

# Spirits, Scribes and Scriptures: Spiritual Warfare and the Transmission of New Testament Texts\*

Edgar B. Ebojo\*\*

## 1. Texts, Intentions, and Theologies

Textual variances are generally classified under two headings: unintentional changes and sensible intentional changes.<sup>1)</sup> Lately, there has been a remarkable emergence of scholarly interest in studying observable scribal changes with bearings on the intersection of the social history of the ancient scribes and the readings they chose to reflect in their manuscripts. The general intention of this paper is to chart a paradigm on the role of scribes in the transmission of the New Testament texts,<sup>2)</sup> as they underwent the layers of transcriptions and the many text forms that were (re)created as a result. In particular, textual variants with the implications of “spiritual warfare” shall be the focus of this investigation, in an

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\*\* Philippine Bible Society Translation Manager.

1) On this, see K. Aland and B. Aland, *Text of the NT: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 280-316; B. Metzger and B. Ehrman, *Text of the NT: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 250-271.

2) While it remains true that the traditional aim of NT textual criticism is the determining and establishing of the “original text”, recent studies have successfully demonstrated that alterations in the textual tradition can also become a resource for studying the social history of the nascent church, including their practices and beliefs. On this intersection, see B. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effects of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the NT* (Oxford; NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); J. Roysse, “Scribal Tendencies in the Transmission of the Text of the NT”, B. Ehrman and M. Holmes, eds., *The Text of the NT in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis in Honor of Bruce Metzger*, Studies and Documents 46 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 239-252; D. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); K. Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); W. Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition: Evidence of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Text of the Canonical Gospels*, Text-Critical Studies 5 (Atlanta: SBL, 2004) among others.

attempt to show that many scribes were, to a large extent, deeply fascinated and influenced by the “other-worldly”<sup>3)</sup> culture of their community-patrons.<sup>4)</sup>

### 1.1. Oral Tradition and the Authority of the Written Tradition

Christianity is practically an “oral religion” by origin. Inspired by the teachings *of* and *about* Jesus Christ, and propagated by early itinerant preachers heralding the *euangelion*, early Christian communities lived it out and transmitted it from one generation to another for the edification of the Body of Christ. Among other things, Christianity’s use of (written) “Scripture” is but a necessary consequence of its attempt to survive doctrinal threats, both internal and external, as well as to warrant that Jesus is the long-awaited messiah of the Jewish nation.<sup>5)</sup> On the one hand, the “words of Jesus” and the “testimony of the apostles” were initially construed as a fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures in order to legitimize the connection between Judaism (the religious affiliation of Jesus) and the “sect” that emerged from the public ministry of Jesus, and its eventual transmission through apostolic teachings. But on the other hand, it is equally noteworthy that it is these teachings and works of Jesus that laid the foundation for the eventual birth, growth, and expansion of early Christianity.

It is this oral stage that forms the groundwork for the eventual formation of the NT. Nevertheless, the “oral tradition” in due course intersected with the “written tradition”. And throughout the four gospels, Jesus’ birth, ministry, and death were deemed to be the fulfillment of written prophecies in the Jewish Scripture. Thus, the formulae “just as the Scripture says” and its derivative premise many of the claims by the NT writers. This point hardly needs elaboration. Nor need it be emphasized that the Jewish Scripture (i.e., Greek *Septuaginta*) was the “Christian” Bible before

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3) On this term, see R. Henry, *Filipino Spirit World: A Challenge to the Church* (Mandaluyong: OMF Literature, 1986), esp. 17-35.

4) On the role of the commissioning community in the transmission of texts, see B. Aland, “The Significance of the Chester Beatty Papyri in Early Church History”, C. Horton, ed., *The Earliest Gospels: The Origins and Transmission of the Earliest Christian Gospels*, JSNT Supplementary 258 (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 108-121.

