
Evaluating Bart Ehrman's Textual Reconstruction: A Test Case on John 1:18

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Abstract

Bart Ehrman was a good textual scholar, but some of his notions have provoked animated discussions. One of his provocative notions is his view on the textual transmission of the New Testament. He contends that there were many theologically motivated alterations during the transmission process that affected the validity of some Christian doctrines. In this article I will evaluate Ehrman's historical reconstruction of John 1:18 as a test case. I will show that Ehrman's reconstruction of this passage is incorrect and that no Christian doctrines are affected, whatever reading we take. This, of course, will not automatically prove that Ehrman's reconstruction of other passages is wrong; but at least it will prompt the reader to question Ehrman's other historical reconstructions, or even his whole thesis.

Keywords

Bart Ehrman, John 1:18, New Testament, textual criticism, textual transmission

INTRODUCTION

Bart Ehrman is a scholar well known for his skills in transforming technical academic discussions into comprehensible and interesting writings. It is unsurprising, then, that some of his works have been included on *The New York Times* best seller list.¹ Although Ehrman's studies were initially

1 Some of his works that have become bestsellers are *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); idem, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008); idem, *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden*

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born out of the North American context, his influence could be felt elsewhere, including Asia. While most of his works that carry his ideas are accessible for Asians who are familiar with English, some of them have been translated into some Asian languages, such as Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian.² In the Indonesian context, his works did not have much positive impact on Christianity. In my personal experience, Muslim apologists (or converts) often refer to his works both to attack Christianity and to argue their conviction that the Bible is false. Some Christian “progressive” thinkers have also used his works to question many orthodox beliefs.³ As a result, the faith of some Christians in Indonesia (and possibly other places)⁴ has been shaken.

Ehrman’s main interest now is the Historical Jesus and early Christian studies. Formerly, however, he was also a textual critic of the New Testament (according to Daniel Wallace, he is no longer working in this area).⁵ He even used to be one of the prominent scholars in the field of textual criticism and has bequeathed some works in this field that are well appraised by other textual critics. As a textual critic, some aspects of his textual works are enlightening, but others have aroused controversy. Among these others, one of his provocative ideas is his view of the textual transmission of the New Testament. He contends that

theological disputes, specifically disputes over Christology, prompted Christian scribes to alter the words of Scripture in order to make them more

Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don’t Know about Them) (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009); idem, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God. Why the Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011); and recently, idem, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014).

- 2 His *Lost Christianities* and his coauthored work (with Bruce Metzger) *The Text of the New Testament* have been translated into Korean, and his *Misquoting Jesus* has been translated into Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian (by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2006). See Ehrman’s CV at <https://www.bartdehrman.com/curriculum-vitae/>
- 3 E.g., Ioanes Rakhmat, *Memandang Wajah Yesus* (Jakarta: Pustaka Surya Daun, 2012).
- 4 One of my professors in Singapore, Dr. Simon Chan, shared a story about a member of his church who was challenged by his friend who left the Christian faith after reading Ehrman. This may not be an isolated incident, especially in Asia, where sacred texts are taken very seriously.
- 5 See Daniel Wallace, “Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism for the Twenty-First Century,” *JETS* 52, no. 1 (March 2009): 85.

serviceable for the polemical task. Scribes modified their manuscripts to make them more patently “orthodox” and less susceptible to “abuse” by the opponents of orthodoxy.⁶

So far, Ehrman is correct. This fact, of course, constitutes an open secret for the New Testament textual critics. Many textual scholars realize that some theologically motivated alterations happened during the transmission of New Testament.

What makes some scholars uneasy is his historical reconstruction of many New Testament passages. Although the data can actually be understood differently, he has generated scenarios that put the orthodox party into a corner. And it became worse when he exaggerated the facts by telling that such kind of alteration—that the orthodox party altered the text for theological reasons—can be found in many parts of the New Testament⁷ (even though some scholars think otherwise⁸) and that such alterations will affect many issues, including interpretation and Christian

6 Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-4. Although the second edition of this work was published in 2011, I will use the first edition (I have no access to the second edition). Fortunately, Wasserman wrote that there are no significant revisions in this work. See Tommy Wasserman, “Misquoting Manuscripts? The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture Revisited,” in Magnus Zetterholm and Samuel Byrskog, eds., *The Making of Christianity: Conflicts, Contacts, and Constructions* (Coniectanea Biblica 47; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 326n7.

