

## THE RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE OF TEXT AND CHURCH IN THE EVOLUTION OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

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The evidences are now overwhelming that the literal text of scripture from its inception has always been a developing phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> By “developing phenomenon,” I mean that scripture (not just the interpretation thereof) but the literal words themselves have never been static but have always been changing. This dynamic process results from the reciprocal influence between the written text and the ever emerging church as both realities evolve and shape each other. The reality registers the now increasing recognition that original text [of scripture] has always been a plural entity. Thus, there have been multiple originals from which each of our current texts grew, not one definitive original. Textual scholars now speak in terms of pre-formative original, authorial original, earliest originals, initial text (*ausgangstexts*), archetypal text, interpretive originals and canonical original.<sup>2</sup> The following six realities concerning the text help us to understand the ever changing nature of scripture and the consequent reciprocal influence with the emerging church.

- 1) The method of production of ancient books
- 2) The publication process of ancient books
- 3) The copying process which occurred by hand and types of copying
- 4) The interplay of oral tradition and written text
- 5) The theological motives of scribes in the copying process

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the technology of printing, Bibles throughout the world essentially read the same text. Because of this, moderners are prone to think of scripture as a fixed entity which equals “The word of the Lord.” Such a fixed phenomenon really never existed in the ancient world. The ancients knew of the scripture only in manuscript forms and manuscripts were by nature multivalent.

<sup>2</sup> On the topic of multiple originals and the developmental textual evolution of scripture, see, Eldon Epp’s now famous article, “Multivalence of the term Original Text in New Testament Textual Criticism,” in *idem.*, *Perspective on New Testament Textual Criticism: Collected Essays 1962-2004* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 551-594; Michael Holmes, “What Text is Being Edited? The Editing of the New Testament,” in John S. Kloppenborg and Judith H. Newman, *Editing the Bible: Assessing the Task Past and Present* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2012), 91-122; David Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press 19) 1-213; *Idem.*, “Scripture is Tradition,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94 (1991): 12,13. For the same phenomenon in the OT see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Kristin De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text: What Old Greek Texts Tell Us About the Literary Growth of the Bible*, vol. 4 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature 2003). A growing number of leading textual scholars now believe that the recovery of a definitive original text cannot be achieved. Epp’s words are typical. “Textual criticism must shed whatever remains of its innocence by giving up the myopic quest for single original text.” Epp, “Multivalence of the term Original Text,” 280.

## 6) The developing processes of the early church

### **The Method of Production of Ancient Books**

Writing and publishing a document in the ancient world involved a number of processes:

1. Sometimes the author dictated his contents to a scribe who then wrote it.
2. Sometimes sections of other books, quotations, etc., were copied into the new text being produced. This would be done by the various methods of copying discussed below.
3. The copied information from other sources would sometimes be embellished and modified to fit into the new document being produced.
4. The initial dictated copy would be revised, a fresh copy written for the author to keep and yet another copy made for publication<sup>3</sup>

Whereas all these processes were done by hand, it is obvious that the very first copies would vary in words and content, thus there would be different originals to begin with.

### **Publication Method of Ancient Books**

Publication involved:

- 1) The author having a public reading (*recitatio*) with friends and trusted ones in which the text would be responded to and edited<sup>4</sup>
- 2) The author making donations (*ekdosis*) of copies to his friends who would later recopy the text reshaping sections thereof to make it applicable to their friends, who would then repeat the process<sup>5</sup>
- 3) Sometimes the author would make a revised copy which would be in circulation with the old edition.

A key result of the above processes is that, from the inception, there would be multiple originals of the same text in circulation all different from each other. Within the New Testament, the book of Luke/Acts provides us an example of the writing and publication processes. The book of Luke was dedicated to Theophilus. Gamble observed that it was customary for the dedicatee to be

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<sup>3</sup> For a very insightful survey on the production and publication of ancient books, see, Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1-348.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 84, 85.