5) H. Gamble, “Literacy, Liturgy, and the Shaping of the NT Canon”, C. Horton, ed., *The Earliest Gospels: The Origins and Transmission of the Earliest Christian Gospels*, JSNT Supplementary 258 (London; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 27, rightly comments, “Christianity depended on texts to warrant its fundamental proclamation that Jesus is the messiah of Israel”.

the NT was gradually formed. In addition, nearly all Patristic quotations appeal to scriptural texts as written authorities, whether for the instruction of the faithful or for apologetic purposes. What we see here, therefore, is an intersection of the “oral” and the “written” traditions that were not mutually exclusive, but complimentary,<sup>6)</sup> especially when seen against the milieu of early Christian communities where a majority of its members were functionally illiterate. Such situation ideally calls for dynamic creativity in order to sustain the message of the Gospel. It is for this reason that the texts used for *public reading*<sup>7)</sup> in Christian assemblies were rather more energetic and dynamic than the written documents; they were meant to be vibrant and relevant to the communities’ context. But this also brings to fore the observation that for a span of time there was a period of textual fluidity – a historical stage where different forms of the NT texts were simultaneously circulated in the ancient Christian communities almost without geographical boundaries. This situation had persisted until “the texts were standardized” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries as a logical consequence of recognizing specific books and tagging them as authoritative for Christian faith and conduct, i.e., the invention of the NT canon and the articulation of the doctrine of inspiration by those who upheld “orthodoxy”. Such fluidity was fairly non-problematic at first as practically all Christian traditions prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries were never seen as a threat to the doctrinal survival of the Christian religion at large, so long as they suffice the “scripture needs” of a particular Christian community.<sup>8)</sup> But things radically changed at the invention of canon which would later attest to the increasing value of the written word and the authority<sup>9)</sup> that can be located on a particular text form.

However, there was a pronounced divide between the “popular” and the “official”, and this divide can be deduced from the creedal statements of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries, wherein various (and most of the times conflicting) positions were taken by different communities. This only shows that the ancient church was far from

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6) As Parker, *Living Text*, 19, explains, “it is important to be aware that the relationship between the written and the spoken word in the early church was quite different from that which we assume today. The Gospels were written rather to support than replace the oral tradition.”

7) On the role of public reading of Christian texts in the ancient church, see Gamble, “Literacy”, 27-39.

8) In relation to this, see the points raised by L. Bautista, “The Bible: Servant in the Formation of Communities of Faith”, T. Gener, ed., *Doing Theology in the Philippines* (Quezon City; Mandaluyong: ATS/OMF Literature, 2005), 59-62.

9) On the Patristic use of particular text form(s) for polemic and apologetic purposes, see Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 1-57.

monolithic, both in theology and praxis. The mere fact that the ancient church was geographically divided between “East” and “West” is in itself already descriptive of the differing positions on many issues that confronted them. This gulf can be explored in many ways but is demonstrated most clearly through the variegated forms of NT texts that have been transmitted to us. These textual variances enshrine the socio-cultural and theological proclivities of those who transmitted the text of the NT. In this regard, scribal inclinations and tendencies can serve as a viewing deck to the praxis and dogma of the ancient Christians, which were not handed down to us by traditional sources of church history, e.g., Eusebius’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

## **1.2. Social History and Textual (Re)-Writings: Scribes as Reader-Participants**

Intentional textual changes did not happen in a vacuum; they were performed either due to the scribes’ socio-cultural environment or to their theological preferences. Along this line, scribes (re-)wrote *some* Christian traditions in an attempt to better understand them and to make the “Word” of God relevantly speak to *their* contemporary “world”, so much so that the text of the NT (particularly the Gospels) was for a long time considered a “living text”<sup>10</sup>) - a sacred *text* that directly addressed their *context*. In a sense, this was *Scripture engagement* at its best. However, this also implies that there was no dominical prescript on which an idea of an “original text”<sup>11</sup>) could be based, especially during the primitive age of the church when divergent readings emerged and simultaneously disseminated in ancient churches in various geographical areas, and that these were publicly read in the churches. From this perspective, various (and sometimes conflicting) theological currents crossed paths, without causing major upheavals so long as churches found solace and edification in the text they used in *their* churches.

It is regrettable, however, that we only know the scribes simply as passive copyists who carefully endeavored to come up with manuscripts that “faithfully”

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10) Parker, *Living Text*, 200.

11) As to whether Early Christians were actually conscious of the rigid existence of “original text” is a matter of debate. On the other nuances of the term, see, W. Petersen, “What Text Can NT Textual Criticism Ultimately Reach?” B. Aland and J. Delobel, eds., *NT Textual Criticism, Exegesis, and Early Church History: A Discussion of Methods* (Kampen: Pharos, 1994), 136-152.

reflect their *exemplars*. Probably, that is what we expect. That would be a great relief if it were real. The truth is, ancient scribes were not detached transmitters of the text working in a context-less vacuum. They were also participant-readers,<sup>12)</sup> with particular interests and agenda – interests and agenda which were largely shaped and dictated by their prevailing socio-cultural milieu.<sup>13)</sup> Because of the geographical discrepancy, the scribes’ socio-cultural contexts were frequently very different from those in which their source texts were originated. Bart Ehrman is precisely correct when he notes that

