

Testing the Theological Conspiracy Theory: Utilizing Jude as a Test-Case for the “Heretical Alexandrian” and “Suppressive Orthodox” Positions on Deliberate Corruption in Textual Transmission

by Paul A. Himes¹

1. Introduction: Framing the Discussion

That the copyists of the New Testament manuscripts made deliberate changes to the text on the basis of ideology is a popular notion in textual criticism, notwithstanding the valiant attempt of Westcott and Hort to downplay it.² Yet the occasional subjectivity of such attempts to peer inside a copyists mind becomes apparent with the variant in John 1:18, μονογενὴς υἱός vs. μονογενὴς θεός. Here we are faced with the oddly ironic state of affairs where Bart Ehrman is in agreement with KJV-onlyists on two points: (1) the correct reading is “only begotten son,” and (2) a copyist(s) *deliberately* corrupted the text. Ehrman, however, believes that the change was made by an Alexandrian scribe to promote the deity of Christ, while D. A. Waite and David Sorenson believe the change was made by an Alexandrian scribe to muddy the doctrine of the Trinity.

Ehrman, <i>Orthodox Corruption</i>	KJV-Onlyists
<p>“The variant reading of the Alexandrian tradition, which substitutes ‘God’ for ‘Son,’ represents an orthodox corruption of the text in which the complete deity of Christ is affirmed: . . .”³</p> <p>“ . . . the Alexandrian variant, although perfectly amenable to scribes for theological reasons, is virtually impossible to understand within a Johannine context.”⁴</p> <p>“The problem, of course, is that Jesus can be the <i>unique</i> God only if there is no other God; but for the Fourth Gospel, the Father is God as well. Indeed, even in this passage the μονογενὴς is said to reside in the bosom of the Father. How can the μονογονὴς θεός, the unique God, stand in such a relationship to (another) God?”⁵</p>	<p>“ . . . the Only Begotten <i>Son</i>, . . .”</p> <p>“The <i>italicized</i> portion is CHANGED in the Greek texts and English versions specified above. They take away the word, “Son,” and change it to ‘God.’ This is pure HERESY! It is not possible to have an ‘Only Begotten God.’ This is an example of the Gnostic error that teaches Christ was only one of the many ‘gods’ that were mere ‘emanations.’ You MUST have an “only Begotten Son” to be doctrinally correct. This is certainly a matter of doctrine and theology.”⁷</p> <p>“Though the Son was certainly begotten, God the Father was not. This is utter confusion and diminishes the historic teaching regarding the eternity as well as the incarnation of Christ.</p>

¹ Paul Himes is professor of Bible and Ancient Languages at Baptist College of Ministry and Baptist Theological Seminary (Menomonee Falls, WI). The reader should note that Himes holds to a Byzantine-priority position, and that the point of this paper is not to determine or argue for the original text, but rather to question the validity of both KJV-only and liberal logic in textual criticism.

² Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 2:282—“It will not be out of place to add here a distinct expression of our belief that even among the numerous unquestionably spurious readings of the New Testament there are no signs of deliberate falsification of the text for dogmatic purposes.”

³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 88.

⁴ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 79.

⁵ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 80.

⁷ D. A. Waite, *Defending the King James Bible: A Fourfold Superiority* (Collingswood, NJ: 222002), 165.

<p>“The variant was created to support a high Christology in the face of widespread claims, found among adoptionists recognized and opposed in Alexandria, that Christ was not God but merely a man, adopted by God.”⁶</p>	<p>It is significant that Gnosticism, prevalent in the first and second centuries, held that Christ was one of many gods. The critical text favors the Gnostic position . . .”⁸</p>
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Further irony exists in that Ehrman, like Waite and Sorenson, is more than willing to allow the Gnostics a role in creating this variant, though it is unclear as to what degree the Gnostics ever found themselves theological adversaries of the Adoptionists.⁹

The point of mentioning this is not to determine which reading is correct, nor to necessarily refute the idea that the change was deliberate (though perhaps a simple blurring of the ink on either the *nomina sacra* YC and ΘC, when both terms are common in John 1, could explain it much more simply).¹⁰ The point, rather, is to emphasize how one’s ideological leanings can cause one to peer into the mind of a copyist, now centuries dead, and see whatever they wish to see.

Ehrman, on the one hand, admits that the “vast majority” of textual variants are accidental.¹¹ He nonetheless argues that, *vis-à-vis* the Adoptionist controversy, “What have survived are manuscripts produced by the winners of the conflict, Christians who at times went out of their way to guarantee the ‘correct’ (i.e., their) understanding of Jesus’ birth in the face of the claims made by adoptionists . . .”¹² On the other side of the spectrum, the language of KJV-onlyism will occasionally give lip service to some accidental variants.¹³ The overwhelming focus, however, is on deliberate alterations and their horrific heretical consequences. Edward F. Hills writes, “Some of the scribes who copied some of the ancient manuscripts were heretics, probably Gnostics, who altered the texts that they were copying rather freely in order to tone down the teaching of the New Testament Scriptures concerning Christ’s deity.”¹⁴ Waite asks,

⁶ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 80.

⁸ David H. Sorenson, *Touch not the Unclean Thing: The Text Issue and Separation* (Duluth, MN: Northstar Baptist Ministries), 249, fn 3.

⁹ See Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 82, “The solution to the problem of the origin of the variant lies not in the orthodox-Gnostic controversy, but in that of both the orthodox and Gnostic Christians against the adoptionists.” Yet Tommy Wasserman has appropriately noted, “One may well question whether it is at all possible to detect an anti-adoptionistic motivation behind a harmonization with a context where the Logos is understood to be God right at the outset” (Wasserman, “Misquoting Manuscripts? The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture Revisited,” in *The Making of Christianity—Conflicts, Contacts, and Constructs: Essays in Honor of Bengt Holmberg*, eds. Magnus Zetterholm and Samuel Bryskog, CBNTS 47 (Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 2012): 342. See also pages 342–3 and Wasserman’s discussion of the syntax of *μονογενής*).

¹⁰ Yet YIOC in reference to Jesus may not have become *nomina sacra* until later. See Larry W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 97–98. Ironically, though I favor the Byzantine reading, I have to admit that the *nomina sacra* hypothesis would then favor the originality of ΘC, if YC did not occur until later.

¹¹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 27.

¹² Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 55.

¹³ William P. Grady, *Final Authority: A Christian’s Guide to the King James Bible* (Schereville, IN: Grady Publications, 1993), 61.

¹⁴ Edward F. Hills, *Believing Bible Study: Key to the Space Age*, rev. ed. (Des Moines, Iowa: Christian Research, 1977), 76.

“You want to know why the heretics took out some things but not all of them? They wanted the Bible to agree with them.”¹⁵

Again, I am not here inclined to challenge either Ehrman or the KJV-only position on whether or not copyists *occasionally* altered the text for doctrinal reasons. The question is the *degree* to which one can automatically assume that a change had either as its intent or its effect the actual alteration of doctrine. Thus some modern text critics are more cautious in assuming we can peer into the mind of a scribe and label him a theologically-motivated corrupter. Peter Head’s study of Bodmer Papyrus II (P⁶⁶), for example, describes its copyist “a *careless* committed Christian.”¹⁶ When it comes to the addition of the article in John 10:33, which Ehrman asserts was an attempt to assert Jesus’ deity, Head points to the insertion of the two dots above the article to mark it out for later deletion and asks poignantly, “If it were a deliberate alteration, why would the scribe correct himself?”¹⁷

Here, then, is the challenge to both Ehrman and KJV-onlyists. If, indeed, copyists deliberately changed the text for theological reasons *as often as charged*, then one should expect to see a certain amount of consistency within specific manuscripts (and this may, in fact, be the case with P72).¹⁸ Otherwise we run the risk of special pleading: “Reading A was deliberately added because it supports the copyist’s agenda, while reading B was totally accidental because it does not support the copyist’s supposed agenda.” Also regarding the KJVO perspective, this should manifest itself in an overwhelming consistency in every book of the NT as found in modern Greek New Testaments.

In light of that, we will first offer a sampling of the sort of variants that Ehrman and KJV-onlyist claim are theologically motivated. We will then use what we discover from their methodology in a *reducto ad absurdum* test, focusing on the book of Jude. Our goal is to ascertain whether or not we can determine consistency in theological trends at the level of either (1) specific Greek New Testaments based on specific methodology and presuppositions, or (2)

¹⁵ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 43. Cf. Sorenson, *Touch Not the Unclean Thing*, 21—“Ironically, as early as the second century, there were scribes who intentionally modified their copying to suit a preconceived theological biases”; Grady, *Final Authority*, 65—“The greatest degree of abuse to which the New Testament text was subjected transpired at the hands of the Christ-denying heretics themselves.”

¹⁶ Peter M. Head, “Scribal Behavior and Theological Tendencies in Singular Readings in P. Bodmer II (P⁶⁶),” in *Textual Variation: Theological and Social Tendencies: Papers from the Fifth Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, eds. H. A. G. Houghton and D. C. Parker, Text and Studies: Third Series, vol. 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 60. Emphasis added

¹⁷ Head, “Scribal Behavior,” 66–7. Note also Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitters, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 120; and Wasserman, “Misquoting Manuscripts?,” 326–50. We should also be cautious about assuming too much about tendencies regarding genuinely accidental mistakes. James R. Royse, one of the foremost experts on scribal habits evidenced in singular readings, writes, “Although guidelines based on the habits of scribes are continually cited, the justification for them is not so clear. Indeed, what sort of justification *could* be given for a claim about the tendencies of a second or third century scribe? How can we possibly know what sorts of mistakes such a scribe was likely to make?” (Royse, “Scribal Habits in the Transmission of new Testament Texts,” in *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts*, ed. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, Berkeley Religious studies Series [Berkeley, CA: Graduate Theological Union, 1979], 143–4).