responsible for the diffusion of the work dedicated to him.<sup>6</sup> The beginning chapters of Luke as they now stand in our current manuscript tradition, suggests that there were more than one edition of the book initially.<sup>7</sup> Extrapolating from the scores of textual variants in the last three chapters of Luke, Parker posits that “there is incontrovertible evidence that the text of these chapters was not fixed and indeed continued to grow for centuries after their composition.”<sup>8</sup> The Western Text of Acts is 1/10 longer than all other text forms, leading many textual scholars to conclude that there was more than one edition of Acts in circulation at the same time as these versions differed not only in length but also in content.<sup>9</sup>

The gospel of Mark has different beginnings and at least six different endings,<sup>10</sup> all signs of the different versions of the book in circulation at the same time. Obviously, Matthew and Luke writing in different times and places did not copy from the exact manuscript of Mark. The author of Revelation authorized a public reading (the *recitation*), and was very concerned that his published book be not altered by its recipients (as was the custom) and so he issued a curse as a deterrent (Rev 22:18-19).<sup>11</sup> Most of Paul’s writings were dictated to scribes<sup>12</sup> and the variety of text-types now evident in his letters are indications of multiple versions of his books in circulation from the earliest times. Additionally, there are evidences that Paul’s letters were read in churches other than those to whom they were originally addressed. This would necessitate

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>7</sup> As discussed by Bart Ehrman and others, Luke 3:1-2 carries the ring of the beginning of the book, not its continuation. Evidences of such include the idea that the Genealogy of Jesus makes little sense in Chapter 3, after his baptism, given the fact that his birth has already been mentioned in chapter 2, which would be the more appropriate place to mention his lineage. But if the gospel began in chapter three and the first thing that happened to Jesus was the declaration that he was the ‘Son’ of God (in 3:23), then his lineage back to God through Adam makes sense here in chapter 3. Additionally, as Ehrman points out, the themes mentioned in Chapter 1 and 2 are otherwise absent from the rest of Luke, even though there is much opportunity in the book to mention them. Finally, both summaries of the book of Luke in Acts (1:1; 10:37) begin from the contents of chapter 3, not chapter one. Bart Ehrman, “Christ Comes in the Flesh,” in Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, in *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, vol. 33 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 351.

<sup>8</sup> Parker, *Living Text*, 172.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Stuttgart: United Bible Society, 2000), 222-224.

<sup>10</sup> These can be seen in the critical apparatus of any modern edition of the Greek Bible. For a brief yet insightful discussion on some of the theological import of the beginnings of Mark, see, Bart Ehrman, “The Text of Mark in the Hands of the Orthodox,” in Metzger and Ehrman, *Studies in Textual Criticism*, 148- 154.

<sup>11</sup> See Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 287 Fn. 76, for examples of similar warning in the ancient world.

<sup>12</sup> According to Gamble, the concluding statements in many of Paul’s letters that mentioned his “writing with his own hands” was an ancient convention that indicated that the letters were transcribed by an amanuensis. Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 96.

making nuanced copies, thus multiple originals to begin with.<sup>13</sup> The Muratorian Canon claims that others encouraged John in writing his book and assisted him in doing so. Most Johannine scholars are convinced that at least editors/scribes were involved with John in the writing of his gospel and that what we now have is the result of the editorial process.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Copying Process: Types of Copying**

The only way of reproducing books in the ancient world was to copy them by hand. We should however, not think of copying in light of our modern photocopying process or even our modern hand copying exercises. Essentially, there were three types of copying. One: literal word for word copying,<sup>15</sup> 2) thoughts copying in which the essential contents of the exemplar would be copied,<sup>16</sup> and 3) interpretative copying in which the thoughts and words would be changed.<sup>17</sup> The copying of books was for the most part a combination of all three methods of copying.

Within the New Testament itself, one only needs to compare (in the Greek) the places where there are literary interdependence between the synoptic gospels to see scores of examples of these types of copying. Later, as the books of the New Testament were being copied by scribes, the same situation occurred. The end result of all these methods of copying is that our current extant NT manuscripts contain by conservative estimate, some 300,000 to 400,000 variant readings, far more variants than there are words in the NT. Whereas, the earliest archetypes of our manuscript are at least a century and half removed from the time of their initial production, this means that whenever modern textual scholars compare current variant readings and decide on a text (for example NA28 or UBS4) they are only creating a new original of scripture not necessarily the autographic original or any of the originals mentioned above. Our current Greek Bibles are all different eclectic texts which cannot be traced to any singular manuscript of

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<sup>13</sup> This could possibly be one of the reasons behind the multiple endings to the book of Romans. Furthermore, as Gamble observes, the recipients of Paul's letters like us, may not have been able to absorb the letters in one reading and Paul may even desire that they study them. Thus copies would be made to facilitate this process. Ibid., 96, 97.