... the meanings readers derive from their texts are in fact responses determined by what they bring to these texts... Similar to the way we all ‘re-create’ or ‘re-write’ texts whenever we construe them, the scribes... actually did re-create them, so that their orthodox construals... actually determined the way these texts have been transmitted to us.<sup>14)</sup>

One of the ways to better illustrate this “textual re-creation” is through passages with pronounced textual variations with implications on the early Christians’ view and appreciation of the “spirit world”, and through the extent to which this world view had influenced the shape and form of the manuscripts that inclined scribes have copied and transmitted.

## 2. The “Word” in “Other Words”: Towards a Textual Construct for Spirit World Studies and Bible Transmission

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12) For a good introduction to reader-response criticism of Mark, see R. Fowler, “Reader- Response Criticism: Figuring Mark’s Reader”, J. C. Anderson and S. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 50-83. From a text-critical view, see P. Comfort, “Scribes as Readers: Looking at NT Textual Variants according to Reader Reception Analysis”, *Neotestamentica* 38 (2004), 28-53.

13) As Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 116, notes, “The discursive debate in the second and third centuries intersected with textual transcription in the activity of copying and the (re)-production of texts and creation of new readings. Intentional scribal changes did not occur in a vacuum, nor were they random in nature; rather, they were constrained by the discursive contexts of the scribes themselves.”

14) B. Ehrman, “The Text of Mark in the Hands of the Orthodox”, M. Burrows and P. Rorem, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 31.

Fidelity to the scribe's *Vorlage* is presupposed in any context of transcription. But things change when scribes become too "actively involved" in the process, to the point that they interfere with the text. Hence, the so-called "errors" or "miscopyings" soon arise for deliberate interventions by scribes wanting to make the "Word" more responsive, relevant, and vibrant to their context. This section identifies select passages and attempts to provide a historical framework for the emergence of these divergent readings.

### 1.3. Exorcism and the Different Endings of the Gospel of Mark

Modern "Christian" exorcism is preceded by some forms of elaborate "rituals" which normally include intense/ecstatic prayer (plus speaking in tongues) and many days of fasting on the belief that these are portals to the spirit world and are clearly legitimated by Jesus himself (cf. Mat 17:21 and Mar 9:29). But here lies a question of biblical presupposition: What if the supposed "biblical supports" are not textually authentic but are later additions by scribes who belonged to the Christian groups subscribing to the concept of the spirit world? Can they still be used as a support for the practice of prayer-and-fasting-laced exorcism, which is very common in many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches today? Does this invalidate our belief in the spirit world? The last chapter of the Gospel of Mark may shed light on this inquiry.

Mark 16 in our modern translations includes 20 verses, and is commonly structured into four literary units, representing various layers of traditions that have accrued throughout its transmission history.<sup>15)</sup> However, insofar as extant manuscripts are concerned, there are at least four major endings for the Gospel of Mark: the Short but abrupt Ending (vv. 1-8),<sup>16)</sup> the Intermediate Ending,<sup>17)</sup> the Long Ending (with vv. 9-20),<sup>18)</sup> and the Expanded Long Ending (expanded form of vv. 14

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15) i.e., a) an angel's appearance and mandate to the three women (vv. 1-8), Jesus' appearance and mandate to Mary Magdalene (vv. 9-11), Jesus' appearance and mandate to his Two Disciples (vv. 12-13), and Jesus' appearance and reprimand of the Disciples for their unbelief (vv. 14-20).

16) This reading is supported by relatively early manuscripts including codices and B, minuscule 304, as well as versional materials (syr<sup>s</sup>, cop<sup>sams</sup>, arm<sup>mss</sup>, geo<sup>1.A</sup>) and patristic quotations (Eusebius, Epiphanius, Hesychius, and Jerome). For citation of evidence, see GNT<sup>4</sup> and NTG<sup>27</sup>.

17) i.e., "And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation" (NRSV). This variant is supported by codices L, , 083, 099, 274<sup>mg</sup>, 579; by *lectionary* 1602 and by ancient versions (k, sy<sup>hmg</sup>, sa<sup>mss</sup>, bo<sup>mss</sup>, eth<sup>mss</sup>).