¹⁸ See Tommy Wasserman’s discussion in P72 in “Theological Creativity and Scribal Solutions in Jude,” in *Textual Variation: Theological and Social Tendencies—Papers from the Fifth Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, eds. H. A. G. Houghton and D. C. Parker, Text and Studies: Third Series 7 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 76.

individual manuscripts (and, by extension, the copyist and/or scribe behind it), drawing on the extensive collation data of Tommy Wasserman.¹⁹

We will initiate this study *not* by denying that such alterations make any theological difference in regards to the value of Jude for the church (though that is, in fact, our position).²⁰ To the contrary, we will embrace this assumption for the sake of argument, and see where it takes us. In the process, with our tongue firmly planted in our cheek, we will simultaneously create the “Maximalist” version of Jude (which will be noticeably different from the *TR*) and briefly discuss what a “Minimalist” version of Jude would look like (which, ironically, looks a lot like the *TR*).

To clarify: this paper is not about determining the *correct* readings in Jude.²¹ Rather, this paper is about embracing, *arguendo*, the claim that significant textual variants should be viewed through the lens of theological motivation, and seeing where that methodology takes us.

The Methodology of both *OC* and *KJVO* Perspectives: Some Sample Passages

What determines if a textual variant was theologically motivated? No clear answer to this is given; even something as seemingly innocuous as a καί may possess supposed theological significance. With an understanding that this study cannot be comprehensive, we will focus on a few of the textual variants examined in *OC* and *KJVO* authors.

Textual Omission and/or addition

One of the most discussed textual variants is Mark 1:1, whether or not to include τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ehrman, naturally favors its omission and discounts an accidental omission partially on

¹⁹ Tommy Wasserman, *The Epistle of Jude: Its Text and Transmission*, CBNTS 43 (Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2006). I generally prefer the term “copyist” in this paper, because “scribe” may assume a bit too much about the person doing the work. For relevant discussion, see Larry Hurtado’s post “‘Scribes’ and ‘Copyists’” (<https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2011/02/16/scribes-and-copyists/>, accessed 7/25/22). Alan Kirk is certainly correct when he states, “‘Scribe’ is in fact a notoriously imprecise term, . . .” (Kirk, “The Scribe as Tradent,” in *Scribal Practices and Social Structures Among Jesus Adherents: Essays in Honour of John S. Kloppenborg*, eds. William E. Arnal, et al., Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum ovaniesium 285 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 97

²⁰ See, for example, Mark Minnick, “How Much Differences Do the Differences Make?” in *God’s Word in Our Hands: The Bible Preserved for Us*, eds. James B. Williams and Randolph Shaylor, 246–250 (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2003). He comes to this conclusion regarding the book of Jude. My motivation is actually quite similar to Dr. Minnick’s, in that I wish to show the inconsistency of *KJVO* accusations, and it is in fact quite possible that the seeds of this paper were planted some 20 years ago when I first read Minnick’s essay, though I have barely looked at it in the writing of this paper. I gladly recommend Minnick’s essay as a good starting point for discussing the significance of textual variants.

²¹ Having been mentored to a certain degree by Maurice A. Robinson (though he was not my *Doktorvater*), I hold to “Byzantine Priority.” The reason I am writing this paper, however, is due to my extreme skepticism that theologically-motivated alteration was as rampant as many suggest, whether it be portrayed as “Alexandrian heretics cackling with glee as they satanically remove sound doctrine” or “bullying orthodox suppressing dissidents to maintain their patriarchal hegemony.”

the basis of its occurrence at the beginning of the book.²² For Ehrman, an analysis of Mark's theology allows this Gospel to be read either in an "adoptionist" way (with Jesus' baptism being the point at which he became God's Son) or an orthodox sort of way.²³ In other words, adding τοῦ Θεοῦ to Mark 1:1 has the effect of tipping the scales in favor of the orthodox.²⁴

On the other side of the coin, Waite declares that the expression τοῦ Θεοῦ was "eliminated" by *Aleph*, and that "Removal of 'the Son of God' reflects on the deity of Christ."²⁵ Hills similarly views the omission of τοῦ Θεοῦ in Mark 1:1 in *Aleph* and other mss as part of the "heretic[al], probably Gnostic," plot to diminish the deity of Christ.²⁶

Similarly, for KJV-onlyists, the omission of "ὁ Χριστός" in John 4:42, means that, at a minimum, Christology is "*diminished and diluted*."²⁷ Waite goes even further, declaring that this exact omission constitutes "The Denial of Christ's Deity . . ."²⁸

Back to the liberal side of the coin: even something as apparently innocuous as a conjunction or article may point to theologically-motivated alteration. In Romans 9:5, the omission of καί in the expression ὧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα in a few witnesses is apparently a deliberate attempt to link Jesus' ancestry more closely to his Jewish roots, because the omission of the conjunction means that Christ came "from the fathers" instead of simply from the Israelites in a more general sense.²⁹ Elsewhere, Ehrman argues that P66's singular addition of the article to θεόν in John 10:33 "is characteristic of the movement in early Christology away from seeing Jesus as one who is in some sense *equal* with God, to seeing him actually *as* God, . . ."³⁰

Again, a thorough survey of both OC and KJVO discussions of deletions and additions is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper is simply attempting to provide a sampling of the logic that pervades both perspectives.

²² Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 73; cf. Bart D. Ehrman, "The Text of Mark in the Hands of the Orthodox," in *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman, NTTS 33 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 151.

²³ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 74.

²⁴ Interestingly, Ehrman suggests that in Mark 15:34, "why have you reviled me" replaced "why have you forsaken me" as an anti-Gnostic corruption (see Ehrman, "The Text of Mark in the Hands of the Orthodox," 147–8). Ehrman mentions Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.8.2 as to how Gnostics used the latter against the Orthodox. What is lacking, however, is any mention of the Orthodox then using the variant "why have you forsaken me" against the Gnostics, nor why the expression "why have you reviled me" made no permanent inroads within the Byzantine tradition.

²⁵ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 175.

²⁶ Hills, *Believing Bible Study*, 76.

²⁷ Sorenson, 233 and 235; emphasis original. Sorenson here is critiquing the NASB, yet he does not complete the verse as translated in the NASB, which goes on to say, ". . . the Savior of the world."

²⁸ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 181–2.

²⁹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 241. It puzzles me how Ehrman can think that "out of whom" in regards to the Israelites could be taken in a way that it would *not* refer to genealogical descent, but that "out of whom" in regards to "the fathers" *would* "unequivocally" (in his terminology) refer to genealogical descent. Surely the expression κατὰ σάρκα would remove all ambiguity that this is about biological relation, even without the καί, when linked to the preposition ἐκ!

³⁰ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 84; note the critique on this point by Head, "Scribal Behavior," 67

Textual Change

We have already noted the unique congruence of circumstances that causes *OC* and KJV-onlyism to agree both on the text of John 1:18 and its theological significance. Generally speaking, however, it is more likely for these two perspectives to disagree on correct text but agree on its significance. A classic example is 1 Timothy 3:16. Here, again, one would think that the difference between *OC* and *nomina sacra* ΘC would easily lend itself to accidental alteration. For Ehrman, however, $OC \rightarrow \Theta C$ is clearly “an anti-adoptionist corruption that stresses the deity of Christ,” i.e., a deliberate alteration that enabled the Orthodox, as early as 200s, to affirm “that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ.”³¹

For the KJVO side, $\Theta C \rightarrow OC$ is “the infamous corruption.”³² Waite calls this alteration “The Denial that ‘God’ was Manifest in the flesh,” and that the occurrence of the relative pronoun at this point would “not even make syntactical sense.”³³ Sorenson states, “Popular manifestations of the critical text such as the New International Version and the New American Standard Bible substitute the word *he* for God. Who *he* is is left up to the reader to determine. This clearly is a weakening of the doctrine of the incarnation.”³⁴ In addition, at least twice I have heard similar statements from the pulpit, accusing modern translations of downplaying the deity of Christ.

Once again, it is not the point of this paper to critique the theological statements so much as see where they would logically lead. Yet it is hard to resist questioning whether or not any of the writers cited understand how, exactly, a relative pronoun functions. Is it really “left up to the reader to determine” (Sorenson)? When, for example, the Apostle Paul declares, “in whom we have redemption . . .” in Eph 1:7, he uses the relative pronoun $\delta\varsigma$ (as dative singular ϕ). Is this also “left up to the reader to determine”? Could he be, for example, referring to Donald Trump? $M\eta\ \gamma\epsilon\nu\omicron\iota\tau\omicron!$ The average human being, when confronted with a pronoun, relative or otherwise, does not suddenly allow their imagination to take flight to the heights of absurdity, or heresy. Rather, they simply look for the nearest masculine singular antecedent that makes sense. In Eph 1:7 it would not be “praise” ($\epsilon\pi\alpha\iota\nu\omicron\nu$, masculine singular accusative), even though that would be the closest, but rather Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in verse 5. Context clarifies who is meant. Similarly, looking at 1 Tim 3:16 in the NA28 critical text, passing over $\sigma\tau\tilde{\upsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$, which would not make sense (and itself refers back to $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$, which is feminine singular), we find $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in v. 15 as the only antecedent possible. Thus “God” is the one “who is manifested in the flesh.” It is surely safe to assume that early Christians were less grammatically-challenged than some modern authors.³⁵

³¹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 77–78. Yet even Metzger’s *Textual Commentary*, reflecting the perspective of the UBS committee as a whole, while favoring $\delta\varsigma$, sees a deliberate theological alteration here as unlikely (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994], 574).

³² Grady, *Final Authority*, 294.

³³ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 158.

