

Editor's Note: This paper was originally given at the Evangelical Theological Society's southwestern regional meeting, held at Southwestern Baptist Seminary on March 23, 2007. Brian was one of my interns for the 2006-07 school year at Dallas Seminary. He did an outstanding job in presenting the case that the original New Testament certainly affirmed the deity of Christ.

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Jesus as θεός: Scriptural Fact or Scribal Fantasy?¹

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From Aland to Zuntz, every major NT scholar has explored certain passages in the canon of the NT in which Jesus is called θεός. After reflecting on such texts and prior to endorsing such a claim, many, if not most, discuss their favorite text(s) in support or rejection of this proclamation.² Turning on the tap of literature on this topic immediately provides one with tubs full of *exegetical* and *theological* perspectives. On the other hand, the *textual* certainty of such “Jesus-θεός” passages has escaped this same detailed examination. With many recent challenges to the authenticity of these passages, apparently, mounds of uncultivated soil exist regarding their textual stability.³ On the surface, at least to some, the current textual deposit appears to be what geologists refer to as an erratic: a glacial deposit foreign to the original environment in which it is found. In other words, the notion that Jesus is explicitly called θεός in the NT is foreign to both the autographs and their authors.⁴

At first glance, this undermines the traditional Christian doctrine of the divinity of Christ. For starters, no author of a synoptic gospel explicitly ascribes the title θεός to Jesus.⁵ Moreover, Jesus never uses the term θεός for Himself.⁶ Prior to the fourth-century Arian controversy,

¹ I would like to especially thank Dr. Daniel B. Wallace for his acumen, scholarly example, and friendship. This paper would not be at this stage without his guidance. Likewise, I am grateful for those who contributed in other significant ways: John R. Brown, Steven J. Hellman, and Michael L. Herrington.

² For a detailed list of views see Daniel B. Wallace, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin* (Bern: Peter Lang, forthcoming), Ch. 2, n.2.

³ For example, Bart Ehrman, in at least three published books and one published lecture series, suggests that the deity of Christ is not necessarily taught in the original text. He bases these allegations on alleged textual problems which he attributes to manipulative scribal activity; most often pointing to textual problems behind such verses. He almost exclusively leans toward the manipulation of early proto-orthodox scribes in the development of a high Christology in his book *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 1993). For a recent argument for an early high Christology, see Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁴ I am discussing the origin of a title and not the origin of understanding Jesus as divine. That understanding was early and expressed in various ways. See, among others, C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁵ As Raymond Brown hypothesizes, “The slow development of the usage of the title ‘God’ for Jesus requires explanation. . . The most plausible explanation is that in the earliest stage of Christianity the Old Testament heritage dominated the use of ‘God’; hence, ‘God’ was a title too narrow to be applied to Jesus. . .” I am unconvinced that that is the “most” plausible explanation given the predominately Jewish context which may have dictated the early evangelistic terminology (e.g., Matthew’s “kingdom of heaven”). Nevertheless, Brown adds, “. . . we do maintain that in general the NT authors were aware that Jesus was being given a title which in the LXX referred to the God of Israel” (Raymond Brown, “Does the New Testament call Jesus ‘God?’” *TS* 26 [1965], 545-73).

⁶ In fact, Mark 10:18 records that He differentiates Himself from God (= the Father) [cf. Matt 19:17; Luke 18:19; Mk 15:34; Matt 27:46; John 20:17]. H. W. Montefiore, in his essay “Toward a Christology for Today,” picks up on this as he postulates that Jesus seems to have explicitly denied that he was God (Published in *Soundings*,

noticeably few MSS attest to such “Jesus-θεός” passages, with several scholars assuming Orthodox corruptions in those MSS subsequent to this controversy.⁷ No sermon in the Book of Acts attributes the title θεός to Jesus. No extant Christian confession(s)⁸ of Jesus as θεός exist earlier than the late 50s.⁹ And possibly the biggest problem for NT Christology regarding this topic is that textual variants exist in all potential passages where Jesus is explicitly referred to as θεός.¹⁰ This plethora of issues may provoke one to repeat, for different reasons, what a Gnostic document once confessed, “Whether a god or an angel or what I should call him, I do not know.”¹¹

Why this paper? At least two reasons exist: (1) the ascription of θεός to Jesus is pertinent to NT and Christian Christology and (2) recent textual critics have challenged the authenticity of these ascriptions. This paper, therefore, will examine these textual challenges and assess the likely authenticity¹² of NT ascriptions of θεός to Jesus.¹³

ed. A. Wier [1962], 158). In addition, R. H. Fuller, similar to Bultmann, believes that Jesus understood himself as an eschatological prophet (Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* [NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965], 130). While none of these texts or interpretations portray a complete NT Christology (Jesus does identify himself with God [e.g., John 10:30; 14:9], he never explicitly rejects that he is God, and Jesus understood himself to be more than an eschatological prophet), it is true that Jesus never uses the term θεός for Himself.

⁷ In a recent book, *Reinventing Jesus*, the authors note that, “there are at least *forty-eight* (and as many as fifty-nine) Greek New Testament manuscripts that predate the fourth-century.” In an endnote, the authors go on to explain that these are only Greek New Testament MSS and do not include the early versions or the pre-fourth-century patristic writers. Even so, only four of the possible seventeen “Jesus-θεός” passages are included in these MSS (Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: What The Da Vinci Code and Other Novel Speculations Don’t Tell You* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006], 116).

⁸ Raymond Brown, however, insightfully notes that a danger in judging usage from occurrence exists because NT occurrence does not create a usage but testifies to a usage already extant. And none of the passages considered below give any evidence of innovating (Raymond E. Brown, *Jesus: God and Man* [Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1967]).

⁹ With Rom 9:5 probably occurring first; if one could be certain of its punctuation/grammar (see discussion below).

¹⁰ *Reinventing Jesus*, 114, notes, “If a particular verse does not teach the deity of Christ in some of the manuscripts, does this mean that that doctrine is suspect? It would only be suspect if all the verses that affirm Christ’s deity are textually suspect.” Unfortunately, regarding the explicit “Jesus-θεός” passages, that is the case here. At the same time, the authors continue, “And even then the variants would have to be plausible.” This further reveals the importance of this study and whether or not these recent textual claims are plausible.

¹¹ *Inf. Gos. Thom. 7:4*. Köester writes, “... the individual narratives, in this gospel often only loosely strung together, were already freely circulating in the second-century” (Helmut Köester, ANRW 25/2, 1484). See the Greek text of Constantin von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Hildesheim: George Olms, 1987; original: Leipzig, 1867). Cf. Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into the New Testament* (NY: OUP, 2003), 59.

¹² Maurice Robinson in an interview with David Alan Black said, “In general, any claim that suggests absence of the physical autograph equals absence of textual reliability or biblical authority is bogus. The manuscript copies we possess remain substantially identical to the autographs. As demonstrated in my paper [2005 ETS paper, “The Integrity of the Early New Testament Text: A Collation-based Comparison”], the earliest extant (non-Byzantine) papyri compared against the text of Byzantine minuscule mss copied a thousand years later share a verbal identity approximating 92%—including orthographic and non-translatable differences. With such a large percentage of common text, even over more than a millennium of transmission, it is clear that the autograph text substantially *has* been preserved, even among disparate copies representing quite different textual traditions. On the same principle, dispute hardly should arise as to whether the autograph text similarly was preserved during the much shorter period between autograph composition and the earliest extant mss. Transmissional observations suggest an equally reliable transmissional history during the short period from which no evidence exists. In addition, *all* doctrinal essentials are clearly present within the *ca.* 92% average base text; *no* doctrine is established or negated

First I will define the textual method used to reconstruct the original text. Second I will examine the textual authenticity of each NT passage regarding its textual certainty. Finally I will organize the examined passages into three categories: certain, highly probable, or dubious.

