss. set (4th c.)
- The Harclean Syriac mss. set (7th c.)
- The Palestinian Syriac mss. set (5th c.)

Support for the Critical Text reading

- p⁶⁶ (c. 200 AD)
- p⁷⁵ (3rd c.)
- Codex Sinaiticus (4th c. uncial)
- Codex Vaticanus (4th c. uncial)
- Ephraemi Rescriptus (5th c. uncial)
- Codex L (8th c. uncial, Alex.)
- 33 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- Peshitta Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- Northern Coptic mss. set (4th c.)

Additional readings of importance: The Southern Coptic mss. (3rd c.) set testifies to the reading "...the only unique Son, God, who is in the bosom..."

The change in red above involves the alteration of the word υιος ("Son") to θεος ("God"). The reading of "Son" is supported by the body of the Majority Text set and Codex Alexandrinus, while the minority reading "God" is supported by the Critical Text set (Aleph, Vaticanus, E. Rescriptus, p⁶⁶, and p⁷⁵). Despite the somewhat confused rendering in the NIV, the

change really amounts to altering "only begotten Son" to "only begotten God." This alteration supports the Gnostic theological view in that it removes from the text the Sonship and pre-existence of the Lord Jesus Christ, hallmarks of Christian theology. Many Gnostic groups taught that Jesus Christ was a created being, called an *Aeon*, who emanated from the original and unknowable Father, thus he was not a pre-existent being (or, as the Valentinian and other systems taught, that Jesus and Christ were two separate of such!). In the Gnostic speculative systems, the aeons were viewed as subordinate gods. The changing of "Son" to "God" reflects this as it does not necessarily indicate an attempt to strengthen the doctrine of the deity of Christ, but rather an alteration of His eternal Sonship (as taught in the Scriptures) to that of an emanated and created subordinate god, originating from the Everlasting Father.

Holland points out³⁹ that in the writings of many "Christian" Gnostics, as well as other heretics (such as Tatian, Arius, and the Valentinians), this textual variant appeared. Likewise, in the writings of orthodox heresiologists, the traditional Byzantine reading of *monogenes huios* is cited (Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Tertullian, John Chrysostom). While on the face of it, the simple change from "Son" to "God" would not seem to be especially indicative of Gnosticism, the sharp contrast between heresiarch and heresiologist on this passage demonstrates that the "only begotten God" reading was a trademark of Gnostic speculations as far as their view of Jesus Christ is concerned, and that it was understood to be so by the early churches. The appearance of this alteration in a small body of texts originating from the veritable capital of Gnosticism, Alexandria, would suggest that the Gnostics made their mark in these texts and at this verse.

John 3:13

Textus Receptus –

και ουδεις αναβεβηκεν εις τον ουρανον, ει μη ο εκ του ουρανου καταβας, ο υιος του ανθρωπου **ο ων εν τω ουρανω.**

(And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. - KJV)

NA 21 –

και ουδεις αναβεβηκεν εις τον ουρανον ει μη ο εκ του ουρανου καταβας, ο υιος του ανθρωπου.

("No one has ever gone into heaven, except the one who came from heaven - the Son of Man." - NIV)

³⁹ T. Holland, *Crowned With Glory: The Bible From Ancient Text to Authorized Version*, p. 24, note #30

Support for the Textus Receptus reading

- Codex Alexandrinus (5th c. uncial)
- K (9th c. uncial)
- Delta (9th c. uncial, Alex.)
- Theta (9th c. uncial, Caes.)
- Pi (9th c. uncial)
- Psi (8th-9th c. uncial, Byz. in John)
- f1 (12th-14th c. family of mss.)
- f13 (11th-13th c. family of mss.)
- 28 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 565 (9th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 700 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 892 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- The large majority of the Byzantine textual set
- The large majority of the Greek lectionaries
- Most of the Old Latin mss.
- The Latin Vulgate mss. set
- The Peshitta Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- The Harclean Syriac mss. set (7th c.)
- Possibly in the Palestinian Syriac mss. set (5th c.) - unconfirmed
- Some Northern Coptic mss. (4th c.)