³⁴ Sorenson, *Touch not the Unclean Thing*, 251.

³⁵ In Ehrman’s more accessible work *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005), 157, he makes the inexplicable and grossly misleading statement that the *OC* reading is “ambiguous about [Jesus’ divinity], at best,” and that the original reading merely spoke of “Christ ‘who was made manifest in the flesh,’” despite “the fact that ‘Christ’ only appears once in the entire chapter, three verses back in 3:13.

Yet the real point that I wish to make is that *both* the OC side *and* the KJVO side assume that Θεός contains more doctrinal significance than ὁς. Let us keep this in the back of our mind, allowing it for the sake of argument, and move on.

The question of Jesus' relationship to Joseph in Luke 1–3 appears on both sides of the debate, as well. Ehrman states, “Not surprisingly, in virtually every case of possible ambiguity in the passages, in question—whether, for instance, Joseph is called Jesus' ‘father’ or when he and Mary are designated as Jesus' ‘parents’—one or another scribe has remedied the potential problem by replacing the word in question with appropriate (i.e., more patently orthodox) substitution.”³⁶

Yet it is not clear why an ancient scribe, copyist, or even Christian would have found such matters concerning. Ehrman discusses the three places where, from his perspective, the expression “parents” was changed to something seemingly less offensive: Luke 2:27, 41, and 43. Yet even Ehrman admits that in 2:41 and 2:27, the “corruption” was “sporadic.”³⁷ Both Luke 2:27 and 41 contain γονεῖς even in the *TR*. Why would a scribe change, for example, γονεῖς in 2:27 but not in 2:43? If such a person were truly agenda-driven, would they be so incompetent?³⁸

The matter truly comes to a head with Luke 2:33. Ehrman argues ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ → Ἰωσήφ because an orthodox copyist desired “to eliminate what must have appeared incongruous with the firmly entrenched notion that although Joseph was Mary's betrothed, he was not the father of Jesus.”³⁹ The KJVO perspective prefers Ἰωσήφ → ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ and views it as an outright attack on the doctrine of the Virgin Birth.⁴⁰ Thus when Ehrman goes so far as to declare that “The change makes perfect sense, given the orthodox view that Joseph was in fact not Jesus' father,” this is a statement with which the KJVO side would presumably agree.⁴¹

All sides must affirm that the author of Luke clearly believed in the virgin birth, whatever readings one might prefer.⁴² Despite that, Luke himself was completely comfortable calling Jesus “the son of Joseph” in Luke 3:23—and lest somebody object that “as was supposed” would negate the force of that statement, I would simply point out that ὥς + νομίζω, by default, when linked to the author's perspective (ὧν), is a statement of *agreement*. To create a statement of *disagreement* one would need a negative particle, as in Philo, *On Sobriety* 20 (οὐ τοὺς . . .

³⁶ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 55; see, for example, discusses of Luke 2:33 on p. 55, Luke 2:48 on p. 56, Luke 2:27 on page 103, fn 59. Ehrman's inconsistency in suggesting that when the opposite sort of change occurs, it is due to “literary reasons” (p. 103, fn59) has been critiqued by Wasserman, “Misquoting Manuscripts?,” 332.

³⁷ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 56.

³⁸ Wasserman (“Misquoting Manuscripts?,” 333) aptly states regarding Luke 2:42, “In light of the inconsistent pattern of variation, I do not think the affirmation of the Virgin birth is the issue here. The scribes knew fully that Joseph was not Jesus' biological father—there was no need to prove it by altering the text” (essay *Misquoting Manuscripts?*).

³⁹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 55.

⁴⁰ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 163; David H. Sorenson, *Neither Oldest nor Best* (Duluth, MN: Northstar Ministries, 2017), 22.

⁴¹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 55; compare with Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 633, “. . . thus possibly calling Joseph, Christ's literal ‘father,’ thereby denying His virgin birth” (it is not clear what Waite means by “literal”; does a child who is adopted possess a metaphorical, as opposed to literal, father?).

⁴² Alexander Globe, “Some Doctrinal Variants in Matthew 1 and Luke 2, and the Authority of the Neutral Text,” *CBQ* 42, no. 1 (1980): 53—“However modern scholars interpret the texts, it is certain that Matthew and Luke both believed that Jesus had been conceived by a virgin without human intervention. Those evangelists wrote at such length about the nativity that their views can be substantiated from passages that are not open to doubt on textual grounds.”

νομιζομένους ὥς . . .) or *On the Confusion of Tongues* 43 (οὐ . . . ὥς ἔνιοι νομίζουσιν).⁴³ In addition, one is forced to ask whether, when Mary spoke to Jesus of his *father* (πατήρ) in Luke 3:48, she was denying the virgin birth.

Nonetheless, the point is simply that such changes are viewed as theologically motivated by both sides. Somehow such alterations are assumed to promote a theological agenda, whether it be protecting the virgin birth (Ehrman) or denying the virgin birth (KJVO).

More could be said about various views on the theological motivation behind lexical changes, including Grady's suggestion that James 5:16 in the NIV ("confess your sins to each other") supports Roman Catholic doctrine, though the exact same word, παραπτώματα, is translated as "sins" by the KJV in Eph 1:7.⁴⁴ Yet at this point, I believe we have established a key textual principle at play. For KJV-onlyists, if Reading A contains a key theological word or phrase that promotes orthodoxy more explicitly than Reading B, then Reading A is more theologically "pure" and thus more desirable. I see no other way to understand the logic of Waite and others without this assumption. We shall call this the principle of "Maximum Theological Affirmation," or MTA for short. A key point to understand is that KJV-onlyists generally practice MTA without consideration for what the NIV or NASB or *Aleph* or Nestle-Aland have elsewhere in a particular book of the Bible. For example, if a text such as the NIV omits "through His blood" in Colossians 1:14, this constitutes "the Denial of Redemption by Divinely Provided Blood," *regardless* of the fact that Colossians 1:20 contains the same soteriological truth in the NIV.⁴⁵

Conversely, for Ehrman, if Reading A contains a key theological word or phrase that promotes orthodoxy more explicitly than Reading B, then Reading A is historically suspect, and thus Reading B is more likely to be original. We shall call this the principle of "Minimum Orthodox Corruption," or MOC for short. To be fair, Ehrman is more nuanced and less dogmatic in his arguments than his KJV-only counterparts, not to mention that he lacks the annoyingly persistent ALL-CAPS that the other side seem to enjoy. Furthermore, unlike his counterparts on the other side of the theological playground, Ehrman attempts to build his case based on the theology and literary characteristics of that particular biblical author rather than looking at readings in isolation in the biblical text.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, his propensity to focus on *manuscript* readings in isolation rather than as seen in the entirety of an individual manuscript allows us to characterize his methodology as MOC.⁴⁷

⁴³ Specific examples found utilizing *Accordance* command line : =ὥς <WITHIN 2 Words> νομίζω

⁴⁴ Grady, *Final Authority*, 292.

⁴⁵ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 154.

⁴⁶ For example, his essay "A Leper in the Hands of an Angry Jesus," in *New Testament Greek Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Hawthorne*, eds. Amy M. Donaldson and Timothy B. Sailors, 77–98 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), is quite interesting in this regard. I have found this to be often the case in *Orthodox Corruption*, as well.

⁴⁷ For critique on this point, see Wasserman, "Misquoting Manuscripts?," 230 and throughout the essay. See also Ulrich Schmid, "Scribes and Variants—Sociology and Typology," in *Textual Variation: Theological and Social Tendencies: Papers from the Fifth Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, eds. H. A. G. Houghton and D. C. Parker, Text and Studies: Third Series, vol. 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2008), 5–6.

Embracing MTA and MOC, Round 1—Looking for the Superior Greek New Testament in Jude.

Our first examination of Jude will be more of a critique of KJV-onlyism rather than Ehrman. The latter could care less about which Greek New Testament or translation is more-or-less theologically “pure,” while the former is most definitely concerned with the theological superiority of the KJV and the *TR*.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, we will still consider it a hypothetically worthwhile endeavor to figure out the MOC Greek New Testament along with the MTA.

It is here that we will embrace, for the sake of argument, the supposition that where two variants exist, the one that makes orthodox theology more explicit is the better reading, *regardless of what that same document has elsewhere*. This principle could certainly be applied at the broader level to the entire New Testament. One could ask, for example, why the King James and the underlying *TR* lack the Holy Spirit in Acts 4:25 when the various critical texts include Him (surely a member of the Trinity is of infinite importance!). Yet by narrowing our focus to Jude, we are able to examine *every* single textual variant of any significance.

In my forthcoming Lexham Research Commentary on Jude, I compare every single time in Jude that the following Greek New Testaments diverged in any way from each other: the *Textus Receptus* (*TR*; Stephanus’ 1550, which is identical to the Trinitarian Bible Society’s/Scrivener’s *TR* in Jude); Hodges and Farstad’s 2nd edition Majority Text (*Maj*); Robinson and Pierpont’s 2005 Byzantine text (*Byz*); Westcott and Hort (*W&H*); Nestle-Aland 27th and 28th editions (*NA*²⁷; *NA*²⁸); Michael Holmes’ Society of Biblical Literature text (*SBL*); and the very recent Tyndale text (*Tyn*) (see Appendix B). We will examine each variant and attempt to determine which one is MTA. We will award half a point to minor words or phrases (mostly ignoring articles and word order variations), but a full point to significant words or phrases.