<sup>14</sup> See Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 109

<sup>15</sup> As is evident in comparing any two manuscripts where the exemplar is copied exactly.

<sup>16</sup> As can be demonstrated by the scribe of P<sup>45</sup>, for example. According to Colwell, this scribe "does not copy words. He sees through the language to its idea-content, and copies that are often in words of his own choosing, or in words rearranged as to order." Ernest Cadman Colwell, *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament in New Testament Tools and Studies*, ed. Bruce Metzger (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 9:117.

<sup>17</sup> Major works that demonstrate theological changes to the text of scripture, Wayne C. Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition: Evidence of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Text of the Canonical Gospels* (Boston: Society of Biblical Literature 2004). 1-250. Bart D. Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effects of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: University Press, 2003); Eldon Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), 1-171.

antiquity.<sup>18</sup> This again, underscores the fact that scripture continues to this very day to be an evolving reality, influencing the church and being influenced by the church.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Interplay of Oral Tradition and Written Text**

It is now well established that the written text was a dimension of the oral communication of the ancient world. In the words of Werner Kelber, the written text was only a fossilized profile of the oral message.<sup>20</sup> Dunn calls it frozen orality.<sup>21</sup> By this is meant, that the written text is the oral tradition at a point along its continuum. Needless to say, oral communication is always in flux, thus the written text being “oral” was always in flux. The different versions of the story of the woman caught in adultery,<sup>22</sup> the different versions of the story of the healing of the centurion slave/son (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10 and John 4:46-54.), the appendix of chapter 21 to the gospel of John, the different renditions of the beatitudes (Matt 5:1-2; Lk :21-26); the varied words spoken by the voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism (Matt 3:17, Mark 1:11, Lk 3:22),<sup>23</sup> the different endings of Romans, Mark, Titus, and scores of other examples, all demonstrate the intersect between the oral tradition and the written text and hence, a fluid text of scripture.

### **Theological and Apologetic Motives of Authors and Later Scribes**

The theological motive of the NT writers, not only led them to compose theological documents, but also to change the text of their source documents thus, initiating a reciprocal influence between church and scripture. The literary interdependence between the gospels for example, clearly shows that these writers edited, embellished and rearranged their sources, sources which

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<sup>18</sup> The last seven major editions of the Greek NT, namely, Tischendorf, (1872), Wescott and Hort (1881), von Soden (1913), Vogels (1922; 1955) Merk (1933; 1984), and Bover (1943; 1968) and Nestle Aland 1963 agree in wording of 62.9 percent of the verses of the NT. The NA27 and the UBS4 differ from all previous versions in at least 500 places. See Parker, *Scripture is Tradition*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> In my recent book, *The Journey of the New Testament in Becoming a Book and the Relevance of New Testament Criticism* (Jamaica: Lithomedia, 2012), I discuss this point at length. See also, David Parker, “Scripture is Tradition,” *Theology* 94 (1991) 15; Holmes “What Kind of Text is being Edited” 91-122.

<sup>20</sup> Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and Written Gospels: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 44; Susan Niditch observed that “The notion of a ‘book’ implied not so much a fixed text as an oral presentation, sometimes with commentary.” Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 41.

<sup>21</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making: Jesus Remembered*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 202.

<sup>22</sup> For different versions of this story see, Parker, *Living Text*, 99; Bart Ehrman, “Jesus and the Adulterers,” *New Testament Studies* 34 (1998):37(for a version as known by Didymus, the Blind), Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 3:39

<sup>23</sup> For the first three centuries the oldest and most widespread reading of Lk 3:22, was: “You are my son, today I have begotten you,” contrary to Mark, “You are my son in whom I am well pleased” (1:11) and Matthew, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (3:17).

would have been scripture to an earlier audience (See, for example, Luke in 1:1-3; Matt 22:1-14//Lk 14:14-24; Matt 5:1-2//Lk :21-26; etc.).

