

APPENDIX E

Mark 16:9-20 and the Doctrine of Inspiration

For over a hundred years it has been a commonplace of New Testament textual criticism to argue that Mark 16:9-20 was not and could not have been written by Mark (or whoever wrote the rest of the book), that it was a subsequent accretion. However, among those who wish to believe or claim that Mark's Gospel was inspired by the Holy Spirit, that it is God's Word, I am not aware of any who are prepared to believe that it could really have been God's intention to terminate the book with *εφοβουντο γαρ* (verse 8). The most popular hypothesis seems to be that the Autograph was produced as a codex (not a scroll) and that the sheet (or sheets) containing the original ending was torn off and lost before any copies were made.¹ I wish to examine the implications of the claim that verses 9-20 did not form part of the Autograph and that the original ending has vanished (whatever the explanation offered for such a circumstance).

I am writing from the position of one who believes in the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture and am addressing those who believe (or would like to believe) that the Bible is God's Word written—“*all Scripture is God-breathed*” (2 Timothy 3:16).

So, we claim that the Holy Spirit inspired Mark's Gospel. And why would He do something like that? Evidently God wanted subsequent generations to have an official biography of Jesus Christ, a description of His life, death and resurrection whose accuracy was guaranteed and whose content was sufficient for His purpose. (That there are several official biographies written from different perspectives does not obviate the integrity of each one individually.)² I find it inconceivable that an official biography, commissioned by God and written subject to His quality control, should omit proofs of the resurrection, should exclude all post-resurrection appearances, should end with the clause “*because they were afraid*”!

But most modern critics assure us that such is the case, that the genuine text ends at verse 8. So where was God all this time? If the critics' assessment is correct we seem to be between a rock and a hard place. Mark's Gospel as it stands is mutilated (if it ends at verse 8), the original ending having disappeared without a trace. But in that event what about God's purpose in commissioning this biography? Are we to say that God was unable to protect the text of Mark or that He just could not be bothered? Either option would be fatal to the claim that Mark's Gospel is “*God-breathed*”.

If God tried but was powerless to prevent the mutilation of Mark in this way, how can we be sure that the book has not been mutilated in other ways and places, or even systematically? For that matter, how can we be sure that other New Testament books have not been mutilated too, or maybe even all of them? Anyway, the degree of mutilation would no longer be an issue because if God was powerless to protect His Word then He would not really be God and it would not make all that much difference what He says. The Bible would lose its authority and consequently its importance.

What about the other option—that God could have protected Mark but chose not to? Of what value would quality control be if it extended only to the writing? If God permitted the original ending of Mark to be lost before any copies were made then the biography was ‘published’ in a seriously incomplete form, and it becomes decidedly awkward to speak of its ‘verbal, plenary’ inspiration. If God would permit a mutilation of such magnitude, then what assurance do we have that He would not permit any number of further mutilations? Again, the problem extends to the other New Testament books. Quality control would be gone out the window and we would be left ‘whistling in the dark’. If God is not going to protect His text will not the purpose of inspiration be frustrated? 1 Chronicles 16:15 speaks of “the Word which He commanded, for a thousand generations”—there have been fewer than 300 since Adam.

But, What About All the Variants?

¹ See, for example, B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 126, fn. 7.

² I would say that Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience, Mark for a Roman audience, Luke for a Greek audience, and John for everyone.

It is a plain fact that the extant manuscripts contain a great many copying mistakes and even deliberate alterations. Since we cannot deny that God permitted this to happen, it remains to ask why and with what implications. First, the why.

Why would God permit mistakes and alterations in the copying process? I have no direct revelation to offer on the subject but I suppose the answer begins with God's purpose in creating the human race. It appears that He desired a type of being that could respond to Him in worship and love, a being that could choose (John 4:23-24). In Hebrews 11:6 we are taught that God demands faith and rewards those who **diligently** seek Him. It would seem that His purpose in creating man entails an element of test. The evidence may not be overwhelming, crushing, inescapable or there would be no adequate 'test'. Thus, God permitted textual variants to test our faith and determination, to test our attitude, to test our willingness to humbly and patiently look for answers (Proverbs 25:2 and Revelation 5:10).

Another aspect of the creation of beings with volition is that both God and man must live with the consequences of the exercise of that volition. If He exerts complete control, we become robots and the whole point of the experiment is lost. Alas, most of man's volition is expressed in rebellion against our Creator. A fair share of that rebellion has been directed against His Word—usually by rejecting it, but sometimes by trying to alter it.

Besides all that, our abilities and capacity to understand are limited. As it says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, we are mere "*earthen vessels*", clay pots. Even if the Autographs had been engraved on gold tablets and miraculously preserved intact to this hour, who among us could offer a 'perfect' interpretation of that Text? (Anyone working from a translation is dealing with some imperfection before he even starts, because no translation can be perfect—the nature of language does not permit it.) Since our understanding is condemned to be imperfect in any case, is it really necessary to have a perfect Text? If not, is there some point at which the amount of imperfection ceases to be 'tolerable'? Which brings us to the implications. I will begin with some analogies.