The point here is to determine which modern Greek New Testament, using KJV-only logic (MTA), is superior. Granted, the point system is somewhat artificial and there is room for improvement. Nor should the reader think for a moment that this study is meant to be taken seriously (and I, personally, prefer the Byzantine regardless of what results MTA shows us). Indeed, some readers (you know who you are!) may become irritated that no concern is given to figuring out which reading came first on the various external and internal criteria of textual criticism. Yet I beg the reader’s indulgence because MTA invariably assumes that whichever reading came first will be theologically superior, lest it be left in the unenviable position of positing that a theologically superior reading somehow evolved from a morally corrupt text. In other words, this is an exercise in *reducto ad absurdum*—seeing where the methodology takes us while enjoying the ride.

Verse 3—“common salvation” versus “our common salvation.”

We pass over with reluctance verse 1, where “to those sanctified” is pitted against “to those beloved.” Both phrases contain good doctrine, both are congruent with Jude’s theological emphasis, and any attempts to argue one against the other *on the basis of orthodox theology* will, for lack of critical thinking, inevitably end up with ALL CAPS and accusations of Nazism.

⁴⁸ Hence an entire chapter in Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 131–83, entitled, “The King James Bible Is God’s Word Kept Intact in English Because of Its Superior Theology.”

In verse 2, all the GNTs agree, disappointingly for our purposes So far the score is nothing to nothing.

Verse 3, however, is much more promising. Surely the omission of “our” by the TR, Maj, and Byz GNTs is significant via MTA methodology. After all, according to Waite, the omission of “thy” in John 17:17 (“sanctify them through *Thy* truth: Thy Word is truth”), all by itself, constitutes “the Denial that God’s Word Alone Is ‘Truth.’”⁴⁹ Indeed, one little pronoun can make a whale of a theological difference.

In this case, one could argue that the nefarious deletion of “our” opens the door to universalism. After all, simply speaking of “the common salvation” might imply it is common to *everyone*, not just God’s elect (and, as we have seen, what the rest of the letter has to say about such matters is irrelevant to the principle of MTA). The phrase “our common salvation,” by contrast, makes it clear salvation belongs only to believers. Is not this a significant matter of theology? Consequently, I hereby award NA²⁷, NA²⁸, W&H, SBL, and Tyn ½ point.

“God” in verse 4—It’s complicated . . .

At first glance, verse 4 would seem to be a straight-forward advantage for the traditional texts via MTA. After all, would not the inclusion of “God,” τὸν μόνον δεσπότην Θεόν, καὶ Κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἀρνούμενοι, be more theologically accurate than its omission? Yet something curious happens when “God” is removed, *a là* the critical texts and W&H. Suddenly τὸν μόνον δεσπότην καὶ Κύριον becomes a Granville-Sharp construction designating Jesus Christ as both “Master” and “Lord,” whereas having Θεός and δεσπότης side-by-side without a καὶ disrupts the GNR pattern.⁵⁰ Thus the tradition texts are speaking of two persons: God the Master, and our Lord Jesus Christ. The critical texts and W&H are speaking only of one person being denied, Jesus Christ, who is both Master and Lord.

This could be argued either way. Granted, mentioning God the Father alongside of Jesus is certainly significant, though hardly proof of deity (cf. Judges 7:20; obviously Gideon is not deity). Yet δεσπότης often refers to Yahweh, as seen in Luke 2:29 and Acts 4:24, LXX Gen 15:8, Tobit 8:17, 2 Mac 6:14, etc.⁵¹ Would it not be a significant matter to identify Jesus with Yahweh?

⁴⁹ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 142.

⁵⁰ The Granville-Sharp rule is explained by Wallace in this way: “In the TSKS construction [“when two nouns are connected by καὶ, and the article precedes only the first noun”], the second noun refers to the *same* person mentioned with the first noun when: (1) neither is *impersonal*; (2) neither is *plural*; (3) neither is a *proper* name.” *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 270–72. That Wallace has understood Sharp correctly can be ascertained by anybody who is willing to actually read Sharp. See Granville, Sharp, *Remarks on the Use of the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (London: Vernor and Hood, et al, 1803), available online at GoogleBooks [here](#). Note especially page 6, where it is clear he is focusing primarily on *singular* and *personal* nouns though allow for some exceptions (“. . . **except** the nouns be proper names, or in the plural number, in which cases there are many exceptions”; emphasis added), page xxxix, “. . . they both relate to the *same person*” (emphasis added), and page 3, “a farther [further] description of the *first-named person*” (emphasis added). As to whether or not Sharp’s rule is consistent in *Koine* Greek, I am convinced by Wallace’s impressive review of the evidence in *Granville Sharp’s Canon and Its Kin: Semantics and Significance*, Studies in Biblical Greek (New York: Peter Lang, 2009). If Wallace’s argument has a flaw, it may be simply that he does not seem eager to allow *any* exceptions to the rule.

⁵¹ This is, of course, a selective portrayal of the evidence.

Having said all that, with the assumption that somebody committed to MTA would argue that having two members of the Trinity in a verse is better than one, I will award the traditional texts ½ point here. The score is tied (for those wishing to award the traditional texts a whole point here, please note that it will not make a difference in the end).

Verse 5—Who led them out of Egypt?

Verse 5, however, is where clear frontrunners for MTA begin to emerge. The first half of the verse is, of course, a sanctified textual mess, with four different readings emerging from our 8 Greek NTs. Yet our concern is with the second half of the verse, namely whether or not it was “the Lord” (ὁ Κύριος) or Jesus (Ἰησοῦς) who led the people out of Egypt. The traditional texts and NA27 all have “the Lord” (though NA27 imprisons the article within brackets) while W&H has “Lord” without the article. Yet NA²⁸, Tyn, and SBL all have “Jesus” as the subject.⁵²

Since “Lord” can obviously refer to either the Father or the Son, and is thus ambiguous, and “Jesus” can only refer to the Son, the question must be asked: does a reading that definitively proves the pre-incarnate existence of Christ trump a reading that does not? One could, of course, ask Waite, who believes that changing “The Father which hath sent me” to “him who hath sent me” in John 5:30 constitutes a “denial of the eternality . . . of Christ the Eternal Son of God.”⁵³ Yet “Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.” If changing “Father” to “him” in John 5:30 is a denial of the eternality of the Son, then surely changing the very specific “Jesus,” *which would place Christ as acting with divine power at a point in time before his birth*, with the more generic “Lord,” constitutes a denial of the pre-existence of Christ.

Yet for some, to describe Jesus as acting in the Exodus is “difficult to the point of impossibility.”⁵⁴ Some might object that this confuses the members of the Trinity, thus implying Gnostic influence. To this, however, one may quickly respond with Hebrews 11:26 (KJV: “the reproach of Christ” in Egypt), 1 Cor 10:4 (the Israelites in the wilderness “drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ”; KJV), and 1 Cor 10:9 (“Neither let us

⁵² For arguments for the “Lord” reading, see the following Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC (Dallas, TX: Word Books), 43; Daniel J. Harrington, “Jude,” in *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, by Donald P. Senior and Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2003), 195; J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, BNTC (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1969), 255; Wasserman, *The Epistle of Jude*, 266. For arguments for the “Jesus” reading, see the following Philipp F. Bartholomä, “Did Jesus Save the People out of Egypt? A Re-examination of a Textual Problem in Jude 5,” *Novum Testamentum* 50 (2008):143–58 (this article is proving to be very influential); Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 64-65; and (surprisingly), the 100-year old commentaries, Henry Alford, *The Epistles of St. John and St. Jude: and the Revelation*, vol. 4 of 4, pt. 2, of *The Greek Testament*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co, 1884), 4:532, and E. H. Plumptre, *The General Epistles of St Peter & St Jude, with Notes and Introduction*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890), 204. A more in-depth discussion can be found in my forthcoming commentary on Jude for the Lexham Research Commentary series. Most commentaries on Jude, both here and elsewhere, originally accessed via *Logos Bible Software*, 8.17 (Faithlife, 2022).

⁵³ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 165–6.

⁵⁴ These are the oft-quoted words of the UBS committee as a whole (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 657). Yet this was *not* the opinion of Metzger himself. Within the textual commentary, Metzger and Allen Wikgren offer a dissenting note in brackets: “Critical principles seem to require the adoption of Ἰησοῦς, which admittedly is the best attested reading among Greek and versional witnesses . . .” (*Textual Commentary*, 657–8).

tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents”; KJV).⁵⁵ This last reference is especially helpful, because in Numbers 21:7, the Israelites identify their sin as having spoken against Yahweh, specifically.

Indeed, *if* deliberate theological alteration is supposed, one could perhaps envision a pious scribe changing “Lord” to “Jesus,” thus making this scribe more theological pure than the *TR* (according to the logic of MTA). Conversely, as “Jesus”-supporter Philipp F. Bartholomä argues, the reverse change (Ἰησοῦς → ὁ Κύριος), if deliberate, may have occurred because a copyist “conceived it as anachronistic and theologically problematic to talk about ‘Jesus’ saving the people out of Egypt Since ‘Jesus’ was perceived to be a man’s name (associated with Christ’s humanity), one can easily imagine how scribes would consider as too bold the notion of ‘Jesus,’ the man, being pre-existent.”⁵⁶ I retain my skepticism as to such an explanation, but that is not the point. Without a doubt, the “Jesus” reading is superior theologically, according to the logic of MTA.

Consequently, for promoting a reading that simultaneously proves the preexistence of Jesus while *not* messing with the Trinity (else the King James in 1 Corinthians 10 would also be guilty of that crime), NA28, SBL, and Tyn are all awarded 1 point.

Verses 6–12—No theological gains

In verse 6, all of our Greek NTs agree, all the more surprising considering the previous verse. Verse 7 involves an irrelevant word-order difference. All the Greek NTs agree in verses 8 and 9, unless we wish to pursue the theological significance of a movable *nu* and variant spellings of Moses’ name. In verse 11, again, all our GNTs agree.