-15).<sup>19)</sup>

Most textual critics take these last 12 verses as non-original; and the differences in theology, vocabulary, and style point toward a non-Markan origin.<sup>20)</sup> Admittedly, both the external and internal evidences point to this direction.<sup>21)</sup> As such, it is a big injustice to the manuscript evidence not to point this out in the translation. At the very least, marginal notes should be deliberately made to account for this textual conundrum.<sup>22)</sup>

There are interesting twists here, however. While the manuscript evidence favors the shorter text, it leaves some important questions unanswered. For one, it places a stumbling block insofar as the overall literary tempo of this gospel is concerned. Ending this gospel at v. 8 with a statement that the three women “said nothing to anyone because they were afraid...” (*oudení ouden eípan; ephobounto gar*) proves anti-climatic and contrary to the triumphalistic tendency of the Gospel of Mark as a whole. Furthermore, the lack of reference to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, which has been a pivotal component of a “Gospel”, begs the question of whether accident transpired in the process of transmission or Mark deliberately intended to leave the reference to resurrection appearances ambiguous, which is very unlikely of a “Gospel”. To leave the resurrection reference out is, in fact, to undermine not

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18) This reading enjoys the support of the majority of manuscripts where this portion is intact including the witnesses of the uncial codices A, C, D, , , J<sup>3</sup>, and a horde of other manuscripts.

19) Among modern English translations, only NRSV has reflected this variant reading: *And they excused themselves, saying, “This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits. Therefore reveal your righteousness now”--thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, “The term of years of Satan's power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was handed over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, that they may inherit the spiritual and imperishable glory of righteousness that is in heaven.”* This reading is supported by only one manuscript, codex W, but a partial version is also traceable in Jerome's treatise *Against Pelagius* 2:15.

20) For dissenting opinions, see J. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to Mark* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1871); W. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974) among others.

21) E.g., B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek NT*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: UBS, 1994), 105, concludes, “On the basis of good external evidence and strong internal considerations it appears that the earliest ascertainable form of the Gospel of Mark ended with 16:8”.

22) While it is true that manuscripts without vv. 9-20 are the earliest, it is equally true that manuscripts with the Long Ending are also pretty early. In order to account for this, many modern translations have reflected the major endings. This is accompanied by a marginal comment at the footnote indicating the late origins of the Long and Intermediate endings, e.g., GNB, CEV, NRSV, ESV, among others.

only the very message Mark was intending to convey but also the “received” tradition of the churches within which he was writing.<sup>23)</sup> A gospel should be a pointer to the resurrection event which is the core of Christian *kerygma*. As Parker has rightly noted, “A Gospel without resurrection appearance is incomplete, for the Gospel is about the resurrection and salvation.”<sup>24)</sup>

Such textual difficulty is indeed question-begging, and several proposals have been advanced to account for this conundrum.<sup>25)</sup> This textual maze, however, can be alternatively appreciated by investigating the socio-historical milieu of the scribes who transmitted these various forms of the text. With this perspective in view, the Long Ending of Mark with all its “otherworldliness”<sup>26)</sup> then presents itself as an evidence of a scribal attempt to articulate what some early Christians believed and practiced which did not suit well to the theological palate of the powerful and the mighty – the (proto)orthodox sector of the ancient Church.<sup>27)</sup> It may not have the status of a canonical text but for those who adhered to it, its authority emanates from the fact that *it* is being used by some Christian communities for *their* spiritual nurture.

Notice that the Long Ending is full of otherworldly components, and apparently it is this “otherworldliness” that made the (proto)orthodox segment of the primitive church uncomfortable – a feeling derived from the belief that authority exclusively lies in the nature of “the” document they called as *Holy Scripture*. Hence, we see here the tension between what some Christian sectors believed and what the other (more powerful) Christian groups thought should be believed, as reflected in *their* Scriptures. This tension has been monumentalized in the different text forms replicated in extant manuscripts.

While the Short Ending comparatively has the best manuscript support, both the Short and Long Endings independently existed quite early in the history of

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23) R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans; Paternoster, 2002), 683.

24) Parker, *Living Text*, 144.

25) For instance, see Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 322-27; Metzger and Ehrman, *Textual Commentary*, 105, n. 7; and Aland and Aland, *Text*, 293.

26) It is noteworthy that exorcism, speaking in tongues, snake-handling, poison drinking, and laying on of hands in vv. 9-20 have inter-textual resonances with other parts of the Bible; see, Parker, *Living Text*, 138-141.