Our everyday lives furnish several analogies which illumine this question. All our lives we use measuring devices—rulers, yardsticks, tapes—that vary slightly from each other. We buy many things according to measure without questioning the accuracy of the instrument, even though a precise comparison would reveal discrepancies between instruments. Why? Because the discrepancies are not big enough to concern us and because we know there is an absolute standard to refer to should the need arise. At the Bureau of Standards in Washington, D.C., in a hermetically sealed case, is the absolute, unvarying standard yardstick. How many Americans have ever seen that standard? Very few, comparatively. Yet we are born, live and die without seeing the standard and without feeling any inconvenience. We assume that our rulers are close enough for ordinary practical purposes, as indeed they are, and live happily with them. We know that we can go to Washington if a question arises that warrants the expense.

If someone asks a group of people for the time of day he may well get up to ten different answers, scattered along a ten-minute continuum. We daily live with one or two-minute discrepancies among the several time pieces we may consult and think nothing of it. Two different radio stations in a city often differ from each other by a minute or two, and so on. The system works well enough because there is a recognized standard in Greenwich, England. I have never been there and I suppose few Americans have, but we get along handily just the same. But if there were no standard we would soon be in trouble.

When a legislature draws up a law great care is taken with the precise wording, because once it is published it is law—it becomes a standard, binding upon the people under its jurisdiction. Great care is taken with the standard, but law enforcement officers are not expected to memorize it. All they need is a reasonably accurate understanding of the intent and provisions of the law. When an officer arrests an offender and cites the law he will probably only give the gist of it. No court will countenance a plea by the defendant that the arresting officer did not cite the law verbatim. (Similarly, I doubt that God will countenance an unbeliever's plea that he did not have access to the Law verbatim—it is enough to have the gist.) However, during a trial emphasis is often given to the precise 'letter' of the law and the whole disposition of the case may depend on the interpretation given to that 'letter'.

Alcohol (ethanol) may be found on the shelf at any drugstore, but seldom exceeding 92%; perhaps the pharmacist has a private supply of 96% for special purposes. For ordinary household use 92% is more than adequate—in a pinch a stout 60% rum will burn and may be used to disinfect. It may be that certain scientific experiments require 100% alcohol but it will be hard to come by and quite expensive. As with all manufactured goods, the higher the degree of precision or ‘perfection’ the more difficult and costly it is to attain. Different purposes require different degrees of precision (in any area), but for most people and most purposes most of the time the degree of precision does not have to be very high. In fact, in the majority of cases a superlative degree of precision would be wasted—the context simply does not allow for its full utilization or appreciation.

So, why has God allowed errors to get into the Text, or why does He permit faulty interpretation? In the first place the whole point of having a human race apparently involves giving us the ability and freedom to sin and take the consequences (both individually and corporately—the larger the group is that participates in a sin, the more serious and far-reaching are the consequences). But in the second place normal and daily use does not require a superlative degree of precision—in any event we have more of God’s Truth than we can possibly appropriate. However, it is the availability of a recognized standard that enables us to tolerate minor imperfections, in a given area. We have the treasure in “*earthen vessels*”, but the “*treasure*” must exist!

But, Are Not the Autographs Lost?

The question of a lost standard remains. Returning to the analogy of measuring devices, what would happen if someone stole the ‘inerrant’ yardstick from the Bureau of Standards? Well, there would be no inconvenience so long as we did not know about it—we would continue happily as we always have. But if the loss became known then confidence in the individual instruments would be undermined and our business dealings would become complicated by arguments about the standard of measurement (as I have observed in certain places). I believe we have seen this syndrome with reference to the Bible. Until the 19th century there was no question (to speak of) about the standard, and the Bible was accepted as authoritative even though in fact the text they were using was not identical to the Original. But during the past 200 years critics have convinced the majority (in Europe and North America) that the standard is gone, with the resulting spiritual and moral confusion we see on every side.

The problem is largely one of perception. Generations have lived and died happily using their imperfect rulers and yardsticks without suffering any damage or inconvenience—the discrepancies were not big enough to matter. (If someone had convinced them that they had an insuperable problem, however, they would have been damaged—gratuitously.) Similarly, our manuscripts and versions contain discrepancies, most of which are not serious enough to matter for ordinary purposes. However, if someone makes a ‘court case’ out of some issue then the existence and identity of the relevant standard become crucial.

I submit that the central ‘issue’ has to do with the authority of Scripture. When the Protestant Reformation appealed to the Scriptures (in the original languages) as the supreme authority, the Roman Catholic Church countered by pointing to the textual variation in the manuscripts and challenging the Reformation leaders to produce the standard.¹ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries destructive critics went beyond the variants to challenge the date, authorship and composition of the individual books of the Bible. I consider that these challenges have been adequately handled by others and return to the problem of textual variation.

How does textual variation affect the authority of Scripture? It depends. Is that authority to be seen as absolute or relative? If we are prepared to settle for a relative authority, the ‘Neo-orthodox’ position, we can assimilate an admixture of error in the Text. But if we wish to claim absolute authority the standard must be perfect. Scripture derives its authority from divine inspiration, but if any part of the text is not inspired that part lacks authority. Specifically, the errors and alterations introduced by fallible men down through the centuries of copying lack authority. For this reason those who claim that the Bible is inerrant usually limit the claim to the Autographs. But since the Autographs are gone (they were probably worn out from use within the first one hundred years) what good does that do us? It depends.

¹ See Theodore P. Letis, “John Owens Versus Brian Walton”, *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate* (Fort Wayne: The Institute for Reformation Biblical Studies, 1987), pp. 145-90. For more on this subject please see Appendix I.