Support for the Critical Text reading

- p⁶⁶ (c. 200 AD)
- p⁷⁵ (3rd c.)
- Codex Sinaiticus (4th c. uncial)
- Codex Vaticanus (4th c. uncial)
- L (8th c. uncial, Alex. in Gospels)
- W (5th c. uncial, Alex. in John)
- 083 (6th-7th c. uncial)
- 086 (6th c. uncial)
- 0113 (5th c. uncial)
- 33 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 1010 (12th c. miniscule)
- 1241 (12th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- Most of the Coptic mss. sets (3rd-5th c.)

This alteration involves the removal of a statement of omnipresence concerning the Lord Jesus Christ while He was on the earth. While both affirm that Christ came down from heaven, the Alexandrian reading removes the statement about the Son being concurrently **IN** heaven. This reflects the general Gnostic view that while the Savior "alien god" was in the material world, he was completely separated from the Unknown Everlasting in the realm of Light, just as were the lost bits of Light within each man and woman whom the alien Savior came to restore to

the realm of Light.⁴⁰ In Gnostic theorization, the Savior had to be separated completely from the Everlasting Father to be able to enter into the realm of the material world, and the Byzantine reading of this verse would suggest just the opposite, that the Savior was both on earth in His physical body, yet also contemporaneously in heaven.

John 9:35

Textus Receptus –

Ηκουσεν ο Ιησους οτι εξεβαλον αυτον εξω. και ευρων αυτον, ειπεν αυτω, Συ πιστευεις εις τον υιον του Θεου.

(Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? - KJV)

NA 21 –

Ηκουσεν Ιησους οτι εξεβαλον αυτον εξω, και ευρων αυτον ειπεν, συ πιστευεις εις τον υιον του ανθρωπου.

(Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" - NIV)

Support for the TR reading:

- Codex Alexandrinus (5th c. uncial)
- K (9th c. uncial)
- L (8th c. uncial, Alex.)
- X (10th c. uncial, Alex.)
- Delta (9th c. uncial, Alex.)
- Theta (9th c. uncial, Caes.)
- Psi (8th-9th c. uncial, Alex.)
- 0124 (6th c. uncial)
- f1 (12th-14th c. family of mss.)
- f13 (11th-13th c. family of mss.)
- 28 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 33 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 565 (9th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 700 (11th c. miniscule, Caes.)
- 892 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 1010 (12th c. miniscule)

⁴⁰ See Jonas, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-80

- 1241 (12th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- The large majority of Byzantine mss.
- The large majority of the Greek lectionaries
- Most of the Old Latin mss.
- The Latin Vulgate mss. body
- The Peshitta Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- The Harclean Syriac mss. set (7th c.)
- The Palestinian Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- Most of the Northern Coptic mss. set (4th c.)

Support for the CT reading:

- p⁶⁶ (200 AD)
- p⁷⁵ (3rd c.)
- Codex Sinaiticus (4th c. uncial)
- Codex Vaticanus (4th c. uncial)
- Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (5th-6th c. uncial)
- W (5th c. uncial, Alex. in John)
- The Sinaitic Syriac mss. set (4th c.)
- One Northern Coptic ms. (4th c.)
- The Southern Coptic mss. set (3rd c.)

The difference in these readings seems suggestive of a clarification on the part of the Gnostics. Though "God" and "Man" in most speculative systems could be understood as referring to the Father of all, often the preferred term was "Man," as the Eternal was often represented as being a "Primal Man" or "First Man." The term "God" was often, though certainly not always, reserved for Gnostic treatment of the Demiurge, who was often depicted as the God of the Old Testament, "ignorantly" believing Himself to be the highest power in existence. While this change in reading appears more or less innocent to us, to a reader in the early church familiar with Gnostic systems, the particular choice to change "God" to "Man" would bespeak a definite attempt at making the verse more acceptable to Gnosticism.