27) For the intersection of proto-orthodoxy and intentional textual changes, see Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 3-46; Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159-257.

transmission; both can be confidently dated around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>28)</sup> This is pregnant with implications. First, this underscores the extent of NT textual fluidity before the emergence of textual standardization<sup>29)</sup> – an intentional enterprise which transpired as a consequence of the “invention” of the concept of biblical canon<sup>30)</sup> in the ensuing 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. This shows that extant manuscripts exhibiting divergent readings are a vivid testimony of the scope of diversity in the early history of Christianity, both in terms of praxis and theology, which on the one hand can enrich our historical appreciation of the social contexts from which our NT texts emerged. Second, and in reference to the first, this textual fluidity affords us an alternative paradigm to the way we understand and appreciate the different ideologies behind the “Text” that we are now translating into our modern languages. Early church history, as a viewing deck for us, Bible transmitters, opens for us alternative avenues to appreciate textual variances, which for so long were otherwise immediately adjudged as “non-originals”. But using this paradigm, one may argue that the Long Ending of Mark could provide a socio-cultural situation wherein the affirmation and actualization of the “otherworldly” was suppressed by those who wielded enormous power, using the concept of an “authoritative” text as a leverage. As such, readings longer than verses 1-8 can be taken as representing the “suppressed” spirit world beliefs of the less popular and less powerful echelon of the ancient church. Paradoxically, however, we also witness here a form of “subversion” on the part of the otherworldly-oriented scribes; a subversion tenacious enough to influence the text-form of future copies of the text of the NT,

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28) See Aland and Aland, *Text*, 292-93; Parker, *Living Text*, 137. Incidentally, an Armenian manuscript (MS 229) dated 989 AD has the ascription *Ariston eritsou* (Of the Elder Ariston) before verses 9-20, implying that the verses have come from the hand of the Elder Ariston who lived in the first century, a contemporary of Papias, and is said to be the disciple of John the Apostle. If this scribal suggestion is to be accepted, then this is yet another pointer to an even earlier existence of the Longer Reading in the transmission history; see F. Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1958), 236-237. However, given the remoteness in time of MS 229 to the historical Ariston, the authenticity of such ascription proves to be very nil; on this see, Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 325.

29) On this textual consciousness, see Aland, “Significance of the Chester Beatty Papyri”, 20, who comments, “... the readers of the manuscripts... were well aware of the divergences, omissions, and transpositions, but regarded them as trivial because they did not yet have a highly developed tradition of Holy Scripture with corresponding procedures of controlling its transmission.”

30) For the formation of the NT canon from an alternative perspective, see the chapter “The Invention of Scripture: The Formation of the Proto-Orthodox New Testament” in Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 229-246.

and by extension, even the NT text that we now use in our churches.

The content and theology of the Longer Ending could have predictably provoked the ire of those who did not subscribe to the idea of the “otherworldly”, particularly the explicit mention of speaking in different languages, poison-drinking, snake-handling, and exorcism. But this did not deter those who subscribed to it, as represented by those who transmitted “different versions” of the NT text to us. We owe it to these scribes who enshrined in the Long Ending the experiences of their patrons and churches – the communities that have experienced and participated in the encounter with “principalities and powers”.

#### 1.4. When Prayer is not Enough: Exorcism and Scribal Intervention

The exorcism account recorded in Mark 9:29 (with parallel occurrences in Mat 17:21 and Luk 9:43-45) also strikes the crux of the present issue. According to the synoptic tradition, Jesus, having been affirmed of his special relationship with the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration, was asked to personally exorcise a man’s son possessed by evil spirits, because his disciples were unable to drive the demons out. Jesus willingly “delivered” the boy from demon possession but not without making that event a learning opportunity for his disciples. He pointed out that spiritual “encounters” such as this requires special spiritual discipline and preparation. And here the use of modern Bible versions comes to the fore. Depending on which Bible version one is using, one is once again confronted with a textual problem of the same nature: Did Jesus really say that to be effective exorcism should be preceded by prayer *and fasting*,<sup>31)</sup> or simply by prayer?<sup>32)</sup> Or, as suggested by the omission of Matthew 17:21 in some manuscripts, did Jesus ever utter such a statement?<sup>33)</sup>

Again, external and internal evidences favor the shorter reading, both in Mark and Matthew. We cannot at this juncture extensively expound on the merits of the evidences but only to point out that this type of textual scenario also affirms our observation that there were indeed some sectors in the ancient church that truly put

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31) As in TEV, CEV, N/RSV, N/JB, ESV, among others.

32) As in N/KJV.