TEXTUAL METHOD

Though differing methods exist, I will employ a reasoned eclecticism method which incorporates internal and external evidence.

CONDENSED EXAMINATION

Matt 1:23; John 17:3; Acts 20:28; Rom 9:5; Eph 5:5; Col 2:2; 2 Thess 1:12; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 John 5:20; Jude 4.¹⁴ Although these passages contain textual variants, I will give them less coverage for the following reasons:

1) Romans 9:5, which is one of only four “Jesus-θεός” passages having a manuscript prior to the fourth-century,¹⁵ involves a punctuation issue that the earliest NT manuscripts cannot definitely trace back due to the absence of any type of systematic punctuation.¹⁶

2) Colossians 2:2. Although this verse contains fifteen variants,¹⁷ the issue focuses on syntax rather than the text and is therefore outside the scope of this investigation. The same holds true for Matt 1:23,¹⁸ John 17:3,¹⁹ Acts 20:28,²⁰ Eph 5:5,²¹ 2 Thess 1:12,²² 1 Tim 3:16;²³ 1 John 5:20,²⁴ and Jude 4.²⁵ This leaves seven texts warranting extended examination.

within the remaining *ca.* 8% where differences occur. Also, most variants are quite minor and generally stylistic in nature. If the orthographic, non-translatable, and minor stylistic variants are excluded, the overall agreement among the earliest and latest mss rises substantially. The existing documents accurately represent the autographs in all essential points. The text we now possess is sufficient and substantial for establishing and maintaining *all* doctrinal positions held within orthodox Christianity, skeptics and postmodernists such as Ehrman, Epp, Parker, or the media to the contrary” (interview with Maurice Robinson: Restoring our Biblical and Constitutional Foundations [Part 2], by David Alan Black, http://www.daveblackonline.com/interview_with_maurice_robinson2.htm).

¹³ I will rely heavily on those whose academic acumen regarding textual criticism far exceeds mine, and whose scholarly contributions I highly regard. My purpose and goal here is to serve as sort of an intellectual midwife by helping others sharpen the issues and possibly suggesting new ways in which the arguments can be strengthened.

¹⁴ Although a handful of other verses that are sometimes used to equate Jesus with θεός exist [Luke 16:17; 8:39; 9:43; 1 Thess 4:9; 1 Tim 1:1; 5:21; 2 Tim 4:1; Titus 1:3; 3:4; Heb 3:4; James 1:1], I did not think enough academic support exists to merit a *textual* discussion in this paper.

¹⁵ P⁴⁶, *ca.* 200. Kurt Aland, *Kurzgefasste Liste der Griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin: Walter Gruyter & Co), 1994.

¹⁶ See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 459-62. Cf. Ehrman’s comment, “Nor will I take into account variant modes of punctuation that prove christologically significant, as these cannot be traced back to the period of our concern, when most manuscripts were not punctuated” (Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 31).

One must wait, then, to see if any new evidence or manuscript(s) is(are) evinced to reverse this scholarly consensus. Even so, given the method described above, I think that placing a comma after σάρκα is the most probable; which in turn allows one to interpret this text as equating Jesus with θεός. In fact, Lattey shows that codex “C” contains a small cross between σάρκα and ὁ ὢν that designates some form of a stop, which the Nestle-Aland text reflects with a comma. See Cuthbert Lattey, “The Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus in Romans ix. 5,” [*ExpT* 35 (1923-24)], 42-43. For the most recent critical discussion see Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress 2007), 555, 566-69.

¹⁷ Listed conveniently in *Text of the New Testament*, 334.

¹⁸ The text is overwhelmingly certain here since the author cites Is 7:14 in relation to the birth of Jesus. Yet, in spite of this citation, we cannot be certain that the evangelist takes “God with us” literally and attempts to

call Jesus θεός. In other words, the more probable understanding is to see that God is working in the person of Jesus and not that God Himself is physically with us.

¹⁹Note the discussion of the grammatical issues relating to this phrase in Murray Harris, *Jesus as God*, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 258-59. The text, nonetheless, should be considered certain.

²⁰Acts 20:28 involves two distinct variants of which at least nine possible readings (seven and two respectively) exist. For convenience sake, the viable options are as follows:

τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ (ⲛ B 056 0142 614 1175 1505 vg sy)
τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ κυρίου (ⲡ⁷⁴ A C* D E Ψ 33 1739 cop)

τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου (ⲡ⁷⁴ ⲛ B A C D E Ψ 33 326 945 1739)
τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος (H L P 049 056 0142 104 614 1241)

With the external evidence proportionate on the first variant (the other five readings lack sufficient external support, are obvious confections, or both), the only thing a textual critic can do is appeal to the internal evidence. Yet this too is equally balanced (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 425-27. Transmissionally, Aejmelaeus proposes an actual literary dependence of Acts 20:28 on 1 Thess 5:9-10 and Eph 1:7. This is in keeping with his overall thesis that Pauline allusions in Acts are invariably due to Luke's knowledge of the Pauline letters. *Die Rezeption der Paulusbrieve in der Miletrede [Apg 20:18-35]*, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1987, 132-142).

What then shall we say? Most scholars accept θεοῦ as original not merely because of its difficulty but also because of their confidence that the second variant reads: τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου (“the blood of his own [Son]” or “his own blood”). The second variant is undeniably superior externally (ⲡ⁷⁴ ⲡ⁴¹ ⲛ* A B C* D E Ψ 33 1739 geo syr). Its strength also rests on the logic that it is the harder reading and best explains the rise of the others. Harnack notes, “That God suffered was acceptable language before criticism required some refinement of the conviction that God (or God's Son) had become man and died on the cross” (Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma* [London: Constable, ca. 1900: reprinted NY: Dover, 1961] 1.187 [n.1]; 2.275-86. For further discussion on the imagery of “the blood” in the history of the church, as related to the work and person of Christ as God, see Pelikan [2005: 221-22]. Cf. Charles F. Devine, “The ‘Blood of God’ in Acts 20:28,” *CBQ* 9 [1947], 381-408). In addition, UBS⁴ gives it an “A” rating (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 427) and all major published Greek texts are unanimous (NA27, Tischendorf, UBS⁴, Bover, Merk, von Soden, Westcott and Hort, Vogels, and Weiss).

To answer the initial question, then, I suggest that the first variant originally read θεοῦ. This was quickly changed because of the difficulty in reconciling it with the second original variant: τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου. According to this conclusion, my theory seems to be verifiable and reinforced by the combination of variants in the majority of MSS. Here is how I view the evidence transmissionally:

1. MSS that support both non-originals: 2344 Didymus.
2. MSS that read both originals: ⲛ* B 1175 I60.
3. MSS that read kept θεοῦ because of second non-original: H 056 104 614 1409 1505 2412 2495 Athanasius Chrysostom.
4. MSS that changed θεοῦ to κυρίου because of the second original: ⲡ⁷⁴ A C* D E Ψ 33 453 945 1739 1891 36 181 307 610 1678 arm Theodoret.