John 10:14-15

Textus Receptus –

εγω ειμι ο ποιμην ο καλος, και γινωσκω τα εμα, και **γινωσκομαι υπο των εμων**. καθως γινωσκει με ο πατηρ, καγω γινωσκω τον πατερα. και την ψυχην μου τιθημι υπερ των προβατων.

(I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. - KJV)

NA 21 –

εγω ειμι ο ποιμην ο καλος, και γινωσκω τα εμα, και γινωσκουσι με τα εμα, καθως γινωσκει με ο πατηρ, καγω γινωσκω τον πατερα, και την ψυχην μου τιθημι υπερ των προβατων.

("I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep." - NIV)

The support for the alteration is from p⁴⁵, p⁶⁶, p^{75vid}, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Vaticanus. In favor of the TR reading is Codex Alexandrinus and the Byzantine majority text set.

The change in this passage centers about the alteration of γινωσκομαι υπο των εμων to γινωσκουσι με τα εμα. This involves changing the declension of the verb γινωσκω from a 1st person singular middle/passive indicative construction to a 3rd person plural active indicative construction. What this essentially means is that the shift in emphasis on the knowledge of Christ is changed from being passively had "through" Christ (denoting the agency of Christ acting through the sheep because of their testimony for Him) to being actively obtained by the sheep themselves. This would seem to conflict with other Scripture such as John 6:44, John 6:65, Romans 3:11, etc. where it is taught that the knowledge of God cannot and would not be obtained by man without the aid and providence of God.

This then appears to be a Gnostic alteration to the text because the whole object of Gnosticism was for man to learn, understand, and then seek out the knowledge of the Eternal through his own efforts and desire to obtain *gnosis*. The alien Savior came into the material world to give the call to mankind to *gnosis*. However, the responsibility and power to obtain this heavenly knowledge lay with man himself, who was said to have an inner spark of the divine nature himself, and thus could actively awake himself from his slumber and seek out and respond to the Eternal's call. This was largely the reason why the in many Gnostic speculative systems, it was not only acceptable, but actually encouraged, for individual teachers to produce their own variable speculations, each more involved and intricate than the one before.⁴¹

Acts 2:30

Textus Receptus -

προφητης ουν υπαρχων, και ειδως οτι ορκω ωμοσεν αυτω ο Θεος, εκ καρπου της οσφυος **αυτου το κατα σαρκα αναστησειν τον Χριστον**, καθισαι επι **του θρονου** αυτου,

⁴¹ See Irenaeus, *op. cit.*, Ch. 18.1

(Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. - KJV)

NA 21 –

προφητης συν υπαρχων και ειδως οτι ορκω ωμοσεν αυτω ο θεος εκ καρπου της οσφους αυτου καθισαι επι τον θρονον αυτου

(But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. - NIV)

The only opposition which the reading found in the Textus Receptus has is from Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus, and Ephraemi Rescriptus. Otherwise, the TR reading is supported by the majority Byzantine text set, as well as other versions.

This is a clear-cut example of the removal of a biblical statement concerning the literal incarnation and physical descent of Jesus Christ from David. This is in line with many Gnostic systems which viewed Christ as a purely spiritual being, an aeon emanated from the Everlasting. The reading presented in the traditional text, where Christ in the flesh is said to be in physical descent from David, would be antithetical to these speculative systems.

I Corinthians 15:47

Textus Receptus –

ο πρωτος ανθρωπος εκ γης, χοικος. ο δευτερος ανθρωπος, ο Κυριος εξ ουρανου.

(The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. - KJV)

NA 21 –

ο πρωτος ανθρωπος εκ γης χοικος, ο δευτερος ανθρωπος εξ ουρανου.

(The first man was from the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. - NIV)

The only support for the omission of "the Lord" is from Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and Ephraemi Rescriptus. The vast majority of remaining Greek mss., including Codex Alexandrinus, contain this phrase. Interestingly, p⁴⁶ replaces "the Lord" with "the spiritual" (πνευματικος).