The analogies already given show that we can coexist with minor discrepancies quite handily without feeling that we have been cheated or deceived. In fact, in most contexts to insist on absolute perfection would be deemed unreasonable, if not intolerable. We accept small discrepancies, but not **big** ones! If we feel that someone is trying to take advantage of us our reaction is prompt. Similarly, we must distinguish between honest copying errors, due to inattention, and deliberate alterations. Further, many alterations appear to be relatively 'harmless', while others are overtly damaging.

In Matthew 13:25 and 39 the Lord Jesus explains that Satan sows tares among wheat—this is true of the Church and it is true of the Biblical text; although the analogy is not perfect, in the latter case the “tares” may be likened to poison mixed with the Bread of Life. To give a few quick examples: the variants in Matthew 1:7 and 10 that introduce Asaph and Amos into Jesus’ genealogy are poison; the variant in Matthew 1:18 that ascribes to Christ a “beginning” is poison; the variant in Mark 6:22 that turns Herodias into Herod’s daughter is poison; the variant in Luke 3:33 that inserts the fictitious Admin and Arni into Jesus’ genealogy is poison (these were probably the result of scribal carelessness, or ignorance, but for modern editors to intrude them into the printed text is irresponsible); the variant in Luke 23:45 that has the sun being eclipsed is poison; the variant in John 1:18 that reads “an only begotten god” is poison; the variant in 1 Corinthians 5:1 that denies the existence of incest among the Gentiles is poison; the omission of Mark 16:9-20 is poison; the use of brackets in printed Scripture (in whatever language) to insinuate to the user that the enclosed material is spurious is poison. By ‘poison’ I mean violence done to the Biblical text that undermines its credibility.¹

So where does that leave us? It leaves us with thousands of manuscript copies (of the NT writings) from which we may recover the precise wording of the Autographs, provided we evaluate the evidence on the basis of what the Bible says about itself, about God and His purposes, about man, and about Satan and his ways. To these must be added the declarations of the early Church Fathers and the facts of history that have come down to us. By careful attention to all relevant considerations we can weed out the errors and alterations and affirm with reasonable certainty what must have been the wording of the Autographs. Please see Chapter 7 for my answer.

Since God the Son on earth emphatically declared, *“till heaven and earth pass away not one jot or one tittle will by any means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled”* (Matthew 5:18), I conclude that He would never permit a true reading to disappear from the manuscript tradition. I am well aware that Jesus was presumably referring specifically to the Pentateuch. How then can I apply His statement to the NT? First, jots and tittles refer to **letters**, not concepts or ideas; in fact they are the smallest of letters. Our Lord’s words constitute a rather radical declaration about the preservation through time of the precise form of the Sacred Text. The third chapter of 2 Corinthians makes clear that the *“new covenant”* (verse 6) is *“more glorious”* (verse 8) than the old, including the very Decalogue itself (*“engraved on stones,”* verse 7). Chapters 7 through 9 of Hebrews demonstrate the general superiority of the new covenant over the old and Jesus Himself both guarantees (7:22) and mediates (8:6) this “better” covenant. I conclude that God’s protective interest in the New Testament must be at least as great as His protective interest in the Old. 1 Chronicles 16:15 declares that interest to extend to a thousand generations; in other words, to the end of the world (there have yet to be 300, since Adam).

To be faced with the task of recognizing the genuine reading among two or more variants is one thing; to affirm that something so crucial as the ending of a Gospel has disappeared without a trace is altogether different. If Mark 16:9-20 is not genuine then it would seem that Christ’s statement in Matthew 5:18 is in error.

The Matter of Canonicity

There is a further question—why do we claim that Mark is “Gospel” in the first place? Where did it get its canonicity? Or to put it another way, if God is going to inspire a text for the use of subsequent generations He has to make sure that people recognize it for what it is. If the nature of such a text is not perceived and it is relegated to oblivion, or treated with no more respect than any other bit of literature, then God’s purpose is frustrated. So why do we say that Mark’s Gospel is “Bible”? Because the Church, in her corporate capacity, has so declared, and she has done so down through the centuries, beginning in the second (at least). (We do not have hard evidence from the first

¹ I have a fuller treatment of the subject of variation in Appendix F.

century, but we do from the second and all subsequent centuries.) Of necessity God worked through the Church to achieve both canonicity (the public recognition of its quality) and preservation. (I would say that the superior quality of the inspired writings is intrinsic and can be perceived by a spiritual person in any age, but if the early Church had not recognized them they would not have been copied through the centuries and thus would not have come down to us.)

What has the Church, down through the centuries, said about Mark 16:9-20? With united voice she has declared its canonicity. If she was deceived on this point, how do we know she was not deceived about the rest of the book? However, satanic activity on the fringes produced variant readings that in some cases were quite damaging. The primary evidence is furnished by the continuous text Greek manuscripts.