We may then summarize that the variants that best explain the rise of the others are: θεοῦ and τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου. With our present discussion not hinging on the first variant, if Acts 20:28 is to be proven to equate Jesus with θεός it must do so on other “non-textual” grounds (the decision comes down to one's understanding and interpretation of the phrase διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου: “with the blood of his own [Son]” or “with his own blood”). And so, no certainty exists that this verse calls Jesus θεός. For more sources, a better understanding of these phrases, or both, see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 425-27; Harris, *Jesus as God*, 131-41. Cf. “blood of God” as used in the Apostolic Fathers: Ign. *Eph.* 1.1; Ign. *Rom.* 6:3 (cf. Tertullian [sanguine dei; Ad uxor. 2.3.1]).

²¹The textual evidence is solid here. Ehrman accurately explains, “In the text that is almost certainly original (‘the Kingdom of Christ and God’), Christ appears to be given a certain kind of priority over God himself. This problem is resolved by all of the changes, whether attested early or late” (Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 269). See Harris, *Jesus as God*, 261-63, for grammatical issues. Cf. Wallace, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin*.

²²The textual issue in this verse does not pertain to the clause in question. One is left, therefore, with two possible Greek genitive translations: (1) “according to the grace of our God and Lord, namely Jesus Christ” or

EXTENDED EXAMINATION

John 1:1

Until fourteen years ago²⁶ NT scholars were unanimous in their *textual* certainty of John 1:1c.²⁷ This scholarly agreement continues today with the exception of one recent scholar, Bart Ehrman. He remains unpersuaded by the scholarly consensus because of his reluctance to dismiss a single eighth-century Alexandrian manuscript L which adds an article to θεός.²⁸

(2) “according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” I favor the latter. Cf. Wallace, *Granville Sharp’s Canon and Its Kin*.

²³ The attestation for the variants is not strong enough to warrant serious consideration. Towner notes, “... the change to ὁ (D* and Vg plus some Latin Fathers) was a gender adjustment to accord with τὸ μυστήριον: another late solution was the change to θεός (ℵ² A^c C² D² Ψ 1739 1881 TR vg^{mss}), which supplies the antecedent thought to be lacking in ὁς” (Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 278). Cf. W. M. Zoba, “When Manuscripts Collide,” *ChristToday* 39 (12, ’95), 30-31.

²⁴ Of the two notable variants in this verse, neither of them effectually touches our present topic. The *crux interpretum* is the antecedent of οὗτος; but it is far from clear whether it should be understood as a reference to God the Father or Jesus Christ. Schnackenburg argues strongly from the logic of the context and the flow of the argument that “This is the true God” refers to Jesus Christ. He cites Bultmann as recognizing that a reference to Jesus is more probable, but Bultmann regards the sentence as an addition by an editor who imitated the style of the epistle (*Die Johannesbriefe, in Herders theologischer Kommentar* [2nd ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1963], 291). Cf. critical commentaries on the passage and Wallace, *Granville Sharp’s Canon and Its Kin*.

²⁵ I kept this text in the list primarily because several variants contain the word θεόν. Landon persuasively argues that the internal evidence reads δεσπότην θεόν rather than simply δεσπότην, and that the expression refers only to God (“The Text of Jude and a Text-Critical Study of the Epistle of Jude,” JSNTSup 135, Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996, 63-67). What makes his argument strong is that if Ehrman is correct about the direction of corruption away from adoptionist “heresies,” noting the text of 2 Pet 1:2 in ℱ⁷², then this reading alone resists orthodox interference (shortened by scribes who wish to show God and Jesus as the same entity; thereby stressing Christ’s divinity). Yet even with Landon’s well thought out thesis, of which I did not list all his perceptive reasons, I still reject the longer reading for the following reasons: (1) the earliest and best MSS support the shorter reading, (2) it is probable that a scribe sought to clarify the shorter reading and/or stay within the NT’s normal pattern [i.e., Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; 2 Tim 2:21; Rev 6:10], and (3) it is the more difficult reading. Therefore, my preference is for the shorter reading: δεσπότην. For exhaustive manuscript evidence see Tommy Wasserman, *The Epistle of Jude: Its Text and Transmission* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2006). Cf. C. A. Albin, *Judasbrevet: Traditionen, Texten Tolkningen* (Stockholm: 1962).

The shorter reading in Jude 4 (where Christ is described as the ruling Master) would also comport well with Jude 5 if “Jesus” is indeed the original reading. This would clearly highlight the pre-existence of Christ and thus implicitly argue for his deity. Therefore, both verses taken together make a compelling argument for the pre-existence, as well as the deity, of Jesus Christ. For in-depth textual discussion of Jude 5 see, Philipp Bartholomä, “Did Jesus Save the People out of Egypt? – A Re-Examination of a Textual Problem in Jude 5,” online: <http://www.csntm.org/essays/PaperJude5.pdf>.

²⁶ Reference is made to the publication year (1993) of Bart Ehrman’s *Orthodox Corruption*. For a recent review and critique of Ehrman’s book see Ivo Tamm’s *Theologisch-christologische Varianten in der frühen Überlieferung des Neuen Testaments?* (Magisterschrift, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, n.d.), online: http://www.evangelicaltextualcriticism.com/documents/Theologisch-christologischeVarianten_Tamm.pdf.

²⁷ Not only is this one of only four passages that has at least one manuscript prior to the fourth century, but no textual debates are listed in any standard work on this topic to my knowledge. Neither the UBS⁴ nor the NA27 (the two standard Greek NT texts used today) list variants of any kind for John 1:1c. In addition, only three other major published Greek texts even list it in their apparatus: Tischendorf, Merk, von Soden; with 100% unanimity as to its original form.

²⁸ Merk lists another manuscript in John 1:1c (fifth-century W/032). Upon personally viewing two separate facsimiles of W I came to the conclusion that it was highly improbable. Both facsimiles were severely

καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

To Ehrman, an articular θεός gives him the “distinct impression” that the Orthodox party changed it due to the Arian controversies.²⁹ The real issue, then, makes this otherwise implicit identification (Jesus as simply divine) an explicit one (God himself).³⁰ Without belaboring the point, syntactically, the absence of the article does not deny the full deity of Jesus.³¹ The most probable understanding of the anarthrous θεός is qualitative (the Word had the same *nature* as God).³²

Further, regarding the Arian Controversies, Arius never had a problem calling Jesus θεός. In fact, he does so in a letter he wrote to Eusebius bishop of Nicomedia, “But what do we say and think? What have we taught and what do we teach? That the Son is not unbegotten or a portion of the unbegotten in any manner or from any substratum, but that by the will and counsel of the Father he subsisted before times and ages, full of grace and truth, God, only-begotten, unchangeable.”³³ The Arian corruption theory, in this case, remains unsubstantiated at its fundamental level.

At any rate, one’s attempt to understand the theological interpretation(s) or motive(s) behind these variants does not change the fact that the text is certain and it ascribes the title θεός

faded at this point in the text and could easily be explained as a bleed through from the reverse side. I contacted Dr. Hurtado (who recently published “The Freer Biblical Manuscripts”) via email (1/9/07) and he concurs, “I have looked carefully at the high-res digital photos (unfortunately, not available for the general public...yet), and it's very faint and difficult. But I can't see an omicron there. I'm inclined to think that Merk is incorrect if he ascribes an omicron to W at this point.” Therefore, the evidence is inconclusive regarding this manuscript’s attestation and will not be used either way.

²⁹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 179.