The deletion of "the Lord" from this verse subverts the Christian doctrine of Christ coming in the likeness of sinful humanity to serve as the Savior for the creature made in God's

image (see Romans 8:3, Philippians 2:7, Hebrews 2:14). The emended reading, in conjunction with the statement of I Corinthians 15:45, then becomes a passage which would very strongly support the Gnostic teaching about the creation of man which is found in *The Apocryphon of John*, said by many scholars to be the *locus classicus* of the Christian Gnostic mythological systems.

As the traditional reading goes, this passage in I Corinthians 15 speaks of the incarnation of Christ in the likeness of sinful man, and points to the truth that a man who is saved will one day bear the heavenly image of Christ after his full redemption and glorification (from v. 49). From v. 45 comes the teaching that Christ is the Second Adam, the incarnation of God Himself from heaven in the form of sinful man who has the power to reverse the power of sin and death over the life of the one who believes on Him (see also Romans 5:12-21).

By removing the reference to the Lord, this passage becomes uncannily similar to the sort of anthropology taught by *The Apocryphon of John*. That document records that the Demiurge, Ialdabaoth, endeavored to replicate the image of "the First Man," the "perfect Father," by creating a psychical replicant (Adam), which was unable to move until Ialdabaoth was tricked into introducing a pneumatic element into his creation by Christos, disguised as an archon of Light, thus enabling Adam to move and be a fully completed creature. This also enabled Adam to be "saved," that is, to have the pneumatic element in him restored to the Father through *gnosis*.⁴² Rudolph explains this chain of events in greater detail,

"First of all we have the 'psychic Adam', whom the demiurge Ialdabaoth with his 'seven emissaries' (Genesis 1.26 is drawn upon here also) creates after the image, reflected in the water of chaos, of the 'holy perfect Father, the first man in the form of a man'. Thus the device of imitation is again made to serve the powers of darkness, but of necessity it must be imperfect and finally needs the help of the powers of light, who thereby are able to ensure the fulfilment of the secret purpose of the plan of salvation. Our text is a particularly impressive example of the opposition of the two basic powers, since every move on the one side is matched by a countermove on the other, until in the course of the development a certain pendulum effect is established. Corresponding to the ancient idea of the part played by the planets in the formation of the psychic body of man, the seven powers contribute from their own elements the following 'souls' for Adam: the 'bone-soul', the 'sinew-soul', the 'flesh-soul', the 'marrow-soul', the 'blood-soul', the 'skin-soul', and the 'hair-soul'. These 'souls of the body' correspond, as is frequently the case in gnostic thought, to macrocosmic powers (providence, divinity, lordship, fire, kingdom, insight, wisdom). Behind this evidently lies the idea of the psychic capacities of man, belonging to the earthly intellectual (immaterial) sphere, in contrast to the supramundane intellectual element which is a gracious gift from the world above. In spite of the skill devoted to the formation of this psychic body it remains immobile and it is not possible to make him stand upright. This gives 'Wisdom' (*sophia*) opportunity to intervene in order to win back the power which through her error she had lost to her son the Demiurge. She prays 'the Father of the all' for help; he has recourse to deception (this is evidently quite permissible in dealing with the evil powers): 'By a holy decree he sent the 'self-originate' (*autogenes*) and the four lights in the form of the angels of the first archon.

⁴² See Jonas, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-3

They gave him advice, that they might bring out from him the power of the mother. They said to him: 'Breathe into his face (something) of the spirit (*pneuma*) which is in you, and the thing will raise itself up'. 'And (so) he breathed into him of his spirit—it is the power from the mother—into the body, and it moved at once...' In this way the pneumatic seed finds its way into the psychic Adam, and is thus no longer subject exclusively to the control of the powers of darkness."⁴³

In much of Gnostic speculation, there seems to be some confounding of the purely physical and the "psychical" parts of man, which refer to the animation of his being through his appetites and desires. Both of these parts of man's makeup are the result of the corrupted and dark material world in which he was created, and serve to envelope and intoxicate the "pneumatic," the spiritual, part of man which must be liberated by *gnosis* and restored to the Father above. The *Apocryphon* seems to treat the physical and psychical parts of man interdependently in this case.