The External Evidence

The passage in question is contained in every extant Greek manuscript (about 1,700) except three: codices B (Vaticanus) and \aleph (Sinaiticus) and the twelfth century minuscule 304. It is also contained in all extant lectionaries (compendia of the established Scripture lessons linked to the ecclesiastical calendar). The importance of this lectionary evidence has been explained by J.W. Burgon: "That lessons from the New Testament were publicly read in the assemblies of the faithful according to a definite scheme, and on an established system, at least as early as the fourth century,—has been shown to be a plain historical fact."¹ And again:

It is found that, from the very first, S. Mark xvi. 9-20 has been everywhere, and by all branches of the Church Catholic, claimed for **two** of the Church's greatest Festivals,—Easter and Ascension. A more weighty or a more significant circumstance can scarcely be imagined. To suppose that a portion of Scripture singled out for such extraordinary honour by the Church universal is a spurious addition to the Gospel, is purely irrational.²

Although after a time there came to be prescribed Scripture passages for every day of the year, the practice evidently began with the weekends, and most especially the most important ones. According to Baumstark's Law the lections associated with the great festivals seem to have been the earliest to have been adopted.³ Since the idea was borrowed from the Jewish synagogue the practice may well have been generalized during the second century, if not the first.

Before the Church started producing lectionaries as such (as well as after), regular manuscripts were adapted by putting symbols in the margins (or in the text) to indicate the beginning and ending of lections. These included the word *τελος* "end", either in full or abbreviated. Statements of evidence for omitting verses 9-20 usually mention a number of MSS that have such symbols at the end of verse 8 (and thus at the beginning of verse 9), claiming that they were put there to indicate doubt about the genuineness of the following verses. It happens that not only is Mark 16:9-20 itself one of the most prominent of all lections in the liturgical calendar, but a separate lection ends precisely with verse 8.

Consider what Bruce Metzger writes concerning MS 2386:

The latter, however, is only an apparent witness for the omission, for although the last page of Mark closes with *εφοβουντο γαρ*, the next leaf of the manuscript is missing, and following 16:8 is the sign indicating the close of an ecclesiastical lection . . . , a clear implication that the manuscript originally continued with additional material from Mark.⁴

Notice his "clear implication". Is it not obvious? One cannot read beyond the end of a book so there is no point in putting a lection sign there. Which makes one wonder about the intentions of the editors of UBS³. In their apparatus, as evidence for the omission of verses 9-20, they include "*(Lect? Lection ends with verse 8)*"—this presumably refers to lection signs in the margins since it cannot mean that the lectionaries do not have verses 9-20. But lection signs in the margin are evidence for,

¹ *The Last Twelve Verses according to S. Mark*, 1871, p. 207. Reprinted in 1959 by the Sovereign Grace Book Club, but the pagination given refers to the 1871 edition (to find the corresponding place in the 1959 edition add 78 to the page number).

² *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³ W.R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 35. On pp. 34 and 35 he gives a good summary of the lectionary evidence.

⁴ Metzger, p. 122, fn. 1.

not against! Notice that in discussing the evidence for variant sets within verses 9-20 UBS³ invariably cites *Byz Lect*, which means that they recognize that the lectionaries contain the passage. In fact, from the circumstance that they also list '185m' it appears that lectionary 185 is the only one that does not have the verses in the Synaxarion (just in the Menologion).

The Syriac, Latin, Coptic and Gothic versions all massively support the passage. Only the Armenian and Georgian versions (both fifth century) omit it. To be more precise, every Syriac MS (about 1,000?) except one (the Sinaitic, usually dated around 400) contains the passage. Although the Sinaitic is the oldest extant Syriac MS, apparently, it is not representative of the Syriac tradition. B.F. Westcott himself, writing in 1864, assigned the Peshitta to the early second century, in accord with the general opinion of the Scholarly world of the time.¹ The demands of the W-H theory subsequently led them to assign the Peshitta to the fifth century, but Vööbus demonstrates that the Peshitta goes back to at least the mid-fourth century and that it was not the result of an authoritative revision.² The Sinaitic is a palimpsest; it was scraped off to make way for some devotional material, which is an eloquent commentary upon the contemporary evaluation of its quality!

Every Latin MS (8,000?) except one (Bobiensis, usually dated about 400) contains the passage. But Bobiensis (k) also seems to be the only witness of any kind to offer us the so-called 'shorter ending' by itself—every other witness that contains the 'shorter ending' also contains the 'longer ending', thereby displaying a conflation (an incredibly stupid one!). Now then, so far as I know everyone recognizes the 'shorter ending' to be an aberration, which means that Bobiensis is aberrant at this point and does not represent the Latin tradition. If the Latin tradition dates to the second century here we have second century support for the 'longer ending'. It appears that the only Coptic witness that omits the passage is one Sahidic MS, although there are a few that exhibit the conflation already mentioned (they are thereby convicted as being aberrant).

The Diatessaron (according to the Arabic, Italian and Old Dutch traditions) and Irenaeus clearly attest the last twelve verses in the second century! As does Hippolytus a few years later. Then come Vincentius, the Gospel of Nicodemus and the Apostolic Constitutions in the third century; Eusebius, Aphraates, Ambrose and Chrysostom in the fourth; followed by Jerome, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Victor of Antioch, etc.

Clement of Alexandria and Origen are usually cited as being against these verses, but it is an argument from silence. Clement's surviving works seem not to refer to the last chapter of Mark, but neither do they refer to the last chapter of Matthew. So?