³⁰ John could have used θεῖος, or some other word meaning “divine,” had he wished to convey that. Keener helpfully points out, “Regarding Jesus as merely ‘divine’ but not deity violates the context; identifying him with the Father does the same. For this reason, John might thus have avoided the article even had grammatical convention not suggested it; as a nineteenth-century exegete argued, an articular θεός would have distorted the sense of the passage, ‘for then there would be an assertion of the entire identity of the Logos and of God, while the writer is in the very act of bringing to view some distinction between them’... Scholars from across the contemporary theological spectrum recognize that, although Father and Son are distinct in this text, they share deity in the same way” (Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 374).

³¹ “Neither in LXX Greek nor in secular Greek is a firm or a fine distinction drawn between the articular and the anarthrous θεός. This judgment is confirmed, as far as Hellenistic Greek writings contemporaneous with the NT are concerned, by Meecham, who cites specific examples from the Epistle to Diognetus” (Harris, *Jesus as God*, 29).

³² Contra Modalism/Sabellianism. Philip Harner, after probing the Fourth Gospel for passages which use predicate nouns, points out that the qualitative force of the predicate is more prominent than its definiteness or indefiniteness in 40 of the 53 cases which use anarthrous predicates preceding the verb. Specifically, “In John 1:1 I think that the qualitative force of the predicate is so prominent that the noun cannot be regarded as definite.” He also suggests “... the English language is not as versatile at this point as Greek, and we can avoid misunderstanding the English phrase only if we are aware of the particular force of the Greek expression that it represents” (“Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns,” *JBL* 92 [1973], 75-87). Cf. J. G. Griffiths, “A Note on the Anarthrous Predicate in Hellenistic Greek” *ExpTim* 62 [1950-1], 314-316; Robertson, *Grammar*, 767-68; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 266-69.

³³ William Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983), 29-30. For Greek text see *Urkunden zur Geschichte des arianischen Streites*, ed. by H. G. Opitz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1934). Cf. R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy*, 318-381 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 6. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (NY: OUP, 2004), 105-126.

to Jesus: καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (and the Word was God).³⁴ This discussion must now enter the realm of grammar.³⁵ For that reason, I will press on to John 1:18.

John 1:18

Although John 1:18 has been lauded, celebrated, and esteemed throughout the history of Christendom, not every manuscript contains the same reading.³⁶ The textual certainty might look

³⁴ Regarding its textual certainty, two significant points concern us here: (1) both \mathfrak{P}^{75} and Codex B attest to the absence of the article in John 1:1c. This is significant because Fee persuasively establishes the “careful preservation” of \mathfrak{P}^{75} and B. He states that “[t]hese MSS seem to represent a ‘relatively pure’ form of preservation of a ‘relatively pure’ line of descent from the original text” (Eldon Epp & Gordon Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 247-73). (2) Sahidic Coptic manuscripts, generally considered fairly decent representatives of the Alexandrian text (Frederik Wisse, “The Coptic Versions of the New Testament,” 137), offers an intriguing clue to the textual certainty in John 1:1c. In short, Sahidic has both an indefinite and definite article. What gives this fact significance is that John 1:1c has the indefinite article in the Sahidic MSS: $\Delta\Upsilon\Omega\ \text{NE}\Upsilon\text{NOY}\Upsilon\text{E}\ \text{NE}\ \text{N}\Omega\Delta\chi\text{E}$. It should come as no surprise, then, that the occurrence of the indefinite article (OY ; which has contracted) before “God” ($\text{NOY}\Upsilon\text{E}$) in this passage suggests that the Coptic translator was looking at a Greek *Vorlage* with an anarthrous $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$. My main point is this, the fact that $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ was not translated into Sahidic (or Bohairic; which was a new Coptic translation from the Greek) as a definite noun indicates that the translator was not translating a text that had the article ($\delta\ \theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$) in it. Cf. Bruce Metzger, “The Early Versions of the NT” (1977), 132-37.

To flesh this out a little more, Horner translates John 1:1c into English as follows: “... and [a] God was the Word” (George Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911-1924]). The critical apparatus defines the use of square brackets as implying “words used by the Coptic and not required by the English” (Ibid. 376). Here lies the potential interpretive problem. How can the presence of the indefinite article in the Sahidic require no English equivalent? The answer rests in the usage of the Sahidic indefinite article. Let me explain.

Unlike English, the Sahidic indefinite article is used with abstract nouns [e.g., truth, love, hate] and nouns of substance [e.g., water, bread, meat] (Thomas Lambdin, *Introduction to Sahidic Coptic*. Macon, GA: Mercer, 1983, 5. Cf. Bentley Layton, *A Coptic Grammar: Sahidic Dialect*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000; Clifford Walters, *An Elementary Coptic Grammar of the Sahidic Dialect*, Oakville, CT: David Brown Book Company, 1999). An example of this can be seen in Horner’s translation of John 1:16: “all of us took [a] life and [a] grace in place of [a] grace” (cf. John 1:33; 3:6). None of the words in brackets are necessary in English but are still noted by Horner due to their presence in the Coptic manuscript.

The second issue pertains to the qualitative potential of the indefinite article. Wallace summarizes, “A qualitative noun places the stress on quality, nature or essence. It does not merely indicate membership in a class of which there are other members (such as an indefinite noun), nor does it stress individual identity (such as a definite noun)” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 244. Cf. Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000]). In other words, the Coptic supports the interpretation that the anarthrous $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ can be qualitative rather than definite.

Third, John 1:18 in Sahidic has the definite article. For what reason, then, would the translator have designated the Word as “a god” in John 1:1 and “the God” in John 1:18? Instead, I propose that his use of the definite article in v. 18 makes more sense if we understand John to be ascribing the qualities of deity to the Word in John 1:1c.

At the end of the day, my short summary shows that the indefinite article in Sahidic does not necessarily mean that the Coptic translator understood John to have written “a god” (contra the *New World Translation*). Rather, as I have argued, the scribe understood John to be using $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$ (from a Greek *Vorlage* containing an anarthrous $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$) in a qualitative sense.

³⁵ For surveys of this passage see Wallace, *Greek Grammar*: 256-70; Colwell 1933: 12-31; Keener, *The Gospel of John*: 372-74; Köstenberger, *John*: 28-29; Mastin, “Theos in the Christology of John”: 32-51; Harris, *Jesus as God*: 51-71.

³⁶ Countless exegetical and historical details exist that cannot be canvassed here.

like a mountain of muddle with at least 13 variant readings,³⁷ of which three are viable.³⁸ At the outset, all the variants divide into two distinct groups either reading *υίός* or *θεός*. If the latter is chosen, the final decision ultimately depends on the presence or absence of the article.

μονογενής θεός
ὁ μονογενής θεός
ὁ μονογενής υἱός

Let us now turn to the external evidence.³⁹

θεός is present in the earliest and best Alexandrian MSS (Ⲭ ⲡ⁶⁶ ⲡ⁷⁵ B C). The already widely held opinion that *θεός* is original is increasing,⁴⁰ and the evidence has been “notably strengthened,”⁴¹ with the discovery of ⲡ⁶⁶ and ⲡ⁷⁵ (both attesting to *θεός*).⁴² Additionally, “[a]mong all the witnesses, P75 is generally understood to be the strongest.”⁴³ Yet *θεός* still boasts better textual ancestry than *υἱός* even eliminating these two papyri. Let me explain.