It is obvious that the parables of Jesus in many cases were extracted from their original spoken/written contexts and rearranged in new contexts within the gospels so as to communicate different points as the church evolved in its theology.<sup>24</sup> In Matthew (18:12-14), for example, Jesus' parable of the lost sheep was spoken to the disciples and made the point that members of the church should not stray. In Luke (15:1-7), the same parable is spoken to the scribes and Pharisees and communicate the message that the Jewish leaders should be receptive of sinners. Luke redacted Mark to place the words "The time is near" (referring to the second advent) on the lips of the false prophets. (Compare, Mark 13:6 and Lk 21.8).

Whereas the NT writers framed their books in part, from pre-existing materials, Epp speaks of the predecessor originals of the NT.<sup>25</sup> By this he means, the layers of written/oral materials that existed before the NT books were composed and which were reshaped by the NT authors/church to form the contents of our current NT books. Thus, there is an original of, for example, the parables of Jesus and a new original of the same parable as church and text continued to influence each other. The many independent quotations incorporated within the NT books are also examples of predecessor originals being incorporated into later documents. The initial forms of Paul's letters spliced together to compose 2 Corinthians would be another example of predecessor original.<sup>26</sup> Thus the text continues to evolve in tandem with the developing church.

Subsequent to the initial composition of the NT, and as the church continued to change, the scribes as custodians of the text, continued to reshape the text sometimes based on theological grounds. The works of Epp,<sup>27</sup> Parker,<sup>28</sup> Kannaday,<sup>29</sup> Ehrman,<sup>30</sup> Rice<sup>31</sup> Petersen<sup>32</sup> and many

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<sup>24</sup> This has long been established by the works of C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961) Joachin Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1962). See also T W. Manson, "The Original Teachings of Jesus and the Ethics of the Early Church in Craig Evans, ed., *Historical Jesus, vol 1*. (London: Routledge, 2004), 265.

<sup>25</sup> Eldon Epp, "Multivalence of the term Original Text," 551-594.

<sup>26</sup> 2Corinthians as is well known consists of probably two or three previous letters of Paul fused together. These are: Cor 1-9; 2Cor 10-13 and 2Cor 6:14-7:1.

<sup>27</sup> Eldon Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), 1-171.

<sup>28</sup> Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels*, 1-213; idem, "Scripture Is Tradition," *Theology* 94 (1991), 11-17.

<sup>29</sup> Wayne Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourses and Scribal Tradition: Evidences of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Text of the Canonical Gospels* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1-250.

<sup>30</sup> Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effects of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-283.

others have amply displayed that “scribes embroiled in theological controversies physically changed the text of scripture to “let them say what they were already known to mean.”<sup>33</sup> Ehrman and others observed that the church fathers sometimes disagreed on the interpretation of the text, because they knew the text in different words.<sup>34</sup> Kannaday’s words are germane at this point. He writes:

Textual transmission did not occur in a vacuum. The text has not survived as a relic of the distant past but as something that lived and was adapted in response to change, much like an evolutionary specie adapting to its environment. .. there is a sense then in which it is fair to say that manuscripts are begotten, not made, brought into being by human beings, and brought forward through history by them as well... although the evangelists may be thought of as the birth mothers of the gospels, the scribes functioned in a number of other roles in maintaining this newborn entity, including at times midwife, wet nurse and even adoptive parent. The human infant will not survive unless it is held, kept warm, duly nurtured, and occasionally and quite necessarily, changed. Ancient texts, too, in order to survive to the next generation had to be handled frequently and carefully, they had to be transmitted, transcribed, copied by hand and sometimes –again much like an infant – they had to be changed.<sup>35</sup>

In summary, the text of the New Testament abounds with evidences of author to scribe dictation, varying types of hand copying, an ancient method of publication, the interplay of oral tradition and written text, changes due to apologetic and theological interests, all of which have resulted in multiple originals and which testify to the continued reciprocal influence of church and text. For a number of reasons, chief among them, the fact that our current Greek texts (NA<sup>28</sup>: UBS4) are all eclectic texts, it is fair to say that this reciprocal influence of text and church continues up to this very day.