The main patristic source used to argue against Mark 16:9-20 is Eusebius. It appears that he wrote a defense against four alleged discrepancies between resurrection accounts of the Gospels put forward by a certain "Marinus" (our knowledge is based on a tenth century abridgement of what he presumably wrote, an abridgement that lacks internal consistency). The first alleged discrepancy is between Matthew 28:1 and Mark 16:9. On the face of it "Marinus" is assuming that verse 9 is genuine "Gospel" or there would be no problem, so we may conclude that he understood that to be the position of the Church. That Eusebius takes the time to answer as he does points in the same direction. Further, in answering the second alleged discrepancy Eusebius simply assumes the genuineness of the Marcan account and argues that Matthew's turn of phrase has been misunderstood. However, in answering the first allegation (according to the abridgement) he offers two options: "One might say that the passage is not contained in all the copies of Mark's Gospel . . . ; another says that both accounts (Matthew and Mark) are genuine and must be properly understood." With the first option he employs the optative mood, appropriate to the genre of hypothetical rhetoric (which means that nothing said by the hypothetical speaker is being vouched for by Eusebius), while with the second he switches to the indicative mood, presumably an indication of what he himself considered to be the correct position—so much so that when he moves on to the second "discrepancy" he does not offer the option of rejecting the passage.

However, the "canons" or "sections" of Eusebius (but not the so-called "sections of Ammonius") may not have included verses 9-20. In some Greek MSS the sectional number "233" is placed in the margin beside verse 8 and is the last such number (in Mark)—which means that section 233 started at verse 8, but since many "sections" contained more than one verse we do not know the extent of

¹ *The Bible in the Church* (London: MacMillan) p. 132 (reprintings in the 1890s still contain the statement).

² *Early Versions of the New Testament* (Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1954), pp. 100-102.

this one. But, there is more to the story. Burgon checked out 151 Greek MSS that have “Eusebian sections” marked in the margin and offers the following tabulation of results:

in 3 MSS the last section number is 232, set against v. 6,
in 34 MSS the last section number is 233, set against v. 8,
in 41 MSS the last section number is 234, set against v. 9 (?),
in 4 MSS the last section number is 235, set against v. 10 (?),
in 7 MSS the last section number is 236, set against v. 12 (?),
in 12 MSS the last section number is 237, set against v. 14 (?),
in 3 MSS the last section number is 238, set against v. 15,
in 1 MS the last section number is 239, set against v. 17,
in 10 MSS the last section number is 240, set against v. 19,
in 36 MSS the last section number is 241, set against v. 20.

Added to this, the following information may be of interest:

the oldest MS that stops with 232 is A of the 5th century,
the oldest MS that stops with 233 is L of the 8th century,
the oldest MS that stops with 234 is Δ of the 9th century,
the oldest MS that stops with 237 is Λ of the 9th century,
the oldest MS that stops with 239 is G of the 9th century,
the oldest MS that stops with 240 is H of the 9th century,
the oldest MS that stops with 241 is C of the 5th century.¹

For sections 235, 236 and 238, the earliest MS is 10th century or later. So, in three-fourths of these MSS the section numbers overtly go beyond verse 8, and the two oldest ones (A and C) do not aid the case for omission.

Jerome is cited as being against the passage because he put Marinus’ questions in a certain “Hebidia’s” mouth and used an abridgement of Eusebius’ answers in reply. However, Jerome’s own evaluation is clear from the fact that he included Mark 16:9-20 in his Latin Vulgate; he also quotes verses 9 and 14 in his writings. Hesychius of Jerusalem (not Severus of Antioch, nor Gregory of Nyssa) reproduces Eusebius in his own words in a treatise about the familiar “problems”. However, since he quotes Mark 16:19 and expressly states that St. Mark wrote the words, his own position is clear. Victor of Antioch repeats Eusebius yet again, and acknowledges that “very many” copies of Mark lack verses 9-20 (it is not clear whether he had verified this to be true or was just quoting Eusebius). Then he affirms that he himself has verified that “very many” contain them, and appeals to “accurate copies” and most especially to “the Palestinian exemplar of Mark which exhibits the Gospel verity” in support of his own contention that the passage is genuine. He even blames the omission on individuals who thought the verses to be spurious.²

Parenthesis—down with forgery!

((Every now and again I am handed a question that starts out by irritating me, but after I calm down I perceive that God is nudging me to clarify a point that needs it. This happened recently with the ‘jewel’ attributed to Jerome that in his day ‘most’ or ‘almost all’ of the Greek manuscripts did not have the last twelve verses of Mark. Since of the 1700 or so Greek MSS known to us that contain the last chapter of Mark only three don’t have them (one of them being a falsification at this point), how could a vast majority in the 5th century be reduced to a small fraction of one percent later on? In terms of the science of statistical probability, such an inversion is simply impossible. Only a world-wide campaign that was virtually 100% successful could bring about such a switch, and there is not a shred of evidence for such a campaign. Recall that Diocletian’s campaign to destroy NT MSS (applied unevenly in different areas) was past history by a century (not to mention Constantine’s ‘conversion’ and the consequences thereof). Kenneth Scott Latourette (*A History of Christianity* [New York: Harper, 1953], p. 231) describes Eusebius Hieronimus Sophronius (alias Jerome) as “a gifted and diligent scholar, enormously erudite, a master of languages, a lover of books, wielding a facile, vigorous, and often vitriolic pen” who “was an eloquent advocate of the monastic life”. He doubtless had his defects [don’t we all], but he was not ridiculously stupid, as he would have had to

¹ Burgon, p. 313; for the general discussion see pp. 127-134 and 297-314.