θεός is “the reading of the *great* Alexandrian uncials (Ⲭ B C)” and “attested by the *earliest* available witnesses [ⲡ⁶⁶ ⲡ⁷⁵].”⁴⁴ On textual critic concludes that the discovery of these two papyri MSS has “done very little (in this instance) to change the character of the documentary alignment,” and in fact, “done nothing to change the picture.”⁴⁵ I wholeheartedly agree. It is inadequate to merely *count* the MS evidence; one must also *weigh* it.⁴⁶ The implication of this is that it makes anyone’s use of this text-type a moot point for *υἱός* if the late secondary Alexandrian texts for *υἱός* cannot go back to the Alexandrian exemplar.⁴⁷

Next, it has been argued that because “virtually *every* other representative of *every* other textual grouping—Western, Caesarean, Byzantine—attests to *υἱός*” then *θεός* does not “fare well

³⁷ Kurt Aland, Barbara Aland, and Klaus Wachtel, *Text und Textwert der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments: Johannesevangelium* (NY: 2005), 3-5.

³⁸ John 1:18 is actually the only verse listed under textual issues in both major works on this topic. The standard work by Murray Harris, *Jesus as God*, lists only three problems as “textual” (Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:1; John 1:18) and Raymond Brown, in *An Intro to NT Christology*, lists three under “textual”: Gal 2:20; Acts 20:28; John 1:18.

³⁹ Several major published Greek texts are evenly divided here as to the original. Von Soden, Bover and Tischendorf choose *ὁ μονογενής υἱός*. UBS⁴, NA27 and Merk favor *μονογενής θεός*.

⁴⁰ Notwithstanding two publications, approximately 50 years apart, where C. K. Barrett and Bart Ehrman came to similar conclusions about ⲡ⁶⁶ and ⲡ⁷⁵. Basically, more eggs do not need to be put in this Alexandrian basket because these MSS merely confirm the character of documentary alignment we already knew.

⁴¹ Kurt Aland dated them respectively, ‘um 200 oder etwas spater’ and ‘Anfang III. Jhdt.’. *Studien zur Uberlieferung des Neuen Testaments und seines Textas* (Berlin, 1967), 133 & 135.

⁴² Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 169.

⁴³ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 112. Kenneth Clark admits the same, “Finally, it is our judgment that P75 appears to have the best textual character in the third century” (“The Gospel of John in Third-Century Egypt,” *NovT* 5 [1962], 24).

⁴⁴ *Ibid* (italics added).

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, “In terms of age, only uncial mss. which derive from the 3rd/4th century or earlier have an inherent significance, i.e., those of the period *before* the development of the great text types. There are only five (but really four): 0162, 0171, 0189, 0212 (it’s the Diatesseron text and should not be counted, pg 56), and 0220” (Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* [2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1989], 104).

⁴⁷ “We are mindful that these papyri cannot claim unquestioned priority on the ground alone of their greater antiquity... [nor can we] blindly follow their textual testimony even when the two are in agreement with one another” (Kenneth Clark, “The Gospel of John in Third-Century Egypt,” *NovT* 5 [1962], 23).

at all.”⁴⁸ I think this is a slight exaggeration and after reevaluating the evidence, θεός will “fare well.”

Two issues require comment concerning the Western tradition. One, the quality and antiquity of the Western manuscript supporting θεός (Ⲭ)⁴⁹ is comparatively greater and earlier than all three Alexandrian MSS supporting υἰός (Δ Ψ Τ). This demonstrates that θεός is not isolated in the Alexandrian text-type, as the statement above alludes. Two, when using the “Western text” one must keep in mind that “in the early period there was no textual tradition in the West that was not shared with the East.”⁵⁰ In other words, “the origin of the ‘Western’ text lies anywhere but in the direction its name would suggest.”⁵¹ Moreover, Ehrman concludes, “[a]bove all, it is significant in saying something about the transmission of the so-called ‘Western’ text of the Fourth Gospel. To be sure, we have not uncovered any evidence of a consolidated form of this text that could match the carefully controlled tradition of Alexandria.”⁵²

Adding to the argument above, Ehrman uses the Caesarean textual grouping to strengthen his argument in support for υἰός. Indeed, the overwhelming majority read υἰός (Θ, 565, 579, 700, *f*¹, *f*³, geo¹). This, however, is problematic for at least two reasons. First, more recent nomenclature moves away from this label (Caesarean) since it has been strongly argued not to be a fourth text-type.⁵³ Admittedly, some merit still exists in using the label Caesarean with the result that further geographical distribution can be exposed. This leads me to point two. Assuming Caesarean does exist as a text-type, θεός does attest in it, albeit scarce (geo²).⁵⁴ Showing again that θεός is present in another text-type resulting in further geographical distribution.

Additionally, as Ehrman rightly claims, the predominance of υἰός exists in the Latin and Syriac traditions (with θεός still present in several Syriac MSS [*syr*^{h(mg)} *syr*^p]). Unfortunately what often gets overlooked is that a predominance of θεός exists in the Arabic and Coptic traditions (with υἰός absent from both). Even more, the most striking versional witness for θεός is the Peshitta. At first glance, this scant evidence seems irrelevant. What impresses us here, though, is that θεός consistently attests outside the Alexandrian tradition.

⁴⁸ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 79 (italics added). Later, we shall see that he reverses the same external appraisal he employs here (see Heb 1:8 discussion below).

⁴⁹ Ⲭ is a “Western text” in John 1:1-8:38. See, for example, Gordon Fee, “Codex Sinaiticus in the Gospel of John: A Contribution to Methodology in Establishing Textual Relationships” (*Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, 221-43).

⁵⁰ “Hardly anyone today refers to this putative Western text without placing the term in quotation marks, i.e., as the ‘Western text’.” Aland-Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 54. Likewise, Scrivener concludes, “... the text of Codex Bezae, as it stands at present, is *in the main* identical with one that was current both in the East and West...” (Frederick H. Scrivener, *Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis* [London: Bell and Daldy, 1864], xlv).

⁵¹ Aland-Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 67.

⁵² Bart Ehrman, “Heracleon and the ‘Western’ Textual Tradition,” *NTS* 40 (1994), 178-79.

⁵³ See Bruce Metzger, “The Caesarean Text of the Gospels,” *Chapters in the History of the New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 42-72, and Hurtado, *Text-Critical Methodology and the Pre-Caesarean Text: Codex W in the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

⁵⁴ “Like the Armenian version, it [Georgian] is an important witness to the Caesarian type of text. Among the oldest known Gospel manuscripts are the Adysh manuscript of A.D. 897, the Opiza manuscript of 913, and the Tbet’ manuscript of 995. In most *apparatus critici*, the Adysh manuscript is cited as Geo¹ and the testimony of the other two, as Geo²” (Metzger-Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 118-19). Cf. Robert Blake and Maurice Brière, “The Old Georgian Version of the Gospel of John” *PO* 26/4 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1950); Metzger-Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 2005).

To emphasize the early date of υἱός, Ehrman uses three specific church fathers (Irenaeus, Clement, and Tertullian) “who were writing before our earliest surviving manuscripts were produced.”⁵⁵ Unfortunately, he does this without acknowledging any church father supporting θεός around the same period (or Ϝ⁶⁶). I, therefore, will equally list three here: Irenaeus, Clement, and Eusebius. One may notice that two of the three names also appear in Ehrman’s list.⁵⁶ This redundancy reveals the fact that two of the fathers he uses for υἱός (and the earliest two: Irenaeus and Clement) support θεός in other writings. In the least, θεός shows up again outside the Alexandrian tradition.