Verse 12 provides us with three key points of variation: the inclusion or omission of the article in the expression οἱ ἐν ταῖς ἀγάταις, the inclusion or lack of the pronoun ὑμῖν after συνευωχούμενοι, and a slight lexical difference in περιφερόμεναι vs. παραφερόμεναι. An argument could be made that the latter two words are not perfect synonyms, but try as I might, I could not determine any theological difference. Likewise, the inclusion or exclusion of the article at the beginning does not make a translatable difference.⁵⁷ While one might be tempted to read some significance into ὑμῖν, indisputably the pronoun is implied even with just συνευωχούμενοι as we see in the following translations: “eating with you” (NIV), “eat with you” (NLT), “feast with you” (ESV), and “feast with you” (NASB20).⁵⁸ Thus, all GNTs break even.

Verses 13–21—The calm before the storm

The variants in verses 13 and 14 make no translatable difference and may thus be ignored. Verse 15, however, is much trickier, and transcends the normal “traditional text vs.

⁵⁵ Carroll Osburn, “The Text of Jude 5,” *Biblica* 62, no. 1 (1981): 112.

⁵⁶ Bartholomä, “Did Jesus Save the People out of Egypt?,” 150.

⁵⁷ If included, the article would obviously go with συνευωχούμενοι. I find Whallon’s argument that this would be “inelegant” completely unconvincing (*why* should it be “inelegant”?), as well as his conjectural emendation to αἱ ἐν τοῖς ἀγάταις . . . (William Whallon, “Should We Keep, Omit, or Alter the *oi* in Jude 12?”, *NTS* 34 [1988]: 157–8).

⁵⁸ Various translations accessed via <https://www.blueletterbible.org>.

eclectic text” dichotomy. On the one hand, NA27 and NA28 stand together with “to convict every soul,” yet I feel it would be special pleading to argue either positively or negatively for this reading compared with “to convict all their ungodliness.” Similarly, the inclusion of “their” in “all their ungodliness” (Byz, Maj) versus its omission (W&H, SBL, and Tyn) would seem to make no difference in meaning.

At first glance, when we come to the *TR*’s unique ἐξελέγω, compared to everybody else’s ἐλέγω, we may be tempted to see a bit deeper theological significance. The latter, ἐλέγω, is consistently used in the sense of confronting sin or rebuking it.⁵⁹ In contrast, ἐξελέγω, a *TR hapax*, is sometimes more of a philosophical term (4 Macc 2:13; Wisdom 12:17), one that belongs in the court of human reason (Philo, *Flaccus* 76). Nonetheless, in LXX Micah 4:3, ἐξελέγω seems to be used in the same way as ἐλέγω in the NT. Thus there is no advantage in v. 15.

In verse 16, the difference between “according to their lusts” and “according to their own lusts” makes no difference, unless simply having more words is superior theology (in which case the NA27 and NA28 beat everybody else). In verse 17, all the GNTs agree. The more complicated situation in v. 18 makes absolutely no difference theologically.

In verse 19, the stand-alone *TR* reading, οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ ἀποδορίζοντες ἑαυτούς is somewhat odd, seeming to say that the false teachers make divisions within their own group, which would not seem to fit the profile Jude points of their danger to the community of faith. Thus every other GNT (including the Byz and Maj) would seem to make more sense with the omission of “themselves.” The problem with the false teachers is that they divide the community of faith, making them true “heretics” in the original sense of the term.⁶⁰ Yet is this a big enough difference for MTA? Considering that according to KJV-only MTA logic, the removal of “heaven” in Hebrews 10:34 “takes away the reality of that place.”⁶¹ I feel justified in momentarily setting aside my real and deep respect for the *TR* and snarkily declaring, “The false teachers don’t divide themselves, they **DIVIDE** the **CHURCH**! Only a form of **LIBERAL** compromise would **DENY** the very real **DANGER** there heretics threaten the church with!” Thus everybody but the *TR* gains ½ pt. (Again, lest somebody think that I am being unfair to the *TR* here, in the end it will make no difference as to the winner).

Verse 20 contains a word-order variant that would not make any difference in English translation. In verse 21, once again all the Greek NTs agree. This sets the stage for *la crème de la crème* of textual studies in Jude, the ultimate textual mess for Greek nerds, verses 22–23.

Verses 22–23—A textual nuclear apocalypse of epic proportions . . . that ultimately comes to nothing.

A number of textual issues arise within these verses (which are lumped together for ease of study, and since it is essentially a single sentence). First, all GNTs but the Tyndale have either

⁵⁹ Matt 18:15, Luke 3:19, John 3:20, 8:9, 8:46, 16:8, 1 Cor 14:24, Eph 5:11, 5:13; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9, 1:13, 2:15; Heb 12:5; James 2:9; Rev 3:19.

⁶⁰ See the helpful discussions in D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expositional Commentary* (Greenville, SCC: Bob Jones University Press, 1989), 279, and Ben Witherington III, *A socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude*, Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 629.

⁶¹ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 150.

ἐλεεῖτε or ἐλεᾷτε (“show mercy”), but the Tyndale has ἐλέγχετε (“rebuke”). Second, there are word order issues. Third, the three traditional texts and, surprisingly, W&H, only have one δέ, while the critical texts contain two, which raises significant questions about syntax.⁶² The most significant issue is directly connected with number of δέ in the text, namely whether there are two clauses describing two groups, or rather three clauses (potentially describing three different groups).⁶³

Despite the matter’s simultaneously confusing and fascinating nature, this writer cannot for the life of him figure out how to put a theological spin on any one GNT. The closest we might have would be with the Tyndale GNT’s “rebuke” instead of “show mercy.” Perhaps we could say that this change demonstrates a harsher, less Christ-like spirit, to which the Tyndale-onlyists could respond that everybody else is soft on sin. Thus no points are awarded. May my audience forgive me for being so anti-climactic.

Verse 24—An Anomaly

In verse 24, the Byz and Maj have “to keep them from stumbling,” while everybody else has “to keep you from stumbling.” This variant is more of a curiosity than a theological line in the sand. “Reading A” (Byz/Maj, “them”) may, in fact, offer the prospect of mercy to the false teachers themselves.⁶⁴ The only concern here would be that Jude would then be distinguishing itself from 2 Peter 2, which makes it clear that the false teachers are beyond hope (2 Peter 2:20–21). Yet different audience, different emphasis. The Byz/Maj reading loses nothing of theological significance and arguably retains a close connection to the previous context. Yet

⁶² For example, Earl J. Richard argues that *hous men + hous de + hous de* pattern of the three clause version is “clumsy” (*Reading 1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter: A Literary and Theological Commentary* [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001], 294). Yet on the other hand, Alexandra Robinson, Stephen Llewelyn, and Blake Wassell, while acknowledging the awkwardness of the construction, see it as authentic and part of an “oral tradition” embedded in Jude (“Showing Mercy to the Ungodly and the Inversion of Invective in Jude,” *NTS* 64 [2018], 195).

⁶³ For arguments in support of P72’s 2-clause reading (which is slightly different from the *TR*’s 2-clause reading), see the following: Carroll D. Osburn, “The Text of Jude 22–23,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 63, no.1 (1972): 140–5; Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 110; Jörg Frey, *Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus*, THZNT (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 121; G. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 124–6. The irony is that Osburn, after having written an article that influenced so many commentaries (many of which mention him by name!), later switched sides in support of the 3-clause reading! (see Carroll D. Osburn, “Discourse Analysis and Jewish Apocalyptic in the Epistle of Jude,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, eds. David Alan Black with Katharine Barnwell and Stephen Levinsohn [Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 1992], 292). For other arguments in favor of the 3-clause reading, see the following: Sakae Kubo, Jude 22–23: Two-division Form or Three?, in *New Testament Textual Criticism: Essays in Honour of Bruce M. Metzger*, eds. E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 239–253; J. Daryl Charles, “Jude,” in *Hebrews–Revelation*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 567; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 98–99; and, surprisingly, centuries earlier, Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, 6th ed., 5 vols. translated by William Fletcher (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1866), 5:170.

⁶⁴ This is a controversial issue apart from the text-critical matter. Though they invariably rely on the critical text, a significant number of scholars believe that Jude does indeed offer hope for the very people he is attacking. For extended defenses of this position, see Robinson, Llewelyn, and Wassell (“Showing Mercy to the Ungodly,” 194–212) and Darian R. Lockett, Objects of Mercy in Jude: The Prophetic Background of Jude 22–23.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77 (2015): 322–36. The commentaries seem to be almost split down the middle here.

conversely, “Reading B” (“you”) resonates strongly with Jude’s theme of divine protection of the community of faith.⁶⁵ No theological superiority can be determined.

The curiosity, however, is that this is the only place in the entire epistle of Jude where the TR agrees with the critical texts against the Byz and Maj. We are *not* saying here that everywhere else the TR agrees with them, only that this is the only place in the entire epistle where the TR “jumps ship,” so to speak, and joins the other side. Interestingly, the Byz and Maj are in complete agreement on the text of Jude, though that is not the case with 2 Peter, where one difference exists.⁶⁶

Verse 25—“They cut out what?!?!”

Notwithstanding our earlier discussion of “Lord” vs. “Jesus,” the close of the epistle is the precise point at which the theological purity of the KJV and TR in Jude would be questioned on the basis MTA. Here it becomes not a matter of what was *changed*, but what was *omitted*.

Yet before we get there, we begin with a slight advantage to the TR, Byz, and Maj. In the first phrase of v. 25, they include σοφῶ, “wise,” in the phrase “to the only wise God our savior.” The other GNTs omit this word. While an argument could be made that lacking “wise” makes a stronger argument for monotheism—since, after all, with the “wise” reading there could be other gods that are not so wise—nonetheless the principle of MTA, as generally followed by KJV-onlyists, sees the omission of *any* theological term as proof of heresy. Thus we give ½ pt to the TR, Byz, and Maj.