As such, by removing the reference to the Lord, and making the resultant revision of this verse read simply as a second man being from heaven (without the Christian specification), it would quite easily make v. 45...

"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit."

...read as if it were speaking of the Gnostic teaching found in the *Apocryphon*, namely, that the first Adam was created with soul (*psyche*), and the last was created with spirit (*pneumatos*). Concurrently then, v. 47 would support the notion that the first man, the psychical, was an earthy and earthly creation of the Demiurge, but that the second man, formed from the injection of *pneuma*, was from heaven, since in the Gnostic speculation, all *pneuma* originated from the Father above and was of heavenly origin. The evidence from the reading of "the spiritual" in p⁴⁶ in place of "the Lord" would seem to lend additional credence to this supposition, and further alter this passage from a Christian Christological to a Gnostic anthropological perspective.

II Corinthians 4:6

Textus Receptus -

οτι ο Θεος ο ειπων εκ σκοτους φως λαμψαι, ος ελαμψεν εν ταις καρδιαις ημων, προς φωτισμον της γνωσεως της δοξης του Θεου εν προσωπω Ιησου Χριστου.

(For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. - KJV)

⁴³ K. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, pp. 102-3

NA 21 –

οτι ο θεος ο ειπων εκ σκοτους φως λαμψει, ος ελαμψεν εν ταις καρδιαις ημων, προς φωτισμον της γνωσεως της δοξης του θεου εν προσωπω Χριστου.

(For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. - NIV)

Support for the TR reading:

- p⁴⁶ (200 AD)
- Codex Sinaiticus (4th c. uncial)
- Ephraemi Rescriptus (5th c. uncial)
- H (9th c. uncial)
- K (9th c. uncial)
- L (8th c. uncial, Alex.)
- P (6th c. uncial)
- Psi (8th-9th c. uncial, Alex.)
- The majority of Byzantine mss. (Maj)
- One Old Latin ms.
- Some Latin Vulgate mss.
- The Peshitta Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- The Harclean Syriac mss. set (7th c.)
- The Northern Coptic mss. set (4th c.)

Support for the CT reading:

- Codex Alexandrinus (5th c. uncial)
- Codex Vaticanus (4th c. uncial)
- 33 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 1739 (10th c. miniscule, Alex. in Pauline epistles) - unconfirmed
- The Southern Coptic mss. set (3rd c.)

Additionally, a TR-supportive reading which merely reverses the final phrase to say "Christ Jesus" is found in:

- Codex Claromontanus (6th c. uncial, West.)
- F (9th c. uncial, West.)
- G (Codex Boernerianus, 9th c. uncial, West.)
- 630 (14th c. miniscule)
- A copy of 1739 (a 10th c. miniscule, Alex.) - unconfirmed
- 1881 (14th c. miniscule)
- Two Old Latin mss.
- Most of the Latin vulgate mss.

This omission would tend again to separate the earthly "Jesus" from the heavenly "Christ," another example of the docetic and Gnostic tendency. According to many Gnostic speculations, Christ, but not Jesus, came to bring illumination to mankind who is separated from the Everlasting Father of Light.

Galatians 6:17

Textus Receptus –

Του λοιπου, κοπους μοι μηδεις παρεχετω. εγω γαρ τα στιγματα του Κυριου Ιησου εν τω σωματι μου βασταζω.

(From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. - KJV)

NA 21 –

Του λοιπου κοπους μοι μηδεις παρεχετω. εγω γαρ τα στιγματα του Ιησου εν τω σωματι μου βασταζω.

(Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. - NIV)

The support for the CT reading is found in Codex Vaticanus, Codex Alexandrinus, Ephraemi Rescriptus, and p⁴⁶. The entire Byzantine mss. body contains the TR reading. Further, Sinaiticus contains the reading "The Lord Jesus Christ" (Κυριου Ιησου Χριστου), which may be supportive of the notion that "Christ" was added in an attempt to clarify the Gnostic view that the earthly Jesus could not be "the Lord," but that the heavenly, spiritual "Christ" was, serving to justify the appearance of the term "Lord."