Two more critical issues must be argued regarding the church fathers. First, McReynolds warns us that any reference to ὁ μονογενής υἱός by a church father is unsubstantiated unless it specifically denotes John 1:18. The citation or allusion could equally apply to any of the other passages in John (1:14; 3:16) or in the NT (Luke 7:12; Heb 11:17; 1 John 4:9) where μονογενής refers to the “son.” On the other hand, the same problem does not apply to μονογενής θεός since it occurs nowhere else. Thus, one can be sure that John 1:18 is in view if μονογενής θεός is read (e.g., Arius, Basil, Clement, Cyril, Didymus, Epiphanius, Eusebius, Gregory-Nyssa, Heracleon, Hilary, Irenaeus, Jerome, Origen, Ps-Ignatius, Ptolemy, Serapion, Synesius, Tatian, Theodotus, Valentinus). McReynolds concludes “that patristic evidence for various readings needs to be used much more carefully, and with a full view of the context of the Father being quoted.”⁵⁷

Second, I find it remarkably striking that Arius supports the reading θεός (according to Epiphanius).⁵⁸ If this is true, it throws into doubt that an orthodox scribe would change the text away from Arius as though θεός bolsters “the complete deity of Christ.”⁵⁹ Even if the reverse is true (Epiphanius’s testimony is wrong), one would have to assume that each scribe that changed υἱός to θεός knew about the Arian controversy and knew how to change the text to the higher Christology. Even then, the evidence shows inconsistency in their alleged corruption(s) (given John 1:1; 20:28). On top of all that, it would also have to be shown that all the evidence originated during or subsequent to this Arian controversy (which the evidence does not).⁶⁰ Otherwise, the earliest and best MSS heighten the argument away from the allegation that this is an orthodox corruption.

To be even more critical, the reading μονογενής θεός is *not* an anti-Arian polemic. Arians again did not balk at giving this title to Jesus (c.f. John 1:1 above).⁶¹ In fact, as Keener points out, “Given the tendency to simplify the sense of the text, the Arian controversy in Egypt, the source of most of our manuscripts, would have led to a later preference for ‘only Son’, since

⁵⁵ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 79.

⁵⁶ Eusebius attests to both and could have appeared in this list had Ehrman used him.

⁵⁷ Paul McReynolds, “John 1:18 in Textual Variation and Translation,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1981], 118.

⁵⁸ As well as Valentinus (another theologian deemed heretical): Valentinians^{acc. to Irenaeus and Clement}. Furthermore, no church father accuses him of changing the text. Hort argued here that μονογενής θεός was original because the Gnostics (such as Valentinus) did not invent this phrase; instead, they quoted it (Hort, *Two Dissertations* [Cambridge: MacMillan, 1876]).

⁵⁹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 78.

⁶⁰ One might argue, then, that there only needs to be one early orthodox scribe who generated θεός during the Arian controversy. The real question would then become, “How early?” To answer this objection, the evidence reveals that earlier MSS (the earliest) attest to θεός well before the Arian controversy. This indicates that the objection would remain highly speculative and against the clearer testimony of earlier and better MSS.

⁶¹ Brown, *The Gospel According to John: (i-xii) Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 17. Cf. n.48 above.

‘only’ was often read as ‘only begotten’ and ‘only begotten God’ could be pressed into ambiguous support against both Arius and Athanasius.”⁶² The Arians wanted to weaken the sense of “only God” and designate Christ as merely a divine being, which eliminates the word θεός as applied to ὁ λόγος in 1:1. In other words, it is more reasonable to envisage the orthodox party altering “God” to “son” during this controversy than it is to imagine the shift from “son” to “God.”

Finally, it has been said that θεός is a “fairly localized” and “almost exclusively Alexandrian” reading while υἱός is “found sporadically there and virtually everywhere else” and is “almost ubiquitous.”⁶³ Besides being a bit misleading, as I have noted elsewhere, there are still several reasons explaining the wider transmissional survival of υἱός away from the original θεός even if one accepts these statements lock, stock, and barrel. For example, it is highly probable that “son” prevailed as the easier reading before most extant versions were composed. This can also be seen in the fact that “son” has universal agreement in later copies with no observable evidence of a tendency in scribes to alter it. Additionally, “God” is the more difficult reading theologically, statistically, and stylistically (see discussion below), which generally promotes various textual variants.

In sum, both readings enjoy wide geographical distribution, even though υἱός is relatively wider and θεός is primarily Alexandrian. Both readings co-existed in the second century, although weightier MSS support θεός. As a whole, externally, I believe the chips stack much higher for θεός due to the quality and antiquity of the MSS listed above. Nevertheless, this external evidence alone does not make θεός the exclusive heir to the throne.

Now that the camel’s nose is in the tent, let us look at the internal evidence. To a scribe, only one letter in majuscule script differentiates the two readings. These words contract and represent a *nomen sacrum* symbolized as $\overline{\Upsilon\text{C}}$ or $\overline{\Theta\text{C}}$. As mentioned, “God” is the more difficult reading theologically, statistically, and stylistically. This recognition, then, is of decisive significance for our internal considerations. Theologically, this reading is pregnant with implications. Statistically, it is almost unparalleled. Stylistically, it is more difficult. I think, however, that after examining the internal evidence the scales still tip in favor of θεός.

Two major issues seem to negate the *nomen sacrum* option. First, Metzger points out that it is doubtful with what we know that this transcriptional error occurred in the Alexandrian tradition.⁶⁴ Second, “this ‘accident’ would have had to have occurred very early for both variants to have survived, and one such occurrence seems unlikely to have caused so much support so early.”⁶⁵

To sum up another main internal argument, one scholar believes that μονογενής is never substantival when a noun that agrees with it in gender, number, and case follows.⁶⁶ Not only does he reject it here (1:18), but he also emphasizes that an adjective can never be used substantively (here or elsewhere) when it immediately precedes a noun of the same inflection (i.e., grammatical concord). In response, another scholar said, “There are many critiques that could be made of his argument, but chief among them is this: his absolutizing of the grammatical situation

⁶² Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 425.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁴ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 170.

⁶⁵ McReynolds, “John 1:18,” 115.

⁶⁶ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 81.

is incorrect.”⁶⁷ Following this statement he goes on to demonstrate and accomplish *at least* two things: (1) this statement “is simply not borne out by the evidence” and (2) “if examined carefully” either reading fits “comfortably within orthodoxy.”⁶⁸ To say it another way, this major internal argument has already been debunked.

As seen above, Ehrman purposely appealed to Origen in John 1:1c as a safety net for the soft or implicit interpretation of Jesus as “simply divine” rather than “God himself.”⁶⁹ Yet we find the occurrence of θεός in Origen with the article on the other side of this same prologue, John 1:18.⁷⁰ Ehrman accurately suggests that if μονογενής θεός is the original text in 1:18 then “the complete deity of Christ is affirmed.”⁷¹ Was this, then, merely an “Origenal” sin? Without discussing the interpretation(s) that Origen extracts from 1:18, my conflict here is that, given Ehrman’s own line of reasoning in 1:1 and 1:18,⁷² it seems highly probable, even expected, that Origen would have changed the text of 1:18 to conform to his theology in 1:1c. Especially if 1:18 affirms what Origen already denied in 1:1c and if orthodox corruptions were so rampant.⁷³

What, then, are some other internal arguments? Several observations initially seem convincing in support of υἱός. For starters, statistically, μονογενής refers to the “son” elsewhere in John (1:14; 3:16) and in the NT (Luke 7:12; Heb 11:17; 1 John 4:9);⁷⁴ μονογενής θεός does not.⁷⁵ Stylistically, the reading “son” is more natural with the mention of “God” earlier in the verse as well as the mention of “father” later in the verse. Otherwise, why would God be repeated twice and how could “God” reside in the bosom of another God (“the Father”)? Theologically, Jesus is rarely called θεός in the NT making the reading almost too difficult. All of these observations seem to quickly point one in the direction of an original reading of “only son.”