7 I recorded that Ehrman in *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* discussed almost one hundred passages in which he thinks theologically motivated alterations took place. If I include other kinds of theological polemics (e.g., oppression of women, conflict against Judaism, conflict against paganism, etc) that Ehrman discusses in his other works, then Ehrman in total thinks that there are more than one hundred theologically motivated alterations. However, Ehrman opens the possibility that there are more such alterations when he writes:

I can claim to have found a large number of such variants, perhaps most of the ones that ultimately prove significant for the history of the text and for exegesis. But I almost certainly *have not uncovered* them all. The following enumeration and discussion, then, is extensive and, I trust, representative; it is not exhaustive. (*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 32; emphasis mine)

8 E.g., Wasserman, “Misquoting Manuscripts?” 326; Stanley E. Porter, *How We Got the New Testament: Text, Transmission, Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 26. Cf. also James R. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (NTTSD 36; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 738.

doctrines.⁹ He even provocatively states,

It would be wrong, however, to say—as people sometimes do—that the changes in our text have no real bearing on what the texts mean or on the theological conclusions that one draws from them. We have seen, in fact, that just the opposite is the case. In some instances, the very meaning of the text is at stake, depending on how one resolves a textual problem.¹⁰

So, simply stated, Ehrman believes that there were many theologically motivated alterations during the transmission of the New Testament, and consequently, many Christian beliefs are at stake.

In this article, however, I am not trying to prove that all of Ehrman's arguments or all of Ehrman's historical reconstructions are wrong. Limitation of space will not allow me to do that. Rather, I have twofold purposes. First, I want to show that Ehrman's reconstruction of one passage does not work. I believe this will open the way for a discussion of other passages in which Ehrman thinks the proto-orthodox party has altered the text for their own theological agenda. I will focus on John 1:18 as a test case, in which Ehrman denies the originality of the "accepted reading"¹¹ and proposes another reading as original.¹² Second, I also want to show—in contrast with what Ehrman said—that actually no Christian doctrine (especially the Christology of the Fourth Gospel) is affected no matter what reading of this verse is to be judged as original. In short, I want to prove that Ehrman's notion of textual transmission doesn't work for this verse.

9 Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 276-277.

10 Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 207-208.

11 By the term *accepted reading*, I mean the reading that is chosen by the Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies editors as original and then included in their critical text.

12 I will utilize the standard rules of textual criticism as our common ground, since Ehrman himself also uses the method. See, e.g., Bart D. Ehrman, "Textual Criticism of the New Testament," in Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 15-33.

EHRMAN'S ARGUMENTS ABOUT JOHN 1:18

Ehrman discusses this passage in at least three works: *The Orthodox Corruption of the Scripture*,¹³ *Lost Christianities*,¹⁴ and *Misquoting Jesus*.¹⁵ His full argument, however, can be found only in *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*. Ehrman's conclusion about this passage is that the scribes have changed the original reading, *monogenēs huios* ("unique son"), to be more appropriate with the orthodox view. He writes, "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...."¹⁶ There are two considerations that lead Ehrman to arrive at that conclusion.

First, he says that external evidences support the originality of *monogenēs huios*. Ehrman argues that the "accepted" reading, *monogenēs theos* ("unique God"), can be found only in the Alexandrian tradition. On the other hand, the *monogenēs huios* reading can be found in all other text types: Western, Caesarean, Byzantine, and secondary witness of the Alexandrian (e.g. C³, Ψ, 892, 1241, Ath Alex).¹⁷ He adds,

And although the witnesses supporting ὁ μονογενῆς υἱός (*ho monogenēs huios*) cannot individually match the antiquity of the Alexandrian papyri, there can be little doubt that this reading must also be dated at least to the time of their production. There is virtually no other way to explain its predominance in the Greek, Latin, and Syriac traditions, not to mention its occurrence in fathers such as Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian, who were writing before our earliest surviving manuscripts were produced.¹⁸

Second, Ehrman questions the meaning of *monogenēs theos* for first Christian reader. He writes, "The problem, of course, is that Jesus can be the *unique* 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 *monogenēs* is

13 Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 78-82.