This seems a clear example of docetism on the part of the Alexandrian texts, since we see an apparent attempt to divorce the term of deity "Lord" from the "earthly Jesus." In this sort of speculative system, "Lord," denoting the alien Savior from the Realm of Light, would not rightly be applied to the earthly Jesus. Further, the "Lord," viewed as a purely spiritual creature, would not have any marks in his body for Paul to bear in similitude.

Ephesians 3:9

Textus Receptus -

και φωτισαι παντας τις η κοινωνια του μυστηριου του αποκεκρυμμενου απο των αιωνων εν τω Θεω τω τα παντα κτισαντι δια Ιησου Χριστου,

(And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. - KJV)

NA 21 –

και φωτισαι τις η οικονομια του μυστηριου του αποκεκρυμμενου απο των αιωνων εν τω Θεω τω τα παντα κτισαντι,

(...and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. - NIV)

The only opposition to the TR reading here is from p⁴⁶, Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and Ephraemi Rescriptus.

The pertinent alteration in this case involves the removal of δια Ιησου Χριστου (by [or through] Jesus Christ). This change essentially removes from this passage the affirmation that Jesus Christ was the agent by which Creation was brought into existence. This fits into Gnostic cosmogony quite well. Christ, as an emanation of the eternal Father, was therefore completely outside of the material *cosmos*, only entering it as a representative of the "alien god" who sought to bring out the souls of men (also parts of the eternal Father, and thus alien to the *cosmos*) away from the material world. As such, Christ would not have been involved in the creation of the material world, which was viewed as the work of the evil Demiurge (Ialdabaoth, etc.) who was opposed to the eternal Father and his efforts to restore the lost light to himself. The removal of "by Jesus Christ" from Ephesians 3:9 supports this cosmogony as it removes Christ (and by implication the Father) from the the role of Creator, and more easily makes the passage to be understood as referring to the Demiurge as God in creation. In many Gnostic systems, it was taught that the Demiurge was the "World-Artificer," the one who fashioned the existing material world. The Demiurge often is depicted as ignorant of the existence of powers higher than himself, and falls into conceit about his supremacy. For example, Hippolytus cites the belief system of the heresiarch Basilides,

"For there ruled the great Archon, whose dominion extends to the firmament, who believes that he is the only God and that there is none above him."⁴⁴

Further, Irenaeus relates another permutation of this theme found among the Gnostics,

⁴⁴ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, Bk. 7, Ch. 13

"He boasted of what was taking place at his feet and said, 'I am Father and God, and there is none above me....Do not lie, Ialdabaoth: there is above thee the Father of all, the First Man, and Man the Son of Man.'"⁴⁵

The Gnostics would rely upon Old Testament statements of God's supremacy, such as Isaiah 45:5, to present their claims that the God of the Old Testament was the Demiurge who makes these sorts of boastful claims, and that the Father of Christ in the New Testament is the Father over all. Hence, to remove reference to Christ as the agent of creation in such a blatant manner would point to the overlaying of Gnostic cosmogony onto this verse.

I Timothy 3:16

Textus Receptus –

και ομολογουμενωσ μεγα εστι το της ευσεβειας μυστηριον. Θεοσ εμφανερωθη εν σαρκι, ε δικαιοθη εν πνευματι, ωφθη αγγελιοις, εκηρυχθη εν εθνεσιν, επιστευθη εν κοσμοω, ανελη φθη εν δοξη.

(And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. - KJV)

NA 21 –

και ομολογουμενωσ μεγα εστιν το της ευσεβειας μυστηριον. οσ εμφανερωθη εν σαρκι, εδι καιωθη εν πνευματι, ωφθη αγγελιοις, εκηρυχθη εν εθνεσιν, επιστευθη εν κοσμοω, ανελημ φθη εν δοξη.

(Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory. - NIV)

Support for the Textus Receptus Reading

- 4th c. (poss. 7th c.) corrector of Codex Sinaiticus
- 5th c. corrector of Codex Alexandrinus
- 6th c. corrector of Ephraemi Rescriptus
- 9th c. copy of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis [D]
- K (9th c. uncial)
- L (9th c. uncial, Byz.)
- P (9th c. uncial, Alex.)
- Psi (8th-9th c. uncial, Alex.)

⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *op. cit.*, Ch. 30.4-6

- 81 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 104 (11th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 614 (13th c. miniscule, West.)
- 630 (14th c. miniscule)
- 1241 (12th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 1739 (10th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- 1881 (14th c. miniscule)
- 2495 (14th-15th c. miniscule)
- The large majority of the Byzantine text set
- The large majority of the Greek lectionaries

Support for the Critical Text Reading

- Codex Sinaiticus (4th c. uncial)
- Codex Alexandrinus (5th c. uncial)
- Ephraemi Rescriptus (5th c. uncial)
- G (9th c. uncial, West.)
- 33 (9th c. miniscule, Alex.)
- The Palestinian Syriac mss. set (5th c.)
- Possibly the Peshitta Syriac mss. set (5th c.) - unconfirmed
- Possibly the Harclean Syriac mss. set (7th c.) - unconfirmed
- Possibly in the Coptic textual sets (3rd-5th c.) – unconfirmed

This alteration seems pretty straightforward. By changing "God" to the more general "he," the potentially offensive (to Gnostics) idea that the Demiurge would be incarnated into the world and "justified in the Spirit," "received up into glory," etc. is diverted. Thus, the alteration avoids casting the Demiurge into the role which should be fulfilled by the heavenly alien Savior. On the other hand, if one wishes to consider "God" in this passage (from a minority Gnostic point of view) as referring to the Eternal Father, then this change is equally supportive of Gnostic theology. The truth of the voluntary incarnation of the eternal God into His own creation is weakened, and replaced with language which could still support the entry of **Jesus Christ**, as a created aeon, into the material world.

I John 4:3

Textus Receptus –

και παν πνευμα ο μη ομολογει τον Ιησουν **Χριστον εν σαρκι εληλυθота**, εκ του Θεου ο υκ **εστι**. και τουτο **εστι** το του αντιχριστου, ο ακηκοατε οτι ερχεται, και νυν εν τω κοσμω εστιν ηδη.

(And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world. - KJV)

NA 21 –

και παν πνευμα ο μη ομολογει τον Ιησουν εκ του θεου ουκ εστιν. και τουτο εστιν το του αντιχριστου, ο ακηκοατε οτι ερχεται και νυν εν τω κοσμω εστιν ηδη.

(...but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. - NIV)

The only support for the omission of this clause comes from Codex Vaticanus and Codex Alexandrinus. This clause is contained in Codex Sinaiticus, except that the phrase "Jesus Christ" Ιησουν Χριστον is changed to "Jesus Lord" Ιησουν Κυριον.

This is a straightforward example of a change made to support the docetic aspect of certain Gnostic beliefs. The traditional reading says that if a person refuses to believe that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, they are of the spirit of antichrist. This reading is changed in the Alexandrian texts in two ways which both reflect Gnostic tampering. In Alexandrinus and Vaticanus, the clause is simply deleted. They now say that if one "denies Jesus" (without the stipulation of acknowledging His literal incarnation), they are not of God, which is something that both Gnostic and Christian would agree upon in a general sense, though the Gnostic can still freely reject the fleshly incarnation of the spiritual, heavenly Christ. Essentially the same sort of change is made in Sinaiticus, which retains the clause, but replaces "Christ" with "Lord," making this passage a Gnostically more acceptable statement concerning the coming of the earthly Jesus in the flesh. This proceeds then without casting the heavenly, spiritual Christ into that material role, which would be unacceptable to many of the speculative systems of the Gnostics.