⁶⁷ Wallace, *The Gospel according to Bart*, 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 14. Wallace’s last point is the most significant. If υἱός is found to be the best reading the deity of Christ is not jeopardized. This luxury allows one to follow the textual evidence to an objective conclusion where/if possible. On the other hand, Ehrman does have a tremendous problem if θεός ends up being the best reading because it would contradict his overall thesis and it would put a major dent in his *a priori* assumption that Jesus is not called θεός in the NT.

⁶⁹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 179n187.

⁷⁰ Ehrman lists these texts in another publication, *The Text of the Fourth Gospel in the Writings of Origen*, 59-60, and concludes, “Origen’s text almost certainly attests the article with μονογενής: this is the text of the two clearest citations in the John commentary and five of the seven references to the text both there and in the *Contra Celsum*. Only one clear quotation lacks the article (Io.Com 6, 3, 13), and there it may simply be for contextual reasons.”

⁷¹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 78.

⁷² To support his thesis he also notes, “It is on intrinsic grounds that the real superiority of ὁ μονογενής υἱός shines forth. Not only does it conform with established Johannine usage, a point its opponents readily concede, but the Alexandrian variant, although perfectly amenable to scribes for theological reasons, is virtually impossible to understand within a Johannine context” (*Ibid.*, 79). Although I disagree with Ehrman’s view on a number of intrinsic grounds (see discussion), I concede that ὁ μονογενής υἱός does fit well into established Johannine usage. And he is not the only scholar who balks on intrinsic grounds (Cf. Rolf Furuli, *The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation: With a Special Look at the New World Translation of Jehovah’s Witnesses* [Huntington Beach, CA: Elihu Books, 1999], 200-229).

⁷³ Origen’s motive or even alleged error would be difficult to prove in light of his Hexaplaric Recension of the LXX and other available textual evidence suggesting otherwise.

⁷⁴ Harris rightly observes, “The only occasion in the NT where μονογενής is not used of an “only son” is Luke 8:42, where it qualifies θυγάτηρ” (Harris, *Jesus as God*, 92).

⁷⁵ Certain texts (John 5:44; 17:3; Rom 16:27; 1 Tim 1:17; Jude 25) do not legitimately belong here since they all use μόνος and not μονογενής.

In response, I believe a stronger case remains for the original reading of θεός. This offense probably drove a scribe away from θεός to the less offensive Christology of “son”; which also comports well with the scribal tendency to simplify the text. Substituting “God” for “son” is highly improbable. Given this scenario alone, θεός already seems to best explain the rise of the other variants.

Next, the reference “who is in the bosom of the Father” is an anthropomorphic metaphor for intimacy and fellowship.⁷⁶ In other words, it is an idiom for closeness and does not truly affect either reading. From a different angle, stylistically, “God” closes the inclusio begun in 1:1c; also providing a parallel with 20:28 (the gospel as a whole). Perhaps shocking the reader was intended. If this phrase occurred frequently then the author may have failed in achieving his desired result. Lastly, the author of John’s Gospel has a penchant for varying Christological designations (1:49; 4:42; 6:69; 9:38; 11:27; 20:16).

What variant, then, best explains the rise of the others? I believe that an early misconception was made regarding the subtle meaning of the two words in their original apposition: μονογενής θεός. Thus, an article was assigned to the original reading, now ὁ μονογενής θεός, as early as Ϙ⁷⁵ and ϙ. Ironically, this change wound up enhancing the problem, not alleviating it. The text now appears self-contradictory (“the only God, in the bosom of the Father”) and inconsistent with other Johannine usage (John 3:16; 18; 1 John 4:9). Accordingly, the next stage of evolution changed “God” to “son”: ὁ μονογενής υἱός. Finally, although a few other variants arose which either combined the two readings (ὁ μονογενής υἱός θεός) or simply omitted both (ὁ μονογενής),⁷⁷ ὁ μονογενής υἱός became the majority text.⁷⁸

With that, our textual journey is done. In retrospect, I conclude that μονογενής θεός is the best reading given all the evidence we have. As a result, it is highly probable that Jesus is called θεός in John 1:18.

John 20:28

As N. T. Wright makes the case, John 20:28 is the fullest Christological confession of faith in the entire Gospel (“Thomas answered and said to him, ‘My Lord and my God’”).⁷⁹ And coming from the lips of *doubting* Thomas adds even more intrigue. Granted, several non-textual issues are roaming around like a roaring lion seeking to devour this confession.⁸⁰ Without hunting those important beasts here, my aim is to find out if the reading ὁ θεός in John 20:28 is, in fact, textually impregnable:

⁷⁶ See BDAG 556-57 and L&N 34.18.

⁷⁷ I consider ὁ μονογενής so poorly attested externally and too easily explainable transmissionally to necessitate the reverse hypothesis of starting with it.

⁷⁸ For similar conclusions see Jack Finegan, *Encountering New Testament Manuscripts: A Working Introduction to Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

⁷⁹ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 664. Mastin notes, “John’s ‘My Lord and My God’ directed to Jesus reflects the LXX, where it represents (יהוה אלהים) *Yahweh Elohim* and similar expressions, but also makes contact with an expression fairly common in pagan religion” B. A. Mastin, “Theos in the Christology of John: A Neglected Feature of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel” (NTS, 22 [1975-76]), 32-51, esp. 37-41. Cf. G. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (NY: George H. Doran, Co., 1927), 366-67; Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1978), 572-73; H. D. Betz, *Lukian von Samosata und das Neue Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 102.

⁸⁰ For example, some have felt that Jesus just allowed this statement in order not to “ruin the moment.” Yet Jesus quotes Deut 6:13, “You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him,” in Matt 4:10 and Luke 4:8. Therefore, his teachings and convictions seem to strongly negate this option.

ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου.

The absence of the second article (θεός μου instead of ὁ θεός μου) in a single fifth-century Western manuscript D (05) has once again given Ehrman some textual reflux.⁸¹ First, Ehrman seems to flee his own textual method, reasoned eclecticism,⁸² and follows a rigorous eclectic approach by choosing this variant. Second, he allows the possibility of this being an astonishing exclamatory statement (e.g., “My God!”). Yet grammatically and contextually this is unsustainable.⁸³ Third, although D is arguably the most important Western manuscript⁸⁴ it is also the most eccentric manuscript and regularly drops the article.⁸⁵ Fourth, from his perspective, scribes omit the article so that Jesus is seen as divine and not the one “God” himself. His argument, however, is backwards. What he overlooked is that if D drops the second article this verse falls under the criteria of Granville Sharp’s Rule:

ὁ κύριός μου καὶ θεός μου.

The point is that the second noun “God” would refer back to Jesus because the first noun “Lord” refers back to him; making the phrase even more explicit and “leaving no wiggle room for doubt.”⁸⁶

John 20:28, no matter which variant is chosen, is categorically secure for referring to Jesus as θεός. As it stands, then, Jesus is both the recipient and subject of Thomas’s statement, “My Lord and My God.” In light of the evidence, this verse needs no additional *textual* consideration.