14 Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: OUP, 2003), 223.

15 Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 161-162.

16 Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 78.

17 Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 79.

18 Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 79.

said to reside in the bosom of the Father. How can the *monogenēs theos*, the unique God, stand in such a relationship to (another) God?"¹⁹ He continues, "One is left, then, with the problem of how to understand [*ho*] *monogenēs theos* in the *Johannine* world if it were accepted as original."²⁰

If Ehrman is correct that *monogenēs huios* is the original reading, why did, then, the scribes change it to *monogenēs theos*? Ehrman thinks of two possibilities. First, the scribes want to conform the verses to the whole context of the chapter 1, in which the word *theos* occurs seven times (but the word *huios* never), or, second, it was motivated by theological polemics that took place at the early stages of the church.²¹ Ehrman, however, favors the latter when he concludes:

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. 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. For the scribe who created this variant, Christ is not merely portrayed as the "unique Son." He himself is God, the "unique God," who is to be differentiated from God the Father, in whose bosom he resides, but who nonetheless is his co-equal. This Alexandrian reading derives from an anti adoptionistic context, and therefore represents an orthodox corruption.²²

EVALUATING EHRMAN'S CONCLUSION

Some scholars (such as Beasley Murray²³) admit that deciding which reading is original is not that easy. Thus it is unsurprising to find that some scholars stand on the same side as Ehrman in deciding *monogenēs huios* as the original reading (for example, Haenchen²⁴). I think, however, that Eh-

19 Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 80. Emphasis original.

20 Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 80. Emphasis original.

21 Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 82.

22 Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 82.

23 George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Word Biblical Commentary 36; Dallas: Word, 2002), 2.

24 See Ernst Haenchen, *John 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapter 1-6* (Hermeneia; trans. Robert Funk; ed. Robert Funk and Ulrich Busse; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 121.

rman's conclusion is rather weak for some reasons. To demonstrate this I will divide my discussion into two sections (considering external evidences and considering internal evidences), so that it is easier to understand.

Considering External Evidence

From the apparatuses of NA²⁸ and UBS-GNT⁴, we know that there are basically five optional readings in this verse: *ho monogenēs huios*, *ei mē ho monogenēs huios*, *monogenēs theos*, *ho monogenēs theos*, and *monogenēs*. It can be described as follows:

Reading	Witnesses
1. <i>ho monogenēs huios</i>	A, C ³ , K, Γ, Δ, Θ, Ψ, f ^{1, 13} , 565, 579, 700, 892, 1241, 1424, Majority Text, lat, sy ^{c, h} , Cl ^{pt} , Cl ^{exThd pt}
2. <i>ei mē ho monogenēs huios</i>	W ^s , it, Ir ^{lat pt}
3. <i>monogenēs theos</i>	P ⁶⁶ , N [*] , B, C [*] , L, sy ^{p, hmg} , Or ^{pt} , Did
4. <i>ho monogenēs theos</i>	P ⁷⁵ , N ¹ , 33, Cl ^{pt} , Cl ^{exThd pt} , Or ^{pt}
5. <i>monogenēs</i>	Vg ^{ms} , Ps-Vigilius

However, from that table there are some preliminary observations:

- (a) The fact that *ei mē* (“except”) in reading 2 is attested only by W^s, it, Ir^{lat pt} makes this phrase unlikely to be original. The addition of this phrase to *ho monogenēs* perhaps was a scribal way of making the meaning of the text clearer (“No one has ever seen God, *except* the “unique Son” who is at the Father’s side....”).
- (b) The occurrence of article *ho* for *monogenēs theos* in some manuscripts (reading 4) can be regarded as a later addition, since it is more natural to comprehend that such an article has been added instead of being omitted by the latter scribes.²⁵
- (c) The reading *monogenēs* (reading 5) can be ignored for it is weakly at-

25 Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd edition; 4th rev. ed; London/New York: UBS, 1994), 169.

tested. It is supported by only two witnesses and, perhaps, came up as a scribal way to avoid difficulties from a “somewhat clumsy”²⁶ *monogenēs theos* or from a *theos – huios* dilemma.