Then, however, the scales tip. In what is surely a heretical departure of earth-shaking proportions, the traditional texts *omit* the entire phrase διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν before “glory,” a phrase included in all other GNTs *including* W&H! Thus any GNT and English translation that omits this phrase must be simultaneously denying the deity of Jesus, the humanity of Christ, the lordship of Jesus Christ, the fact that salvation comes through Him, and the fact that He is our savior!⁶⁷ How DARE they! Consequently, an entire point is awarded to W&H, NA27, NA28, SBL, and Tyn, though my sense of outrage is so great I wish I could award more.⁶⁸

It seems pertinent to remind the readers at this point that we are simply taking KJV-only logic, described as MTA, and applying it to Jude. For example, Waite devotes an entire section to “The Denial of Christ’s Deity by Removing the Word ‘Lord.’”⁶⁹ Consequently, the removal of the entire phrase “through Jesus Christ our Lord” must also constitute serious theological deviance. Since there is no possible way that the *omission* of such a phrase could be theologically more pure than the *inclusion* of the phrase, the superiority of the King James and/or the TR must be argued on other grounds, which then begs the question: how could a supposedly

⁶⁵ See the helpful discussion on this theme in Ruth Anne Reese, *2 Peter and Jude*, THNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 83–4.

⁶⁶ Specifically, 2:12. See the “Introduction,” § “The Textual Variants in 2 Peter,” in my forthcoming Lexham Research Commentary on 2 Peter (either 2022 or 2023).

⁶⁷ After all, according to Waite, when the critical text omits “for us” from the end of 1 Cor 5:7, that is a “Denial of Christ’s Substitutionary, Vicarious Atonement” (*Defending the King James Bible*, 153).

⁶⁸ Note to the impressionable reader: this is satire. The writer is, in fact, a Byzantine-priority man who still uses the King James in his preaching, and gladly so. He is simply indulging in some sarcastic snarkiness that results from having read too much KJV-only writing.

⁶⁹ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 169–74.

theologically *corrupt* manuscript (*both* Sinaiticus [01] and Vaticanus [03/B], for starters) produce a theologically superior text, even in one verse? “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” (James 3:11, KJV, shamelessly prooftexted).

As if that were not enough, at the end of the verse the three traditional texts omit *πρὸ παντὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος* (retained by all the other GNTs), a phrase aptly translated by the ESV as “before all time.” Thus any GNT or Bible translation that omits this phrase must, in fact, be DENYING the ETERNALITY of God!! Lest this seem to be a bit of a stretch (and it is, of course), let me remind the reader that, according to Waite, the omission of “and art to come” in Rev 11:17 is a denial of “the eternal future of Christ.”⁷⁰ It stands to reason, then, that the removal of the words “before all time” would be a denial of eternity the *other* way, in the past. “Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.” Thus ½ pt is awarded to W&H, NA27, NA28, SBL, and Tyn.

The Results

When the total points are tallied, we see that, irony of ironies, the *most modern Greek New Testaments under consideration*, NA28, SBL, and Tyn, all score the highest at **3½ pts**. NA27 and W&H score 2½ pts, mostly on the basis of verse 25. The Byz and Maj score 1½ pts, slightly ahead of the *TR* due to v. 19. The *TR* scores last at 1 pt. Even if the benefit of the doubt were given in a few places (e.g., v. 19), the *TR* would still rank behind the NA28, SBL, and Tyn.

Consequently, the MOC here would actually be the *TR*. If, then, we begin with a presupposition that orthodox scribes altered the text to promote their theological agenda, then a case can be made that the *TR* represents the text pre-corruption, before clarifying points were added about Jesus’ pre-existence, his lordship, and even that God enacts salvation through Jesus.

Naturally, this completely defenestrates the one key principle that *all* legitimate text critics can agree on, whether they gravitate to the *TR*, Byzantine texts, or more of a critical-eclectic methodology. That principle is: “Knowledge of documents should precede final judgment upon readings.”⁷¹ With that in mind, we shall proceed to an examination of individual documents themselves.

Embracing MTA and MOC, Round 2—Examining some individual manuscripts via Wasserman’s *Epistle of Jude*

Utilizing the extensive collation data in Wasserman’s monograph, we can briefly look at some individual mss to see if we can spot theologically motivated copyists. Of necessity, this section will not be comprehensive, nor will we look at every single variant. Bizarre readings, such as “to the nations” (τοῖς ἐθνεσιν) or “healthy” (υγιασμενοῖς) in verse 1 will simply be ignored (though the former occurs in a surprising number of mss). In addition, we are not holding illegible writing against any individual copyists. I will also generally ignore additional readings in the margins and corrected readings.

⁷⁰ Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 167.

⁷¹ Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2:31.

The unique situation of P72

Any discussion of individual manuscripts must begin with our oldest copy of Jude, P72, a Bodmer Papyri codex which contains all of 1–2 Peter and Jude, as well as other miscellaneous texts.⁷² The consensus of scholarship, drawing from the influential dissertation of James Royse, is that the hand of the copyist of Jude was prone to mistakes, and even more so towards the end of the epistle.⁷³ Despite this, P72 has exerted quite a bit of influence. As noted earlier, Osburn defended the primacy of P72 in verses 22–23, ironically recanting *after* having influenced a significant number of commentaries that mention his by name!

P72 is noteworthy for two readings in Jude not found in any other mss: rather than just “Jesus” in v. 5, P72 actually has Θεός Χριστός, and in v. 25 it adds the phrase αὐτῷ δοξα κρατος τιμη after “to the only God our Savior,” thus creating a “two-fold doxology.”⁷⁴ “God Christ,” at least, is very difficult to view as a simple mistake. At a minimum, the copyist certainly got carried away in his exuberance. We may, for once, agree with Ehrman that this illustrates “the tendency of P72 to stress an exalted Christology.”⁷⁵ Having said that, if for the sake of argument we accept the Alexandrian reading “Jesus” as original, then obviously *the exalted Christology is already there*. In other words, it is a matter of degree—P72 did not invent Jesus’ pre-existence (and thus deity) in the epistle of Jude, it simply intensified it.⁷⁶ Furthermore, if the copyist of P72 were truly agenda-driven, then he missed other opportunities to bolster the deity of Christ, such as joining mss 131 with τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου (that he certainly did not know of that reading is completely irrelevant. Why not make it up like mss 131 did?).

Thus P72 is the obvious candidate for pro-orthodox theological alteration. Yet even P72 loses a bit compared to other mss at least in the final verse. It lacks κρατος καὶ εξουσια and προ παντος του αιωνος.⁷⁷ It is certainly possible to suggest that the singular readings were deliberate alterations, and the omissions at the end were accidental, and that may indeed be the case. Yet at what point does this become special pleading?

Other notable variants in specific manuscripts

Next, let us consider some significant additions and omissions that go beyond what we see in our 8 published GNTs. All of the data is taken directly from Wasserman, *The Epistle of Jude: Its Text and Transmission*, pages 134–207, though any mistakes, observations, and snarky remarks are mine own.

⁷² See Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*, 30–33, for a helpful description. In addition, for a comparison between P72 and the ECM, see J. K. Elliott, “The Early Text of the Catholic Epistles,” in *The Early Text of the New Testament*, eds. Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 204–224.

⁷³ Wasserman *Epistle of Jude*, 45; cf. Terrance Callan, “Reading the Earliest Copies of 2 Peter,” *Biblica* 93 no. 3 (2012): 430. In addition, for discussion of P72 “as a literary artifact with social significance,” see Phillip David Strickland, “The Curious Case of P⁷²: What an Ancient Manuscript Can Tell Us about the Epistles of Peter and Jude,” *JETS* 60, no. 4 (2017) 783 (emphasis original).

⁷⁴ Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*, 47–48.

⁷⁵ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 115 endnote 191

⁷⁶ Regarding the unlikelihood that the reading Ἰησοῦς was referring to Joshua, see Bartholomä, “Did Jesus Save the People out of Egypt?,” 153–4.

⁷⁷ See Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*.

At the end of verse 1, after κλητοις, mss 1846 adds “saints” (αγιοις). On the other hand, mss 631 includes “Lord,” κυριου, before τετηρημενοις (“Lord Jesus Christ”).⁷⁸

In verse 2, mss 1367 adds “in the Lord,” εν κυριω, after “peace and love.”

In verse 3, mss 01 [Sinaiticus] and 044 add και ζωης to “our common salvation.”

We mentioned earlier the dueling variants “the only master and our Lord Jesus Christ” (a Granville Sharp construction) and “the master God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Fascinatingly, a significant number of mss—250, 383, 393 592, 616, 634, 1360, 1742, 1862, 1880, 1888, 2712—wish to have their cake and eat it too, with τον μονον δεσποτην και θεον και κυριον ημων Ιησουν χριστον. This actually manifests as the most superior reading, because it retains the Granville sharp construction with a και between “master” and “God.”⁷⁹ Thus, for these mss, Jesus is simultaneously master, God, and Lord. Manuscript 1661 is also notable with the singular reading δεσποτην θεον και κυριον Ιησουν χριστον.

On the negative side, however, mss 102 somehow omitted the entire sequence of words from μεταπιθεντες through χριστον.

We have already discussed the “Lord” vs. “Jesus” variant in v. 5, as well as P72’s unique reading. One other theologically significant reading exists, however, and that is mss 1735, “Lord Jesus.”

In verse 6, mss 629 adds κρισεως after υπο ζοφον, thus “under darkness of judgment.”

In verse 7, mss 1836 and 1877 omit δικην (KJV “vengeance”), arguably softening the condemnation a little bit (though in all fairness, “suffering eternal fire” still constitutes strong language!).