**BMRC RESEARCH:** Against the above framework, the Biblical Manuscript Research Centre (BMRC) of Northern Caribbean University (NCU) has been carrying out research to uncover the sub-text of Mark’s gospel as yet another example to illustrate the reciprocal influence of church and text in their earliest stages. Working with the majority position that Matthew and Luke used

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<sup>31</sup>George E. Rice, *The Alteration of Luke’s Tradition by Textual Variants in Codex Bezae* (Ph. D dissertation, Case Western Reserve University), 1974.

<sup>32</sup>For a sweeping discussion of the many scholars prior to these recent scholars who have discussed the issue, see Peter Head, “Christological and Textual Transmission: Reverential Alterations in the Synoptic Gospels,” *Novum Testamentum* 35 (1993): 105-109.

<sup>33</sup> Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, xii.

<sup>34</sup> Ehrman shows that, for example, in 11 out of 49 times, Heracleon appears to attest to a different form of the text from that known to Origen. Of these, over half (6/11) are instances in which their different interpretations of the text depend to some extent on the variant forms of its wording, Barth Ehrman, *Studies in Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, vol 33 ( Leiden: Brill, 2006), 269 . See also Ehrman, Fee and Holmes, *The Text of the Fourth Gospel*.

<sup>35</sup>Wayne Kanaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 242, 243.

Mark as one of their sources, it is posited that a text of Mark can be derived from the multiple instances where Matthew and Luke copied Mark, while at the same time agreeing in exact wording against Mark.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, any cursory reading of the Greek text in places where Matthew and Luke copied Mark, will reveal that they were copying independently from different manuscripts of Mark.<sup>37</sup> If while copying from different manuscripts of Mark, Matthew and Luke agreed in exact wording in scores of places against Mark, then such betray a sub-text of Mark 'extant' in Matthew and Luke, but different from the Mark we now have or even the Mark from which Matthew and Luke were copying.

Having collated Matthew and Luke against Mark, in places where Matthew and Luke were copying Mark, ninety five (95) such variants were identified. Note, these are not Q material, or Mathew-Luke reinterpretations of Mark, but literal copying of Mark by Matthew and Luke. The research is still in its preliminary stages, but I can give two examples to illustrate the point.

In copying Mark 2:23-27, both Matthew (12:8) and Luke (6:5) 'omitted' the words :

το σαββατον δια τον ανθρωπον εγενετο και ουχ ο ανθρωπος δια το σαββατον

The statement in Mark is introduced by Mark's characteristic formula "και λεγει αυτοις." According to William Lane,<sup>38</sup> και λεγει αυτοις, is a literary device of Mark to indicate that the statement which follows has no direct immediate relationship with the immediate preceding verses. See 2:27a; 4:2b, 11, 21, 24, 26; 6:10, 7:9; 8:21; 9:1. This implies that the words existed independently before they were incorporated into Mark's gospel - predecessor original. Interestingly, in almost all of the places where Mark uses the formula και λεγει αυτοις, to introduce something, Matthew and Luke follow Mark in recording what follows και λεγει αυτοις

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, the BMRC is not the first to propose such. As early as 1901, E. A. Abbott made this advancement. See E.A. Abbott, *Corrections of Mark* (London 1901) Recently, Helmut Koester, wrote. With respect to Mark, one can be fairly certain that only its revised text has achieved canonical status, while the original text (attested to only by Matthew and Luke) has not survived. With respect to Matthew and Luke, there is no guarantee that the archetypes of the manuscript tradition are identical with the original text of each gospel. The harmonization of these two Gospels demonstrate that their text was not sacrosanct and that alterations could be expected. New Testament textual critics have been deluded by the hypothesis that the archetypes of the textual tradition which were fixed CE 200 ... are (almost) identical with the autographs. This cannot be confirmed by external evidence. On the contrary, whatever evidence there is, it indicated that not only minor, but also substantial revisions of the original texts occurred during the first hundred years. Helmut Koester, "The Text of the Synoptic Gospel in the Second Century," in William L. Peterson, ed., *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century: Origins Recensions, Text, and Transmission* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1989), 37.