Therefore, there actually exist two variants (significant readings) only: *monogenēs huios* and *monogenēs theos*. If so, the supporters of each variant can be described as follows:

m o n o - P⁷⁵, P⁶⁶, ⳃ, B, 33, C*, L, sy^{p,hmg}, Cl^{pt}, Cl^{exThd pt}, Or^{pt}, Did,
g e n ē s GrNy, Eus, etc.
theos

m o n o - A, C³, K, Γ, Δ, Θ, Ψ, W^s, it, f^{1.13}, 565, 579, 700, 892, 1241,
g e n ē s 1424, Majority Text, lat, sy^{c,h}, Cl^{pt}, Ir^{lat pt}, Hipp, Ath, Alex,
huios Chr, etc.

Based on the age of the witnesses, *monogenēs theos* is very well supported. It is found in some older and important manuscripts such as P⁶⁶ (ca. 200), P⁷⁵ (third century), ⳃ (fourth century), B (fourth century), C (fifth century), and in some early fathers, such as Origen (d. 254) and Clement of Alexandria (d. 215). Although the reading *monogenēs huios* is known as well by some early fathers, the oldest Uncial witness of this reading comes from the fifth century, the Codex Alexandrinus (A). In other words, *monogenēs huios* is supported mostly by late witnesses.

As to the spread of the reading, Ehrman is not entirely correct. As it can be seen, Ehrman is right when he says that *monogenēs huios* is widespread. Yet, he is wrong when he writes that *monogenēs theos* belongs exclusively to the B (Alexandrian) text. The fact is that the *monogenēs theos* reading does not belong exclusively to the B text, since it can also be found in the D text (ⳃ)²⁷ and the C text (possibly Origen and Eusebius). So, what can we conclude from this data? Because *monogenēs theos* is supported by

26 Borrowing Francis Moloney’s term from Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Sacra Pagina 4; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 46.

27 Although most parts of ⳃ belongs to B cluster, scholars found that John 1-8 belongs to another cluster (possibly D cluster). See Eldon Jay Epp, “The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament Text in the Second Century: A Dynamic View of Textual Transmission,” in Eldon Jay Epp and Gordon D. Fee, *Studies and the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 283-295.

the oldest and best witnesses, and because this reading is also found in the B, D, and C texts, therefore, in my opinion, the external evidence seems to give more support to the originality of the *monogenēs theos* reading.

Considering Internal Evidence

When we move to talk about transcriptional probabilities, Ehrman thinks that it is more likely that the scribes changed *monogenēs huios* to *monogenēs theos*, either because of harmonization with the context or, as Ehrman favors, theological polemic took place during the early stage of the church. But the Ehrman reconstruction is apparently problematic for the following reasons.

First, *monogenēs theos* seems to be the more difficult reading. Moloney admits that “a reference to Jesus Christ as ‘the only God’ would be *some-what clumsy* in this context and within the overall christology and theology of the Fourth Gospel.”²⁸ The fact that Ehrman himself questions the meaning of this phrase for the first-century Christians affirms that he sees this phrase as the more difficult reading. So, if the canon *lectio difficilior portior* is consistently followed, then this variant is more likely to be the original reading.

Second, *monogenēs theos* occurs only in this verse. In contrast, the *monogenēs huios* reading occurs twice in the Gospel of John (John 3:16, 18) and once in another Johannine writing (1 John 4:9). In other words, *monogenēs theos* is not a usual Johannine expression, while *monogenēs huios* is. So, from this fact, it is more understandable if the scribes replace the more difficult and unusual reading, *monogenēs theos*, with the easier and familiar reading, *monogenēs huios*, than vice versa. Carson comments:

No other passage puts these words together like this, which probably accounts for the change made by many copyists to *monogenēs huios*, “the unique and beloved Son” (or, in more traditional language, “the only begotten Son”). That is so common an expression in John that it is hard to imagine any copyist changing “Son” to “God.” Similarly, it is possible to explain the weakly-attested *monogenēs*, without either “Son” or “God” added, as an attempt to clear up the difficult reading with “God” by simply

28 Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 46. Emphasis mine.

dropping the latter; it is hard to imagine why any copyist would have *added* “God” to *monogenēs* if this short form had been original.²⁹

Similar to that, Ramsey Michaels says, “It is very improbable that scribes would have changed such a familiar Johannine expression as ‘the unique Son’ to something so unusual and unfamiliar as ‘**God the One and Only**.’”³⁰

Third, Ehrman’s notion that the change from *monogenēs huios* to *monogenēs theos* was caused by theological polemics is somewhat baseless. If the scribes did really want to promote a kind of higher Christology by changing *huios* to *theos*, then, it would be fruitless effort since the Fourth Gospel itself performs a higher Christology.³¹ In other words, their alteration would bring no significant advantage for the Fourth Gospel.

Finally, as some commentators proposed, the *monogenēs theos* is more likely to be the original because it structurally forms an *inclusio* with verse 1. Beasley-Murray, quoting Lindars, writes, “The harder reading has the merit of bringing the thought back to v 1, and so constitutes another case of the Johannine *inclusio*, ‘God’ here has the same meaning as ‘and the Word was God’ (1c).”³² Keener also argues, “In further support of the ‘God’ reading may be...the probable *inclusio* surrounding Jesus’ role introduced in 1:1c....”³³ Thus, the structure of John 1 implies that *monogenēs theos* is the original reading.

After considering both external and internal evidences I contend that the *monogenēs theos* reading is more likely to be the original reading. It is supported by the best and important manuscripts; it is also a difficult and unusual reading, so that it is more understandable if the scribes softened the difficult reading than changed the familiar reading to be “somewhat clumsy.” In other words, Ehrman’s scenario that in this verse some scribes

29 D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC; Leicester/Grand Rapids, MI: IVP/Eerdmans, 1991), 139. Cf. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 169;

30 J. Ramsey Michaels, *John* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989.), 27. Emphasis original. Cf. also Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary Vol. 1* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 425.

31 Cf. Wasserman, “Misquoting Manuscripts?” 343.

32 Beasley-Murray, *John*, 3.

33 Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 425. C.f. also Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 49.

have altered the words to accommodate their higher Christology is indefensible.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

But, what if I am wrong? What if the *monogenēs huios* is the original reading? Will the Gospel of John still promote a higher Christology? Is Jesus ever actually called God in the Fourth Gospel? And finally, is it true, as Ehrman says, that there are any Christian beliefs at stake?³⁴

A further investigation shows that no christological aspect needs to be changed. This is because Christianity is not a “one verse” religion.³⁵ On the contrary, Christianity is built on the continuous and consistent teachings of Jesus and his apostles spread throughout the Bible. Variants perhaps affect the interpretation of a particular passage, but it will not destroy any (“cardinal”) Christian doctrines.³⁶ Jones gives a great summary about this:

In every case in which two or more options remain possible, every possible option simply reinforces truths that are already clearly present in the writings of that particular author and in the New Testament as a whole; there is no point at which any of the possible options would require readers to rethink an essential belief about Jesus or to doubt the historical integrity of the New Testament.³⁷

Returning to John 1:18, on the one hand, if *monogenēs huios* is the original reading, it does not mean that John does not show Jesus to be God. As I mentioned above, the Fourth Gospel entertains a kind of higher Christology. It records that Jesus identifies himself with YHWH of the Old Testament. For instance, he said, “Before Abraham was, I am,” which is not a mere claim of preexistence; rather, as Carson notes, “[t]hat the Jews take up stones to kill him presupposes that they understand these words

34 Cf. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption*, 276-77; idem, *Misquoting Jesus*, 207-208.

35 Carson even warns us to “be cautious about absolutizing what is said or commanded only once.” See D.A. Carson, “Must I Learn How to Interpret the Bible?” *Modern Reformation* 5, no. 3 (May/June 1996): 18-22.