² For detailed documentation and an exhaustive discussion, see Burgon, pp. 19-31, 38-69, 265-90.

be to make the statement attributed to him. Our knowledge of the 'jewel' comes from the tenth century [the interval of five centuries does not inspire confidence]; it is almost certainly a forgery (someone 'borrowing' a famous name to give credence to some statement). Since 'sacred cows' don't like to die, a review of some relevant history is in order.

K. Aland on Egypt

Even that great champion of an Egyptian text, Kurt Aland, recognized that during the early centuries, including the 4th, Asia Minor (especially the Aegean area) was "the heartland of the Church". (It also became the heartland of the Byzantine Empire and the Orthodox Churches.) The demand for copies of the NT would have a direct bearing on the supply, and on the areas where copies would be concentrated. But on the subject of Egypt, Aland had this to say:

Our knowledge of the church in Egypt begins at the close of the 2nd century with bishop Demetrius who reorganized the dominantly Gnostic Egyptian church by founding new communities, consecrating bishops, and above all by establishing relationships with the other provinces of the church fellowship. Every church needed manuscripts of the New Testament—how was Demetrius to provide them? Even if there were a scriptorium in his own see, he would have to procure "orthodox" exemplars for the scribes. The copies existing in the Gnostic communities could not be used, because they were under suspicion of being corrupt. There is no way of knowing where the bishop turned for scribal exemplars, or for the large number of papyrus manuscripts he could give directly to his communities.¹

But just a minute, please. In the year of our Lord 200, who in Egypt was still speaking Greek? (For that matter, who among the ordinary people had ever spoken Greek there?) What Greek speaking communities could the worthy Demetrius have been serving? Would the scholars linked to the library in Alexandria be likely to bow to Demetrius? So far as we know, no apostle ever ministered in Egypt, and no Autograph of a New Testament book was held there. The Gnostic dominance probably should not surprise us. But the situation in Alexandria is relevant to the question in hand because of Clement, and especially Origen, who was mentor to Pamphilus, who was mentor to Eusebius of Caesarea.

Eusebius (Caesarea)

One suspects that the forger who 'borrowed' Jerome actually started out by 'borrowing' Eusebius (Caesarea). He has Eusebius answering a certain 'Marinus' with, "One might say that the passage is not contained in all the copies of Mark's Gospel . . ." The 'not all' became 'some' or even 'many', here and there. If Eusebius actually wrote such a thing, of which we aren't sure [the interval of six centuries does not inspire confidence here either], how was he qualified to do so? After the Roman destruction in 70 AD, Palestine became a backwater in the flow of the Christian river. The transmission of the true NT Text owes nothing to Caesarea. By the 4th century there would have been thousands, literally, of NT MSS in use around the world, of which Eusebius (d. 339, b. about 265) probably would not have seen more than a dozen (most from Alexandria, not Asia Minor). If Codex B was produced in Alexandria in time for Eusebius to see it, it would indeed permit him to say 'not all' copies; but why would he do so? And why should we pay any attention to him if he did? Here again, who in Palestine was still speaking Greek in the 4th century? What use would Eusebius have for Greek manuscripts? One other point: had Eusebius written such a thing, it would have been after Diocletian's campaign, presumably, but it would still be fresh in his memory and he should have mentioned it. Emboldened by success, as I suppose, the forger decided to 'up the ante' attributing the same exchange to Jerome, answering a certain 'Hebidia', except that now it is 'most' or 'almost all'.

Jerome (Bethlehem)

Jerome was born around 342 and died in 420 (or so). During 382-384 he was secretary to Pope Damasus, in Rome, and began work on the Latin Vulgate. Not long after the death of Damasus (384) he moved to Bethlehem, followed a few months later by the wealthy Paula, who helped him build a monastery, and so on. Jerome spent the last 30+ years of his life in Bethlehem, even more of a 'backwater' than Caesarea, and a century after Eusebius. All the negative observations made

¹ "The Text of the Church?" Kurt Aland, *Trinity Journal*, Vol. 8, N° 2, Fall, 1987, p. 138 [actually sent out in the Spring, 1989].

about Caesarea apply here with added force. Further, who in the Pope's entourage in Rome was speaking Greek in 380 AD? From Rome Jerome moved to Bethlehem. How many actual Greek MSS of the NT would Jerome have seen? Certainly fewer than 1% of the total in use (at that time there would be few Greek MSS in Italy and Palestine—who would use them?). In lists of early Church 'fathers' Jerome is usually listed with those who wrote in Latin, not Greek. The statement attributed to him is patently false, scientifically impossible; and he would have been ridiculously unqualified to make it. Not being stupid or dishonest, he didn't!

Addendum

After I circulated the above, my Canadian friend, Charles Holm, called my attention to historical research done by Timothy David Barnes that is relevant to the credibility of Jerome (*Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). In an appendix dealing specifically with Jerome, there is a section called "Jerome and Eusebius" wherein Barnes offers the following observations (pages 236-238).

First, Jerome never questions the reliability of Eusebius. Thus he accepts Eusebius' interpretation of what a writer says without asking whether it is correct.

Secondly, Jerome far surpasses Eusebius in credulity. What was in Eusebius presented as surmise or mere rumour is for Jerome established and indubitable fact.