In verse 9, mss 1243 and 2492 have a simple αγγελος for Michael’s job description, thus slightly diminishing our angelology. Also, at the end of the verse, in Michael’s speech, mss 1501 has κυριος ο θεος, thus “The Lord God rebuke thee,” while a significant number of mss add in the vocative διαβολε at the end.⁸⁰

In verse 10, mss 131 and 2653 omit ουκ, thus reading “they blaspheme what they know” instead of “what they don’t know,” but obviously the infiltrators still end up being characterized negatively.

At the beginning of verse 11, a surprising number of mss add the vocative αγαπητε, “Beloved, woe to them . . .”⁸¹ One mss (384) has replaced “woe to them” with “woe to the unbelievers” (τοις απιστοις) while a few more mss declare “woe to the ungodly” (τοις ασεβειν—1751, 2318, 2718, plus a large number of lectionaries).

In verse 12, in the expression δις αποθανόντα εκριζωθέντα, mss 263 and 918 have omitted the second word while mss 582 have omitted the third word. MSS 1762, on the other hand, omits the entire expression κυματα αγρια θαλασσης επαφριζοντα.

In verse 14, in the quotation (presumably) from 1 Enoch, mss 1642 has shamelessly omitted κυριος. Without a doubt, according to the principles of MTA, “the Lord comes” is greatly superior to “he comes”! Interestingly, a number of mss, including P72, may show evidence of assimilation to Mark 8:38 here, with “angels” instead of “saints.”

⁷⁸ When drawing directly from Wasserman’s collation data as opposed to a published GNT, Greek words will lack the accents and breathing marks.

⁷⁹ Comparing Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*, 146–147, we can see that these mss did not omit the article at the beginning of the construction.

⁸⁰ See page 163 in Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*, under 48↑.

⁸¹ See page 165 in Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*, under 1.

In verse 15, various mss have omitted some part of *κατα παντων και ελεγξαι πασαν ψυχην περι παντων*—056, 0142, 0166, 1359, 1425, 1563, 1718, and 2627.⁸² Later in verse 15, a surprising number of mss omit *ἀσεβείς*.⁸³ Later on, in the phrase “spoken against him,” a couple mss clarify the heinousness of the sin by replacing *αὐτοῦ* with *θεου* (629 and 1881), while mss 918, 1067, 1852 omit the phrase altogether. In addition, 2523 omits the final word *ἀσεβείς* in v. 15.

In verse 16, in the expression “these are murmurers,” mss 263 adds the expression “into judgment” (*εις κρισιν*), making a bit more explicit the consequences of the sin. Oddly enough, after *πορευόμενοι*, 459, 467, and 1838 add some form of combination of *ασεβεια* and *παρανομια*. At the end of the verse, mss 378 omits *χαριτι*. However, since this is an idiom for seeking people’s favor, rather than a reference to divine grace, it creates an oddity but not a heresy.⁸⁴

In verse 18, the expression *ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τοῦ χρόνου* has a bewildering array of mss variation that *makes no difference theologically*! The main difference is some form of *χρονος* vs. *καριος* vs. *ημερα*, but all of them, when paired with *ἐσχάτω* (as they always are in legible text, with the sole exception of mss 1104, so far as I can tell), all words become an acceptable way of describing the final era. Indeed, it is precisely at this point when one begins to wonder how much regional dialect might play a role in textual variants.

At the end of v. 18, mss 1248 omits *ἐπιθυμίας πορευόμενοι*, though retaining the reference to the infiltrators’ *ἀσεβειῶν*.

At the end of v. 20, mss 1248 and 2675 shockingly omit “praying by the Holy Spirit.”

At the beginning of verse 21, mss 181, 1240, and 1390 omit the entire expression “keep yourselves in the love of God.”

In the middle of v. 21, “the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ,” mss 131 bravely stands alone with the Granville Sharp construction *τοῦ θεου και κυριου*, thus equating God with Jesus, while mss 1409 and 1495 replace “Lord” with “God,” also equating God with Jesus (but in a less dramatic fashion than our hallowed 131). Sadly, within that same expression, mss 1070 and 1735 omit “Christ,” and 613 omits both “Jesus” and “Christ.” Yet even this pales in significance with the shocking betrayal of mss 922, which omits everything from *προσδεχομενοι* through *Χριστου*, and then leaves out *αιωνιον* just to spite us.

For the sake of our sanity, we will ignore the sanctified textual mess of v. 22.

We have already noted that verse 24 contains some significant omissions and/or additions. Beyond the variants covered in our 8 GNTs, it is odd that mss 459 and 616 replace the singular “now unto him that is able” with the plural *των δε δυναμενων*, thus sinisterly promoting polytheism. Also noteworthy is the omission of *μονω* by mss 1626 and 2705, thus promoting polytheism in a more subtle manner (again, may the reader understand, I am being sarcastic). Manuscript 450, along with P72, omits “Savior,” while a substantial number of mss omit “God.”⁸⁵ We will close out this mass of textual data by pointing an accusing finger at mss 1838, which omits the final phrase (before “amen”), *και εις παντας τους αιωνας*.

⁸² See page 179 in Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*, under 6–16↓, 10–20↑↓, and 10–16↑ (the arrows indicate overlap).

⁸³ MSS 01, 6, 04, 94, 307, 321, 322, 323, 442, 453, 621,, 918, 1241, 1243, 1678, 1739, 1838, 1845, 1846, 1881, 2197, 2298, 2374, 2484, 2805, 2818. See page 180 of Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*, parts l and o in section 20–30↑.

⁸⁴ On the use of this phrase in the LXX, see Harrington, “Jude,” 215.

⁸⁵ See page 204 of Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*, parts j and k in section 4–8↑.

Dare we draw any observations?

We cannot, of course examine every single manuscript in Wasserman's collation. We will focus here on a few highlights to illustrate the difficulty of finding specific patterns.

For example, mss 131 would be my initial front-runner for theological purity, with its bold (though unique) reading του θεου και κυριου ημων Ιησου Χριστου. Can we get any more awesome than that? Yet mss 131 reads "Lord" instead of "Jesus" in v. 5, and, along with the *TR*, omits "through Jesus Christ our Lord" in v. 25.

Conversely, the shockingly impudent mss 1248 and 2675, which omit "praying by the Holy Spirit" in v. 20, also omit "through Jesus Christ our Lord" in v. 25, and prefer "Lord" over "Jesus" in v. 5. Yet while mss 1248 has also omitted ἐπιθυμίας πορευόμενοι in v. 18, mss 2675 retains it. In addition, mss 1248 and 2675 both have "keep [?] in the love of God" (omitting the ἐαυτοῦς) in v. 20 which is certainly better than omitting the entire phrase.

Miniscule 181 omits "keep yourselves in the love of God" in v. 21, yet *retains* "through Jesus Christ our Lord" in v. 25, against the *TR*, as well as having προ παντος του αιωνος in the closing, which 131, 1248, and 2675 lack.

Thus, on the one hand, it is virtually impossible to find a true hero within the manuscripts, in the sense of maximum theological purity. On the other hand, if we were to choose a villain, we would probably have to go with mss 1248 (2675 being a close second). Admittedly, removing the clearest reference to the Holy Spirit in the entire book is not an easy failure to live down. Yet even here, both mss 1248 and 2675 retain the reference to the Spirit at the end of v. 19, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες.

This then raises a question—what, precisely, do we know about the copyists of 1248 and 2675? Precious little. MSS [GA] 1248 dates to the 1300s and is currently housed in St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai.⁸⁶ It is highly doubtful that a manuscript that late was part of a vast Alexandrian conspiracy to eliminate the third member of the Trinity, nor is it likely to correspond that closely to the original text 1,200 years ago that the orthodox "corrupted."

Furthermore, as much as we enjoy venting our righteous indignation at mss 1248 and 2675, when we examine our Greek NTs we see that ἐαυτοῦς is the word that immediately precedes ἐν Πνεύματι Ἀγίῳ, and ἐαυτοῦς is the word immediately after that phrase, as well. If this is not the clearest example of parablepsis, than I don't know what is. The amazing thing is not that mss 1248 and 2675 skipped such a phrase; the amazing thing is that apparently *nobody else did!*⁸⁷ Considering that I myself have been guilty of parablepsis when copying and translating from the Greek, and considering that I am not a heretic (that I know of), I can sympathize.

A 19th century novel once stated, "Let us not attribute to malice and cruelty what may be referred to less criminal motives."⁸⁸ For our purposes, I would like to restate this principle in the following manner: "Let us not attribute to heretical or orthodox conspiracy what can be explained by a simple mistake."

⁸⁶ The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, https://manuscripts.csntm.org/manuscript/View/GA_1248, accessed 7/22/2022.

⁸⁷ Two other mss, 913 and 1717 are illegible here, and an alternate reading for mss 910 omits it.

⁸⁸ Jane West, *The Loyalists*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1812), 3:132.

In other words, since one of the most shocking theological mistakes committed by any mss in Jude can be explained very easily by the unintentional skipping of the eye from one ἐαυτοῦς to the other, and since the other significant theological omissions we've noticed in these mss are also shared by the *TR*, it is hard to justify throwing stones.

Introducing the Maximalist and Minimalist Bibles

We mentioned earlier that we would use MTA to create a “Maximalist” version of Jude and make some observations on what would be a “Minimalist” version of Jude via MOC. We will ignore obscure readings in individual mss and focus strictly on our 8 GNTs as representing the readings that could be taken seriously. We will start with the Minimalist side.

A theologically minimalist version of Jude would lack the “God” in verse 4, but be replaced by that significant Granville-Sharp construction. It would read “Lord” in verse 5, which still, in fact, could refer to Jesus, just a bit more ambiguously.⁸⁹ It would lack “wise” in the expression “only wise God” in v. 25. Also in our final verse, it would lack “through Jesus Christ our Lord” and προ παντος του αιωνος.