36 Cf. Wallace, “Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism”: 93.

37 Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 55.

as some kind of blasphemous *claim to deity*.³⁸ John also shows Jesus doing something that Jews think can only be done by God when he raised Lazarus from the dead on the fourth day. Finally, John notes the noble confession of Thomas when he called Jesus his Lord and his God (John 20:28).³⁹ Thus, even though *monogenēs huios* is the original reading, the notion that Jesus is God will not disappear from the Fourth Gospel.

On the other hand, when I concluded that *monogenēs theos* is more original, of course it doesn't eliminate the notion that Jesus is the Son of God in the Fourth Gospel. Though such explicit expression comes up only in two other verses (John 3:16, 19), the idea of Jesus's unique sonship can be found throughout the Fourth Gospel (such as in John 1:34; 49; 3:17, 35-36; 5:19ff; 11:4, 27; 20:31).

In short, the idea of Jesus as God will not be changed because *monogenēs huios* is the original reading, just as the idea of Jesus as the Son of God will not be damaged because *monogenēs theos* is the original reading. In the Fourth Gospel, both ideas can be found side by side no matter what reading of John 1:18 is judged to be original.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

Although Ehrman is a good textual scholar, sometimes his reconstruction, as we have seen, is weak. I think his bias becomes the main reason behind his questionable reconstruction. His past experience has probably generated a kind of bias toward Christianity.⁴¹ Instead of doing even-handed reconstruction, Ehrman's bias, sadly, controlled his research and prompted him to use the data to serve his bias. He ignored the exter-

38 Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 358. Emphasis mine.

39 Some Oneness (and Muslim) advocates (in Indonesia) think that Thomas's statement is a kind of expression of shock. This interpretation is impossible, however, for two reasons. First, it is not appropriate to the context of the Jewish people, who hal-low the name of the Lord (cf. the third commandment of Decalogue). Second, the "shock" comes too late. If it was really an expression of shock, it had to take place right after Jesus's appearance. The fact that Jesus had time to speak beforehand shows that Thomas's statement cannot be understood as a shock expression.

40 Cf. also Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 100; Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 124.

41 Ehrman tells his past stories in the Introduction of his *Misquoting Jesus*, 1-15.

nal evidence and did not sufficiently consider other possibilities.⁴² In short, Ehrman's bias prompted him to generate scenarios that put the orthodox party into a corner, even though many times the data can actually be understood differently. Ehrman is correct that there are some theologically motivated alterations in the transmission of the New Testament, but he is wrong in trying to apply it everywhere.⁴³ Also, Ehrman is right that the variants will affect the interpretation of particular passages, but he is incorrect when he thinks it will change any theological stance. At least, John 1:18 has shown it.

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42 Unfortunately, such phenomena can as well be seen in his reconstruction over many other passages (e.g., Mark 1:41; Luke 3:22; 22:19-20; 24:12; Hebrew 2:9, etc). I have discussed those passages that Ehrman frequently discusses in my MTh thesis. See Stefanus Kristianto, *Evaluasi terhadap Pandangan Bart Ehrman mengenai Transmisi Teks Perjanjian Baru dan Implikasinya bagi Iman Kristen* (unpublished MTh thesis; Lawang: STT Aletheia, 2015), 55-75. For a similar critique that Ehrman tends to ignore the external evidence, see, e.g., Philip M. Miller, "The Least Orthodox Reading Is to Be Preferred: A New Canon for New Testament Textual Criticism?" in Daniel B. Wallace, ed., *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic, and Apocryphal Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011), 57-89; for similar critique that Ehrman does not pay attention to other possible reconstructions, see Gordon D. Fee, "Review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* in CRBR 8 (1995): 204," quoted in Wasserman, "Misquoting Manuscripts?" 350; Gerald Bray, "Review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*," *Churchman* 108, no. 1 (1994): 84-86.

43 Cf. also Birdsall's review of Ehrman's work: "Ehrman may convince us of the correctness of his hypothesis in some instances, but weakens his endeavor by the attempt to prove his case over too wide a range." See J. Neville Birdsall, "Review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*," *Theology* 97, no. 780 (1994): 462.