Thirdly, Jerome mistranslates and misunderstands.

Fourthly, Jerome dishonestly conceals both his ignorance and his debt to Eusebius.

Well, well, well, it appears that one should read Jerome with a full salt shaker to hand. Perhaps my closing sentence above should have been: Not being stupid, he didn't! However, I continue to insist that Jerome could not have been so grossly stupid and/or dishonest as to make the ridiculous statement attributed to him. Down with **forgery!))**

Unfortunately, commentaries can still be found that reproduce certain misstatements of yesteryear about "scholia" and "catenae". The "catenae" may not be adduced for the omission, as demonstrated by Burgon (pp. 135-157). As for the "scholia" (critical notes), the situation seems to be something like this: at least 22 MSS simply repeat Victor of Antioch's statement, which includes the affirmation that he himself had verified that "very many" copies, including "accurate" ones and most especially the "true Palestinian exemplar", contained verses 9-20; several have footnotes defending the verses on the basis of "ancient copies at Jerusalem" (attention is directed to the footnote by a "+" or "*" in the text which is repeated before the footnote—much as we do today); two MSS say the passage is missing in "some" copies but present in "many"; four MSS say it is missing in "some" copies while present in "others"; three say it is missing in "many" and present in "many".¹ Now the earliest of these MSS is from the 10th century (most are later), so the copyists were repeating the "scholia" blindly, with no way of knowing if they were true or not. The fact remains that of the extant MSS only three lack the passage.

Codices L, Ψ, 099, 0112 and 579 are sometimes claimed as being against the genuineness of verses 9-20 because they also contain the so-called 'shorter ending'. Metzger's comment (p. 126) is misleading—these five MSS did not "replace" one ending with another, they conflated both. A conflation condemns the MSS that contain it, at that point, but says nothing about the relative merits of the component parts.

We must return to codices B and S, both of the 4th century and both from Egypt (presumably, see Farmer, p. 37), being generally regarded as the two most important MSS of the New Testament (frequently referred to as the "oldest and best"). Their agreement in omitting verses 9-20 has been an important factor in the thinking of those who reject the passage (since they generally regard the "Alexandrian text-type" as superior to all others). However, the evidence is not quite straightforward. Codex B is written in three columns and upon completing a book it normally begins the next book at the top of the next column. But between Mark and Luke there is a completely vacant column, the

¹ Burgon, pp. 116-125, 290-292.

only such column in the codex. Considering that parchment was expensive (and B is on very fine vellum), the “wasting” of such a space would be quite unusual. Why did the copyist do it?

As for Codex \aleph , the folded sheet containing the end of Mark and beginning of Luke is, quite frankly, a forgery. Tischendorf, who discovered the codex, warned that those four pages appeared to be written by a different hand and with different ink than the rest of the manuscript. However that may be, a careful scrutiny reveals the following: the end of Mark and beginning of Luke occur on page 3 (of the four); pages 1 and 4 contain an average of 17 lines of printed Greek text per column (there are four columns per page), just like the rest of the codex; page 2 contains an average of 15.5 lines of printed text per column (four columns); the first column of page 3 contains only **twelve** lines of printed text and in this way verse 8 occupies the top of the second column, the rest of which is blank (except for some designs); Luke begins at the top of column 3, which contains 16 lines of printed text while column 4 is back up to 17 lines. On page 2 the forger began to spread the letters, displacing six lines of printed text; in the first column of page 3 he got desperate and displaced **five** lines of printed text, just in one column! In this way he managed to get two lines of verse 8 over onto the second column, avoiding the telltale vacant column (as in B). That second column would accommodate 15 more lines of printed text, which with the other 11 make 26. Verses 9-20 occupy 23.5 such lines, so there is plenty of room for them. It really does seem that there has been foul play, and there would have been no need for it unless the first hand did in fact display the disputed verses. In any event, \aleph as it stands is a forgery and therefore may not legitimately be alleged as evidence against them.

To sum up: every extant Greek MS (about 1,700) except two (B and 304— \aleph is not ‘extant’ because it is a forgery at this point) contains verses 9-20. Every extant Greek lectionary (about 2,000?) contains them (one of them, 185, doing so only in the Menologion). Every extant Syriac MS (about 1,000?) except one (Sinaitic) contains them. Every extant Latin MS (8,000?) except one (k) contains them. Every extant Coptic MS except one contains them. We have hard evidence for the ‘inclusion’ from the 2nd century (Irenaeus, Diatessaron?). We have no such hard evidence for the ‘exclusion’.

It would appear that sometime during the 3rd century MSS lacking the passage began to be produced in Egypt, probably in Alexandria, of which two (or one) from the fourth century have survived to our day. Although the idea gained some currency in Egypt, it did not take over even there since most Alexandrian witnesses, including the Coptic version, contain the verses. The translators of the Armenian version had studied in Alexandria, and the Georgian version was based on the Armenian, which explains how the idea escaped from Egypt. The rest of the Christian world seems not to have picked up this aberration. As stated at the outset, with united voice, down through the centuries, in all parts of the world (including Egypt), the Church universal has affirmed and insisted that Mark’s Gospel goes from 1:1 to 16:20. Since that is so, how can someone who denies the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20 still affirm the Divine Inspiration of Mark 1:1-16:8? Is he not being inconsistent?