<sup>37</sup> As Sandy rightly states, "Neither our present gospel even in the best text, nor the copies used by Matthew and St. Luke were exactly what St. Mark wrote. All our extant copies whether of the Received text or those constructed upon the most highly critical principles are descended from a single copy which, although very near to St. Mark's autograph is not be identified with it. W. Sandy, *Studies in The Synoptic Problem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 22.

<sup>38</sup> William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark: The New International Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 118.



It goes to say that if the manuscripts of Mark that Matthew and Luke were copying had *και λεγει αυτοις* followed by *το σαββατον δια του ανθρωπου εγενετο και ουχ ο ανθρωπος δια το σαββατον* then Matthew and Luke would more likely have recorded, not omitted these words. The fact that they omitted these words signaled that they were not found in the manuscript of Mark from which they were copying. The notion that it is an accidental omission by Matthew and Luke is not reasonable. That Matthew and Luke copying different manuscripts of Mark, in different locations, to different audiences, accidentally omitted so many exact words in the same sequence, is too far-fetched to be accommodated. It is more likely that the words were not found in the exemplar of Mark from which they were copying.

There are also early evidence in the manuscript tradition that there existed an early Mark that lacked verse 27. The verse is missing in Codex D; a c e ffi. Manuscripts W and syr<sup>sin</sup> omit the latter part of verse 27 (“and not man for the sake of the Sabbath”). Bearing in mind that the D text is a relatively early text (2<sup>nd</sup> century) and is characteristically a longer text, its shorter reading here like the Western Non-Interpolations must be given serious consideration that it represents a very early text, probably going back to the first century. Again, another possible indication of an earlier Mark used by Matthew and Luke that did not contain verse 27.

Therefore, if the different manuscripts of Mark that Matthew and Luke were copying did not carry these words,<sup>39</sup> then it means that there existed a version of Mark even earlier than the one Matthew and Luke were copying, which did not have these words. Additionally, this Mark is different from the Mark in our current extant Mark.

### **The Import of This Variation re-Nexus of Church and Scripture**

According to Joel B. Green, this supposed violation of Sabbath by Jesus and his disciples, was based on Jewish *halakah*, and not on the OT legislations.<sup>40</sup> In Jewish *halakah*, the maxim existed: “The Sabbath is delivered over for your sake but you are not delivered over to the Sabbath”<sup>41</sup> If according to Jewish *halakah*, the Sabbath was given over to Israel, then the Jewish male through their Rabbinic authorities, had the right to frame the many existing legislations

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<sup>39</sup> See note 37 below.

<sup>40</sup> He writes: Exodus 34:21 obligates people to observe the Sabbath even during harvesting. But the disciples were not harvesting. Only later did scribal tradition interpret “plucking” as a form of “harvesting” and in fact, according to this developing interpretation the disciples were culpable not only of reaping but for “threshing” “winnowing” and perhaps “grinding.” Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 253.

<sup>41</sup> This is according to Rabbi Simeon ben Menasya. Mekilta, Shabbata I to Exo 31:14.

regarding the Sabbath, thus providing the “legal ground” on which Jesus and his disciples were found guilty of Sabbath violation.<sup>42</sup> It would appear that the earliest Mark and later Matthew and Luke, wanted to blunt this Jewish authority over the Sabbath, hence they omitted the verse that would suggest such while still maintaining Jesus’ interpretive authority over the Sabbath, by including verse 28 *ωστε κυριος εστιν ο υιος του ανθρωπου και του σαββατου* (Matt 12: 8 and Lk 6:5).<sup>43</sup>

In Codex Bezae (D, 05) verse 5 of Luke 6, is placed after verse 10, and then follows the words: *τη αυτη ημερα θεασαμενος τινα εργαζομενον τω σαββατω ειπεν αυτω Ανθρωπε ει μεν οιδας τι ποιεις μαρκαριους ει ει δε μη οιδας επικαταρατος και πραβατης ει του νομου.* “On the same day he saw a man working on the Sabbath and said to him, “Man, if you know what you are doing, you are blessed; but if you do not know, you are accursed and a transgressor of the law.” All this confirms what is well known from other NT passages, namely, that there were different emphases on Sabbath keeping in the early church and also the reciprocal influence between scripture and Church.<sup>44</sup>