33) Verse 21 is omitted in three uncial codices (Ⲉ\*, B, Θ, three minuscule codices (33, 579, 892\*), one lectionary (l 253), as well as versional materials (it<sup>e,ffl</sup>, syr<sup>c, s, pal</sup>, cop<sup>sa, bopt</sup>, eth<sup>ms, and</sup> geo<sup>l, A</sup>). Major manuscripts supporting this reading include codices C, D, L, W, among others.

a premium on the practices pertaining to the “otherworldly”, particularly exorcism through prayer *and* fasting. In fact, the textual changes in these two verses betray the hand of scribes with ascetic leanings, underscoring the paramount role of prayer coupled with fasting in the context of exorcising demonized victims.<sup>34)</sup> While this revising may have not won the favor of those who stand on the other side of the theological pole, it nevertheless gives us a vivid example that exorcism was indeed a solid fact for many Christians of the earlier history of the church, so much so that this is now enshrined in some of the NT manuscripts that we have as well as in non-biblical manuscripts and exorcism-related materials which we shall underscore in the next section.

### 1.5. When Theology meets Reality: Magic, Miracles, and Manuscripts

The intersection of the otherworldly cultural orientation of some of the early Christians and the “copies” of the Scripture can be conspicuously established. To a large extent, this is due to the cognizance of the spirit world exercising influence over virtually all aspects of life. In fact, some of the early believers even literally used actual manuscripts themselves as protective devices functioning as amulets.<sup>35)</sup> For instance, in order to ward off evil spirits and misfortunes some manuscripts were worn as protective necklaces or placed under the pillow, probably to avoid having “devilish” nightmares.<sup>36)</sup> Ehrman describes these manuscripts as “small in size, often single sheet folded over, sometimes provided with or tied together with a string, and normally inscribed with texts that could prove useful for warding off evil

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34) In the context of marriage, the same thing can be said of 1 Corinthians 7:5, where some scribes equally elevated the role of fasting and prayer. In the case of Jude 12 in Bodmer codex, the change from *suneouchoumenoi* (while feasting) to *suneuchomenoi* (while praying) also points to the ascetic tendencies of its scribe; see Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 114.

35) As E. A. Judge, “The Magical Use of Scripture in the Papyri”, E. Conrad and E. Newing, eds., *Perspectives on Language and Text* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 340, rightly comments, “Everyone in the fourth century knew that magic was one of the major forces in society. Like the state, the churches fought constantly to suppress it. But the trouble was that ordinary believers had to take practical steps to protect themselves, particularly against the demons that crept into their houses in the form of scorpions, or the various kinds of fever. It was hardly surprising if some of the protective devices took on the colour of the magical system which controlled the demonic world. What made the engagement between the church and magic so close and desperate was the fact that neither side doubted the reality of the forces to which the other appealed.”

36) See for instance, Chrysostom, *Homilies* 19.4.

spirits or for effecting healing".<sup>37)</sup> They believed that by wearing these one became invincible to any attacks from supernatural forces that might attempt to harm them or their business interests. Accordingly, Metzger and Ehrman report of manuscripts so unusually small in size to be used for public reading; the smallest being at 3 ¾ x 2 7/8 inches (i.e., codex 0169, 4<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>38)</sup> Furthermore, Pickering also reports of a small papyrus manuscript dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Papyrus Vindob. G 2312) containing Psalm 90:1-2; Romans 12:1-2; and John 2:1-2. Its original size is 6 cm x 15 cm but is folded into a small packet about 2.5 cm x 2 cm, the size of a typical amulet or magical invocations.<sup>39)</sup> These manuscripts may have been used as talismans for effecting healing upon a penitent believer or for invoking divine providence and protection upon an inquiring believer. As such, these manuscripts have become symbols of otherworldly phenomenon as well as the depth of the interplay of the natural and the supernatural forces that have confronted the early Christian believers.

In the magical papyrus of the ancient Near East, the efficacy of a healing prayer using religious manuscripts or relics depends on two factors: the invocation of divine names and the use of forceful orders in commanding the deities to perform the request for healing and deliverance among others.<sup>40)</sup> But this was not only true among the pagan culture. In time, this practice also penetrated the Christian phalanx – or at least those who had been exposed to it. Hence, the names Iao, Osiris, Anubis, Ra, Zeus, and others would soon be substituted with *Logos*, *Iesous Christos*, *Kurios*, *Alpha* and *Omega*, and many other conceivable Christian divine designations.<sup>41)</sup> For instance, in the rare collections of Duke University, Christian non-biblical papyri can be found, wherein Christian divine names and titles are invoked in prayers. One such example is *PGM 80*, a fragmentary 3<sup>rd</sup> century Greek papyrus amulet. After two lines of garbled letters, the next two lines read "*Lord Jesus, heal Helena, daughter of [...] from every illness and every shivering and*

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37) Ehrman, "Text as Window", 370.

38) Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 93.

39) S. R. Pickering, "The Significance of Non-Continuous NT Textual materials in Papyri", D. G. K. Taylor, ed., *Studies in the Early Text of the Gospels and Acts: Papers of the First Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the NT*, Text-Critical Studies 1 (Atlanta: SBL, 1999), 126-129.

40) H. C. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in NT Times*, SNTSMS 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 107-112.

41) But cf. Judge, "Magical Use", 340.

[*fever*]”, which is followed again by several lines of garbled letters. On the one hand, this papyrus amulet and the likes, no doubt, function *therapeutically* through an appeal to the divine name. But on the other hand, it is also vested with *apotropaic* function, i.e., to protect oneself from demons as could be deduced from the magical papyri.<sup>42)</sup>

Other manuscripts are more aesthetically sophisticated, which in turn is very suggestive of their function. For instance, E. A. Judge notes that a fragmentary magical papyrus (*PGM 4*), containing Matthew 4:23-24, was deliberately arranged to form a pattern of crosses.<sup>43)</sup> The content of these two verses and the title given by the scribe (i.e., “The Gospel of Healing according to Matthew”) indicate that this cruciform manuscript was used for effecting healing. But a more extensive Gospel manuscript, codex 047, now housed at the Princeton University library, indicates that cruciform manuscripts were not only used for effecting healing but also as protective gadgets to ward off “unfriendly” spirits. Codex 047 does not simply have an artistic design to soothe the eyes of its users: its form is indicative of its function, in the same way that some modern-day Christians nail wooden crosses to the main doors and major parts of their building structures in the belief of their keeping evil spirits at bay.

Given the low literacy rate among Christian believers in the early church, scribes were commissioned to copy an *exemplar* for public reading. However, there are interesting indications that some manuscripts, on top of their official ecclesiastical purposes, were later used for other purposes: they were used for their magical or fortune-telling functions! For instance, the Greek section of the Gospel of Mark in codex Bezae (D/05) exhibits a fascinating characteristic in that Scripture text, which does not fill the page, is followed by the Greek word *hermēnia* (literally, *interpretation*), centered as a title and followed by various sentences or phrases. Some of the typical phrases are “Expect a great miracle”, “You will receive joy from God”, “From pain to joy”, “After ten days it will happen”, “What you seek will be found”, among others.<sup>44)</sup> There is no logical sequence in the arrangement of these supposed interpretations (*hermēnia*), and they are more likely to have been inscribed there rather arbitrarily and randomly. However, what is striking about this

42) Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic*, 111-112.

43) Judge, “Magical Use”, 342.

44) On this, see Frederick Scrivener, *Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis* (Cambridge, 1864; repr. Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1978), 451-452.

is that these *hermēnia* notes are totally irrelevant to the Scripture passages where they are located! There is no noticeable exegetical relationship between these notes and the Scripture passages. Paleographically, these notes are obviously not the handiwork of the original scribe(s) of codex Bezae; the calligraphic differences are far too conspicuous. They may have been the work of later scribes who had access to this manuscript and used it for purposes other than public reading. This led many textual critics to believe that this manuscript, along with other similar manuscripts,<sup>45)</sup> was actually used for fortune telling by some enterprising believers. Ehrman explains how this fortune telling might have been done: “... one who had a question would roll a pair of dice and, by the use of a specially prepared table, be instructed to turn to a particular page of the text, on which would be provided the appropriate answer (fortune)”.<sup>46)</sup> Apparently, there was a very thin line of distinction between *magic* and *miracle*. Hence, what we have here is an evidence that some early Christians ascribed special power to the manuscripts of Scripture themselves, to the point that they were being used to predict the future of an inquiring “believer”, to make petitions for healing more efficacious, or to appeal for some other daily concerns.