The Internal ‘Evidence’?

It should not be necessary to prolong this exercise, but something probably ought to be said about the “internal evidence” that some critics evidently feel to be fatal to the passage. We are told that Mark “never” uses certain words or phrases, which nonetheless occur there; that others which he “always” uses are missing; that the style is “foreign” to Mark; that there are insuperable problems with the discourse structure and the very content; in short, that it is “impossible” that the same person could have penned 1:1-16:8 and 16:9-20. Alas, what to do?

Most of the ‘arguments’ of this sort that have been advanced reveal a disappointing degree of superficiality in research and ignorance of language. Such supposed arguments were thoroughly refuted over 100 years ago by J.A. Broadus (*The Baptist Quarterly*, July, 1869, pp. 355-62) and Burgon (pp. 136-90). A more recent (1975) treatment is offered by Farmer (pp. 79-103). I will take up one argument that might seem impressive to the uninitiated reader.

It has been alleged as a sinister circumstance that Jesus is not mentioned by name in verse 9 (or in the following verses).¹ The rules of discourse structure have been violated, so they say. Really? Let’s consider Mark’s practice elsewhere. Between Mark 9:27 and 39 Jesus is not mentioned by

¹ The true Text has “Jesus” at the beginning of verse 9, as well as at the end of verse 1.

name, although there are two paragraph breaks and one section break in between, plus two changes in location. Jesus is next named in 10:5, five verses after a section break and another change of location. Between Mark 3:7 and 5:6 (75 verses) Jesus is not named even though there are numerous participants and several radical changes in location, scene and content. In each case it is only when another man is introduced in the narrative, creating a potential for ambiguity, that Jesus is again named since a mere pronoun would be ambiguous in reference. In Mark 16 there is only one dead person in focus, precisely the participant who has dominated the whole book, so verse 9 could only refer to Him—there is no ambiguity so a proper name is not necessary. Throughout verses 9-20 no other singular masculine participant is introduced so there is no need to identify Jesus by name. By way of contrast, Mary Magdalene had to be fully identified, because not only is there more than one woman in the account, there is more than one Mary! (The background information, “out of whom He had cast seven demons”, is entirely appropriate here, and only here, because this is the first time she is brought into focus—in the prior references she was just part of the group.)

There is one aspect of this situation which has not received sufficient attention that I am aware of. The more strident and caustic a critic becomes in proclaiming the “impossibility” of accepting Mark 16:9-20 as genuine (because of style, vocabulary and discourse features), the more he insults the ancients and undercuts his own position. After all, Irenaeus was a native speaker of Koine Greek (presumably)—why didn’t he notice the “impossibility”? How come the native speakers of Koine Greek who lived in Greece and Asia Minor and copied Mark down through the years didn’t recognize the “obvious stupidity”, the “odious fabrication”? How come? How is it that modern critics who deal with Koine Greek as a dead language, and at a distance of 1800 years, are more competent to judge something like this than the native speakers who were on the scene? Irenaeus knew Polycarp personally, who knew the Apostle John personally, who knew Mark personally. Irenaeus declares that Mark wrote 16:19. Who among us is qualified to say that he was deceived?

It would seem to be obvious that the more preposterous the pericope is affirmed to be, the more difficult it becomes to explain how it imposed itself on the Church universal, beginning in the second century (at least). In fact, if the passage contains difficulties this would easily account for its omission in certain quarters. The perceived difficulties would be a more than sufficient stimulus to activate editors and copyists in the Alexandrian school of textual criticism. Indeed, in our own day there are not a few who find the content of Mark 16:9-20 to be unpalatable and greet the claim that the passage is spurious with relief.

Hopefully all concerned will agree that the identity of the text of Scripture is to be established on the basis of the evidence, not personal prejudice. I submit that the evidence in this case is perfectly clear and that the overwhelming testimony of the Church down through the centuries should be loyally accepted.

I see a corollary here: not only is Mark 16:9-20 vindicated, but codices B and \aleph stand convicted of containing ‘poison’. They also contain the poison (mentioned above) in Matthew 1:7, 1:10 and 1:18, Mark 6:22, Luke 3:33 and 23:45, John 1:18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1. Does this not diminish their credibility as witnesses?

I confess that I am puzzled at the dedication and industry of the opponents of these verses. Why do they go to such lengths and expend so much energy to discredit them? Another curious feature of their work is the frequent misrepresentation of the evidence. For instance, in his advice to translators about how to proceed at the end of verse 8, A. Pope suggests putting the following:

“[Some manuscripts end at this point]
[In some manuscripts the following words are found]
SHORTER ENDING
[In some manuscripts the following words are found after verse 8]
LONGER ENDING”¹

What interests me here is the lack of semantic precision in the use of the word “some”. The first time it means “three”. The second time it means “six”. The third time it means “about 1,700”! Will the

¹ *Selected Technical Articles Related to Translation*, Oct., 1984, p. 22. Pope should also have mentioned that in the six MSS that have the ‘shorter ending’ the ‘longer ending’ is also found (so they are convicted of having an obvious conflation, and therefore of being corrupt).

unsuspecting reader of Pope's article not be misled? And if anyone follows Pope's advice will not his readers also be misled?

I wonder sometimes if people really believe what the glorified Jesus said in Revelation 22:19.