Another example of the reciprocal relationship between the church and scripture as found in the Matthew-Luke interaction with Mark are the words: *Ιδου αποστελλω τον αγγελον μου προ προσω που σου ος κατασκευασει την οδον σου*, omitted in Matthew and Luke (Mt. 3:3 and Lk 3:3, 4) but found in their source Mark 1:2. The embarrassment faced by early Christians because Jesus was baptized by John unto a baptism of repentance, is easily traced in extra-biblical literature and also in the different renderings of the baptismal accounts in the gospels.<sup>45</sup> The

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<sup>42</sup> As Robert M. Johnston rightly states, “The rabbis felt that where the scriptures were concerned they had the power to bind or loose as it were in order to safe guard the sanctity of the Sabbath.” Robert M. Johnston, “The Rabbinic Sabbath,” in Kenneth Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, (Washington: Review and Herald, 1982), 82. The thirty nine classes of work prohibited in the Mishnah, would naturally include what Jesus and his disciples did on that Sabbath in the grain fields. According to *Sabbath* 7.2, they include: sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleaning crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, among others. Apparently, the Pharisees saw plucking as reaping, rubbing the heads in one’s hands as threshing, and the natural blowing away the chaff as winnowing. See, Walter F. Specht, “The Sabbath in the New Testament,” in Kenneth Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture*, 95.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew as *κυριος γαρ εστιν του ανθρωπου ο υιος του σαββατου* and Luke as *κυριος εστιν του σαββατου ο υιος του ανθρωπου* the difference in wording here between Matthew and Luke betray the fact that they were copying from different manuscripts of Mark.

<sup>44</sup> For an example of different Sabbath emphasis, see, Col 2:14-16; Rom 14:5, 6; Gal 4: 10,11.

<sup>45</sup> This can be seen in the effort of each gospel to decrease the role of John the Baptist and accentuate the prominence of Jesus in the baptismal accounts. Mark seeks to detract from the ‘baptism of repentance,’ by the designation “With you I am well pleased,”-referring to Jesus ( 1: 4, 5, 9- 11 ). In Matthew, John reluctantly baptized Jesus not into a baptism of repentance, but into a baptism “that fulfilled all righteousness” (3:13-17). In Luke, John is not mentioned as the one who baptized Jesus. In fact, the baptism is mentioned after John was imprisoned (3: 21, 22). John’s gospel never explicitly mentioned the baptism of Jesus by John. Only a comparison between Jesus and John given in which Jesus far supersedes

words, Ἰδοὺ ἀποστελλῶ τὸν ἀγγελοῦ μου πρὸ προσώπου σου ὅς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου accentuate John's role as a messenger prior to Jesus. The omission of these words by Matthew and Luke therefore forms part of the trend throughout the gospel to blunt or downplay John's role relative to Jesus. Yes, he is a messenger, but not one so explicitly heralded by the prophets as the later Mark presents him. This also suggests that an earlier Mark, the one from which Matthew and Luke copied also had this reduced role of John; he is a messenger but not explicitly so uttered by the prophets. Additionally, Matthew and Luke correct Mark (or record their different text of Mark) by omitting the reference to Isaiah as being the source of the quotation, as no such text is found in Isaiah. Again, this demonstrates that scripture is being corrected/edited by scripture and that the text is developing as a later bible writer is rewriting the written word. All this of course was happening before the text became canonical and considered sacrosanct as it is now viewed. The process would continue long after the canonical period, in fact, as mentioned above, it continues even to this very day. Again, reinforcing my point of a reciprocal relationship between the church and scripture with each entity influencing each other as together they developed. The words of Parker and Evans regarding the gospels are germane to all of scripture: Parker notes:

What we have is a collection of interpretative rewritings of a tradition. The concept of a Gospel that is fixed in shape authoritative and final as a piece of literature has to be abandoned<sup>46</sup>

Evans posits:

The locus of inspiration is not the words of the text as originally produced, but in the text as received and used in the church at various times and in various languages. Such inspiration must be attributed the continued work of God, not an infusion of power into

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John. Additionally, as Dunn observes, the tradition regarding the descent of the spirit at the baptism has an increasing presentation in the gospels, “A trend to make it a more visible and objective wonder.” In Mark, Jesus alone saw and heard the dove and voice (Mk1:10, 11; 2). In Matthew the voice is more of a public declaration, “This is my son” (3:16f). In Luke 3:22, the spirit is materialized; there was indeed something – a dove - to be seen. The spirit descended in bodily form “*somatiko*”<sup>4</sup>. In the Gospel of the Ebionites “a great light shun around the place” (*Epiphanius, Against Heresies* 30:13.7-8; 5). In Justin, fire was kindled in the Jordan (*Dial* 88.3) Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 375.