This traceable interplay of the spirit world and the manuscripts, admittedly, is not so explicitly pronounced in the writings of the ancient Christian writers. But the dearth of discussion could be explained on grounds that magic has been largely associated by the well-heeled and educated upper classes with the uneducated and the poor, who were more prone to the spiritually-slanted way of thinking such as “demon’s attack”. As Aune correctly observes, “Those who were educated and affluent associated magical practices with the uneducated and poor in the lower strata of society... Certainly the Greek of the magical papyri is the unpretentious common language of the people, not the cultivated, literary and atticistic language of the educated. Since the Graeco-Roman literature which is extant was produced and transmitted by the educated, rarely are the views of the common people adequately represented.”<sup>47)</sup> At any rate, the readings enshrined by the scribes in their manuscripts afford us to see how extremely important the weight of the spirit world was in the daily lives of the common, ordinary Christians, who were more

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45) See also the text of the Gospel of John in the following manuscripts: P<sup>55</sup>, P<sup>55</sup>, P<sup>55</sup>, P<sup>55</sup>, P<sup>55</sup>, 0145, 0210, 1256.

46) Ehrman, “Text as Window”, 370.

47) D. E. Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity”, *ANRW* II.23.2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 1521.

likely to interpret practically all events in their lives in light of the spiritual realm. Fortunately or unfortunately, these scribes' inclinations or proclivities toward the spiritworld have influenced the shape and form of the NT texts that we now read privately and corporately in our churches.

### 3. Scriptures, Scribes, and Spirits: a Summary

The textual variations frequently observed in our NT are a rich repository of information as to the socio-cultural contexts of the early Christian believers. One area that can be explored in studying these variations is the slant on the otherworldly orientation of the ancient scribes who copied and transmitted not only a "sacred text" but also the religio-cultural environments of their commissioning communities. These variances are not easily detected as they are now "encrypted" in the textual apparatuses of standard biblical texts that, unfortunately, only the specialists can "decode". Some of them are noted in the footnotes of some modern translations; but most of them are "fossilized" in the *apparati criticus* of the critical text editions. However, their value goes beyond scholarship; they are a rich reservoir for appreciating Christian origins and their implications for the modern church. Along this line, many of the intentional alterations pertaining to the otherworldly were in fact changes that intersected with the socio-historical milieu within which otherworldly-oriented scribes transcribed *their* text. Hence, *noticeable* textual variations did not occur in a historical vacuum; they are to a large extent wrought by the socio-cultural context within which particular manuscripts emerged. Scribes with otherworldly leanings were not unengaged parties; they were not disinterested copyists; but like many other scribes before and after them, they were active participants in a dynamic dialogue between them, their commissioning communities (patron), together with all the accompanying socio-cultural and theological packages, and the copy of a book which *they* considered *their* "Scripture". In their desire to see a *sacred* text speaking to *their* context, these scribes took it to heart to ensure that *their* "otherworldly" practices will find support in *their* Scriptures. Arbitrary as it may seem, but it knocks on our consciousness that a document considered by many moderns as "holy" and "beneficial for teaching and reproof" could not escape the realities of life in which early Christians were

involved: reflecting on the “Word” and making it relevant to *their* own “world”, even though it meant “re-writing” them.

<Keyword>

Spiritworld, oral tradition, textual transmission, textual re-creation, other-worldly

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<Abstract>

## 영들, 필사자들, 성서들: 영적 전쟁과 신약성서 본문의 전승

에드가 에보조  
(필리핀성서공회 번역실)

신약성서 사본들은 단순히 원문을 담고 있는 “그릇”들이 아니다. 그것은 초대 교회가 그 역사의 초기 단계에서 가졌던 예배 관습들(practices)과 믿음들로 안내해주는 관문이기도 하다. 그러므로 본문상의 차이들은 마찬가지로 소수이면서 비주류였던 이들의 관점으로부터, “비전통적”이라고 판단되어 왔던 이들의 관점과 현재 출판된 그리스어 본문의 비평판들(critical text editions)에 소리 없이 암호화되어 있는 이들의 본문으로부터, 기독교의 근원들을 (재)구성하기 위한 하나의 대안적인 창을 제공할 수 있다. 그럼에도 불구하고, 이렇게 본문에 감추어진 것들은 밝혀 낼 수 있다. 이러한 배경에 대해 이 논문은 필사자들의 사회문화적 환경이, 우리가 현재 개인과 교회의 교화를 위하여 사용하고 있는 신약성서의 형태와 형식에 어떻게 영향을 미쳤는가를 탐색하고자 한다. 특히 이 논문은 그러하지 않았더라면 성경 전승의 초창기 동안에 성경 전승의 과업에 있어 영계의 역할을 올바르게 통찰하기 위한 패러다임을 제공하였을 수 있었던 “영적 전쟁”의 잠재적 가능성을 가지고 본문상의 차이를 평가해 보고자 한다.