What doctrines, then, do we lose? We still have the exalted Christ (e.g., vv. 4, 17, and 21), the consequences of sin, and the need for personal purity.

Having said that, it must be admitted that this version of Jude lacks any clear designation of Jesus Christ salvific role, which NA28 would have in both vv. 5 and 25, and also lacks the reference to God's *past* eternality in v. 25. We will return to this issue later.

The MTA New Testament

Yet it is not enough to merely find which current GNT is superior. If theological affirmation really does matter in textual criticism, we have here the means to create the greatest Bible translation of Jude, merely by preferring each variant that maximizes theological truth. Thus I give you *Jude: The Ultimate Version*, with the understanding that *I am not seriously asserting this to be the perfect preservation of what Jude wrote*—I do not, after all, wish to bring down upon myself the curses of Rev 22:18–19.⁹⁰

1 Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those that are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:
2 Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.
3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.
4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸⁹ See, e.g., Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, 2nd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 328.

⁹⁰ I am starting with the King James, updating the language when necessary, and simply altering it to prefer the superior variants via MTA. I have underlined all the places where I was forced to make a change from the *TR*.

5 I will therefore remind you, though you once knew this, how that Jesus, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, dare not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the rebellion of Core.

12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints,

15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their harsh words which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaks great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration for the sake of advantage.

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These are those who cause division, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20 But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, before any age, and now and forever. Amen

Methodological Critique of Ehrman and KJV-Onlyists

Let us first start with examining Ehrman's perspective using the "Minimalist Bible." For the sake of argument, let us suggest that vv. 5 and 25 could represent a pre-orthodox text that was later corrupted.

The problem is that each of those readings in the MOC is precisely what we see in the majority of the *older* mss, and all three minimalist readings occur in the *TR*, *Byz*, and *Maj*. If, in fact, the later copying of the NT evidenced "relative stability," including relatively "rigid control," while "during the earliest period of its transmission the New Testament text was in a state of flux," and if in fact "scribes sometimes changed their manuscripts to render them more patently orthodox, . . ."⁹¹, then how is it that the *TR*, and the Byzantine, and the Majority, are "weaker" theologically than W&H? Why did not the "stronger," more patently "orthodox" readings catch on?

It is not enough to object that Jude was too canonically "fringe." Jude is fairly well-attested, certainly better than 2 Peter, notwithstanding the reluctance of Syrian Christians to embrace it.⁹²

Thus the mystery remains. If the orthodox "corrupted" Jude, then somehow they managed to completely undo all their hard work in later manuscripts.

Yet we can add another wrinkle to the story. Consider that "Jesus" in Jude 5 could very easily qualify as an "anti-adoptionist" reading, according to Ehrman's logic (though he, personally, does not characterize it as such that I could see). Consider also that the supposed anti-adoptionist reading μονογονῆς θεός is found in *Aleph*/Sinaiticus (01/*Aleph*), Vaticanus (03/B), and *Ephraemi Rescriptus* (04/C), "the great Alexandrian uncials"⁹³, though not Alexandrinus (02/A).⁹⁴ In Jude 5, however, "Jesus" is supported by Alexandrinus (02) and Vaticanus (03/B), but *not* Sinaiticus (*aleph*/01) or the corrected form of C (04).⁹⁵ In other words, out of four great Alexandrian texts, three of which Ehrman describes as being "anti-adoptionist" in John 1:18, only one of those, Vaticanus, is consistently anti-adoptionist when examining just those two verses. Ehrman's methodology thus opens itself up to the following critique:

The problems with quantifying Ehrman's evidence are multiplied by the fact that his search is not confined to one manuscript only or even to a limited number of consistently cited and checked witnesses. Rather, he harvests the entire textual tradition as available to him through modern critical apparatuses. Hence his sample is a mixed bag, comprising readings shared by any number of witnesses (including potential singular readings). Individual witnesses therefore appear on isolated occasion when they serve to make a point (e.g. minuscule 2766 at Luke 8:28 with the omission of one word). . . . all the available evidence is called into court without cross-examining the individual witnesses for information as to whether or not the scribes involved exhibit any discernible tendency, . . .⁹⁶

⁹¹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 28–29

⁹² See D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 691; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 223–24; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*. 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 1990), 901–2.

⁹³ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 79.

⁹⁴ See NA²⁸ on this variant, page 293.

⁹⁵ See page 148 in Wasserman, *Epistle of Jude*, parts b, c, g, and j in section 12–20. Note that 04C2V has ο θεός, which could qualify as "anti-anti adoptionist" in a sense!

⁹⁶ Schmid, "Scribes and Variants," 5.

Now, let us take a glance at the KJV-only perspective from our “Maximalist” version of Jude. We begin by asking the KJV-onlyist why the most theologically orthodox text of Jude resembles modern GNTs more than the *TR*. After all, the apostasy of the Alexandrian scribes indubitably leads to their heretical textual corruption. If that is the case, then how is the SBL and NA28, whose consultants consist of a “whose-who” of mainstream bible scholars, *indisputably* theologically superior to the *TR* in Jude? How did this happen? Again, “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?” (James 3:11).

It would not be enough, at this point, to acknowledge that occasionally a scribe might have added a theologically-motivated phrase to combat heresy, as at least Grady acknowledges.⁹⁷ Here we are talking about an *entire book*. The minute one sweeps an entire book, no matter how small, under the rug, at that point one has invalidated the entire argument that non-*TR* Bibles are theologically inferior, precisely because it makes no sense for evil Alexandrian scribes to downplay the deity of Christ in the Gospel of John but promote it in the Epistle of Jude, *if in fact all of this stems from theological motivation*.

Furthermore, it does no good to affirm that on balance the *TR* would be superior to the NA²⁸ theologically. If theological affirmation truly mattered to the degree that KJV-onlyists argue, then we cannot stop with the *TR*. If MTA is taken to its logical conclusion, we must revise and “upgrade” the *TR* supplemented with readings from the Alexandrian tradition, just to ensure that no doctrine is, in fact, lost or minimized. It is special pleading to the extreme to argue that the theology of variants matters in John but not in Jude.

Perhaps, then, the superiority of texts must be argued on the basis of something other than theology. This does *not* mean we ignore the doctrine of preservation. God has promised to preserve his Word, but he has not specified the details.⁹⁸ Nor do we totally throw out considerations of theological coherency (perhaps *μονογενὴς θεὸς* *is* problematic in John 1:18; but perhaps not). Yet at a minimum we must seriously reconsider the tendency of both liberals and conservatives to impute theological motives to copyists on the basis of isolated readings.

Conclusion

Bart Ehrman argues that orthodox scribes, over the centuries, corrupted the original readings of the New Testament to better support orthodoxy. KJV-onlyists argue that Alexandrian heretics corrupted the original readings of the New Testament to eliminate or diminish cardinal doctrines. The book of Jude, taken as a whole, challenges both sides and fails to fit in their paradigm, both at the level of entire GNTs and at the level of individual manuscripts.

Both Ehrman and the KJVO position share a common presupposition: that if the perfectly preserved Word of God cannot be tied down perfectly to one physical document, then doubt exists as to the veracity of the entire doctrine of inspiration.⁹⁹ Yet it remains unclear why any post-apostolic, post-canonical, specific point in history, whether that be 1611, 1769, or 1978, should be the determiner of the precise delineation of divine preservation.

⁹⁷ Grady, *Final Authority*, 65–6.

⁹⁸ I appreciate, and encourage my own seminary students to read William W. Combs, “The Preservation of Scripture,” *DBSJ* 5 (Fall 2000): 3–44. I would differ slightly with Combs on a couple points, but I affirm the validity of his methodology and concur with his general conclusions.

⁹⁹ Compare, for example, Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 11, with Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, 43.

Finally, we may acknowledge that *occasionally*, in *rare* occasions, textual criticism did become an issue in theological dialogue. Yet we can also sympathize with Erasmus' response to Bishop Lee over the latter's objection to his initial exclusion of the *Johannine* comma:

[Lee] shows that there is a great risk of the Arian heresy once more rearing its head if certain people realize that the clause 'There are three who give testimony in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one' is omitted. Since no heresy is as dead as that of the Arians, I wonder what reason Lee has to be afraid. But let us imagine that the Arians return to life. Will they be silenced because of this one passage? Are there not many more passages with which they can be refuted?¹⁰⁰

It is my opinion (and, I believe, that expressed by Erasmus), that if the devil ever attempted to use textual corruption as a tool, he failed miserably. Of all the Greek NTs examined in this study, I consider Westcott and Hort to be the least of them. Yet I can confidently assert that if I were to minister to an unreached people-group with nothing but Westcott and Hort, I could effectively teach every single doctrine that the Holy Spirit intended us to have, and thus advance the Great Commission. After all, it certainly wasn't the devil who wrote that God is "our savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Jude 25, a direct translation from Westcott and Hort's New Testament).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, "Response to Edward Lee's New Annotations Against Erasmus" ["Response 3"] in *A Response to the Annotations of Edward Lee (Responsio ad annotationes Eduardi Lei)* vol. 72 of *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. Jane E. Philips, trans. Erika Rummel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 408-9. Originally published in 1520.

¹⁰¹ Many of the research notes that went into this paper were originally typed up specifically for the Lexham Research Commentary (though this paper is significantly different from any significant part of the LRC, with the exception of Appendix 2). I am grateful to Lexham Press for the privilege of working on that. I am grateful to my research assistant at BTS, Devon Swanson, for proofreading and offering suggestions for clarity. Any mistakes, misrepresentations, or outright heresy are the sole responsibility of this writer.