<sup>46</sup> Parker, *Living Text*, 93.

the original text that are no longer accessible to us and of which we have only faulty copies and uncertain reconstructions.<sup>47</sup>

### **Some Implications for the Modern Church**

First, I must say that I am aware that some of these implications can be very disturbing for some people so I make them cautiously as suggestions, as points of discussion:

1. In light of the dynamic nature of the New Testament (in fact the entire bible) in which in many cases neither the words nor the thoughts are those of the original framers of the text, indeed because the text continues to evolve, the old categories of Verbal versus Plenary inspiration is virtually useless. I suggest we should speak of inspiration, full stop.
2. In this regard, probably there is need to revisit how we state Fundamental Belief number 1 which categorically speaks of “Scripture as the infallible revelation of his (God’s) will.<sup>48</sup>” (Please, no assassination, this is only a suggestion, not a campaign). It is indeed very difficult to speak of infallibility or inerrancy, when: 1) there are multiple divergent originals of scripture, 2) we do not have the authorial originals and cannot claim that we have reconstructed them in their entirety, 3) our earliest texts are centuries removed from the authorial texts (which is also multivalent) and, 4) there are literally thousands of evidences indicating that the text was changed in its fundamental content and does not in many cases represent the views of the original framers. In fact, when we remember that the NT that we now have is to a great extent OUR modern construct (it was never used by anyone in the early church), we should be careful how we speak of infallibility or inerrancy lest we attribute these qualities to ourselves.<sup>49</sup>
3. Whereas inspiration of scripture is not an individual endowment but a community bestowal and whereas the text continues to develop, we too are involved not just in the interpretation of scripture but in the decision of what constitutes scripture itself. We concede to this reality every time we reference our current Greek New Testament and differentiate between textual variants.

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<sup>47</sup> Craig Evans and Emanuel Tov, *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation and Historical Literary and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 144.

<sup>48</sup> The Church Manual, revised edition, 2010, 155. One of the most inspiring statements is found in the preamble of the fundamental beliefs. It reads in part, “... Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.” In this case ‘better language’ are the operative words.

<sup>49</sup> Again, we should remind ourselves that our current Greek texts are eclectic texts which cannot be traced to any one Greek manuscript. They are syntheses of all the manuscripts. In addition, it is well known that the NT canon as we now have it was not the bible of the earliest NT church as canon is a product of the post early NT era.

4. Whereas the NT is the result of an effort to adapt the Christ event to the practical needs of the community, the messages of scripture should be adapted to meet the spiritual, social, political and economic needs of society today.
5. In this regard, the acid discussions on such topics as the ordination of women within the SDA Church, need to be reminded that scripture itself is an adaptation to meet the needs of the church in its different cultural contexts. Therefore, by the example of the early church, when scripture is silent, then our ground rule ought to be that which is most beneficial to the church in its respective cultural contexts. In a sense, we have no choice but to “keep on writing scripture,” not canon, - guided by the spirit of course.
6. Scripture is therefore a witness to the living voice of God in the church and a testimony that although we may not be certain regarding a definitive original we need not panic as we have our own original guided by the spirit. Additionally, we are led to realize that scripture is not just what we read of the text literally, it is also our interpretation of the text. Because our interpretations are always fallible, we must be humble and accommodative of each other in our theological discourses.
7. Probably, the question concerning whether or not the bible *is* the word of God or *contains* the word of God should not be closed among us as SDA thinkers. Maybe such discussions could lead us to become more of a people of the spirit than a people of the book. Honestly, we need Jesus more than we need the bible, we should not equate them. One is a book in process the other is a person in perfection.

THE END