Galatians 2:20

Galatians 2:20 rears its head in one of Paul’s first documented writings.⁸⁷ The original text of Gal 2:20, according to Metzger, Ehrman and others, must have read, “faith in *the son of God* who loved me.”⁸⁸ The four noted variants for this passage, in no particular order, include:

⁸¹ This verse is also one of only four “Jesus-θεός” passages that have at least one manuscript prior to the fourth century.

⁸² See Bart Ehrman, “New Testament Textual Criticism: Quest for Methodology” (M.Div. thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1981). More recently, he maintains this discipline in *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), co-authored by Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman.

⁸³ Four solid reasons are listed by Harris in *Jesus as God* (109). Though I believe the third reason can be stated much stronger since ὁ κύριος is never used of God the Father in John’s *entire* Gospel except in two OT quotations (12:13, 38).

⁸⁴ “When D supports the early tradition the manuscript has a genuine significance, but it (as well as its precursors and followers) should be examined most carefully when it opposes the early tradition” Aland-Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 110).

⁸⁵ “By actual count, there is a parsimonious use of the article in D; in fact, this situation obtains in each book except Luke” (James D. Yoder, “The Language of the Greek Variants of Codex Bezae,” *NovT* 3 [1959], 245).

⁸⁶ For a comprehensive treatment of this subject, see Wallace, *Granville Sharp’s Canon and Its Kin*.

⁸⁷ No absolute proof as to the destination of this letter exists, yet as Kümmel put it, “That Gal(atians) is a real, genuine letter is indisputable” (Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1975], 304). Even F. C. Baur, the father of the Tübingen School, agreed with its authenticity.

⁸⁸ The underlining text is found in all major published Greek texts, with the exception of Bover (who reads: θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ).

τοῦ θεοῦ
 υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ
 θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ
 τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ

The fourth revised edition of the UBS *Greek New Testament Text* continues their support and certainty of the second reading. The committee agreed to increase their rating from a “B” (found in the 3rd edition) to an “A.”⁸⁹ In addition, the authors of the text-critical notes in the recent *New English Translation*, with different arguments, came to the same textual conclusion.⁹⁰ Yet after considering the internal and external evidence, I still think there are several stones unturned and discourse left unsaid regarding the third reading θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ (“God even Christ”).

Externally, the two oldest witnesses support θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ (P⁴⁶ B).⁹¹ Along with this early Alexandrian support,⁹² a strong group of Western witnesses concurs (D* G F it^{d, g} Victorinus-Rome). What remains tricky about this variant is the apparent agreement between good Western and Alexandrian witnesses. This agreement is not novel by any means, but it does pose a fascinating methodological question that many have tried to answer: what makes these types of readings? It is possible, I suppose, to understand this as a Western contamination of the Alexandrian witnesses at precisely these points. Zuntz proposes:

Apart from the preservation of some ancient genuine readings, the outstanding feature of this group—foremost in P46—is the ‘Western’ readings, or rather, those readings which have disappeared from the later ‘Alexandrian’ manuscripts (and often also from other Eastern witnesses) but recur in the West. The presence of these readings does not make the group ‘Western’ in any legitimate sense of the term; the ‘Alexandrian’ character of the ‘proto-Alexandrian’ witnesses is established by *unequivocal facts*. This element, common to the earliest Eastern and to the Western traditions, is a survival from a pre-‘Alexandrian’ and pre-Western basis, the traces of which, most marked in P46, gradually disappear from the later ‘Alexandrian’ tradition but often reappear in later Eastern witnesses, as well as in the West.⁹³

In other words, the Western readings found in non-Western witnesses are typically ancient survivals, “They are not, in the relevant witnesses, secondary intrusions into a previously pure form.”⁹⁴

This is unpersuasive to me because the relationships between all the major MSS remain difficult to describe in normal text-type terms. In the least, one needs to do a comparative analysis to demonstrate that the above conclusion establishes *unequivocal facts*. Otherwise, it

⁸⁹ The explanation can be found in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 524.

⁹⁰ Michael H. Burer. *New Testament: New English Translation, Novum Testamentum Graece* (Diglot ed. Dallas: NET Bible Press, 2004), 860.

⁹¹ P⁴⁶ is ca. 200 and B (Vaticanus) is ca. fourth century.

⁹² Some argue that P⁴⁶ in Galatians is not Alexandrian in any discernable sense except for the fact that it was found in Egypt. Yet this implies, at the least, that different books reflect different text-types and thus provide only remnants of earlier, separately transmitted conditions. This same argument was used regarding P⁴⁶ in Rom 16 some time ago with no final reputable consensus to my knowledge.

⁹³ Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles* (London: OUP, 1953), 156-7 [italics added].

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

seems to me a slight overstatement. To my knowledge, no one has given an exhaustive analysis of the manuscript relationships for the Pauline corpus or for any individual book(s). This may be due to a presupposition that the books only ever circulated as a corpus and the results were simply generalized accordingly. In my opinion, such a project needs to be undertaken to add some plausibility and significance to this thesis. Nonetheless, as far as P^{46} is concerned, at least two choices remain: (1) the reading is an ancient survival in Alexandrian witnesses, or (2) the reading is a Western invasion into Alexandrian witnesses.

Next, two main internal arguments against this reading exist: (1) Paul nowhere else expressly speaks of God as the object of a Christian's faith and (2) during the copying process a scribe's eye probably passed over the first article to the second so that $\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ was written (as in MS 330).⁹⁵ In response to the former, God is the object of a believer's faith in Romans 4:24.⁹⁶ As to the latter, this theory depends on the final acceptance of the reading $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, causing a compound hypothetical anecdote with each stage being dependent on the previous one(s).

Furthermore, $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon$ does find syntactical parallel in Pauline literature: 1 Tim 5:21 and 2 Tim 4:1.⁹⁷ Beyond this, "Son of God" is the easier reading and possibly explains why a scribe preferred it. Also, it is possible that there is a contextual harmonization of v. 19 "live to God" and v. 20 "Christ lives in me;" keeping with the Western tradition and Pauline theology.⁹⁸ Of course, textually speaking, harmonization seems to be more literal than conceptual.

Externally and internally, several issues still need more clarification and resolution. Though I sought to confront and consider most of them, I still opted for the traditional reading $\upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ ("Son of God") as the best of all probable scenarios. At the same time, I am still hesitant to give this reading an "A" rating as does the UBS⁴ committee.

Titus 2:13

Titus 2:13 presumably reveals a conceptual unity between Jesus and $\theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$.⁹⁹

$\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \mu\epsilon\gamma\acute{\alpha}\lambda\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \sigma\omega\tau\eta\acute{\rho}\omicron\varsigma\ \eta\mu\acute{\omega}\nu\ \text{I}\eta\sigma\omicron\upsilon\ \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon$

While much of the debate congregates around the grammatical understanding of Granville Sharp's rule,¹⁰⁰ this issue should not entirely distract us here as we look at the textual evidence

⁹⁵ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 524.

⁹⁶ Moo writes, "It is typical for Paul to designate God as the one who raised Jesus from the dead (cf. 8:11; 10:9; 1Cor. 6:14; 15:15; 2 Cor. 4:14), but it is somewhat unusual for him to designate God himself as the object of Christian faith. Undoubtedly he does so here to bring Christian faith into the closest possible relationship to Abraham's faith" (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 287).

⁹⁷ Contra Ehrman, "... neither of the other expressions ("God even Christ," "God the Son") occurs in this way in Paul" (Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 86). It should also be stated that the position of the pronoun does not affect the sense.

⁹⁸ Paul seems to adhere to a bidirectional life for the believer with the two foci being God and Christ.

⁹⁹ The wording "our great God and Savior" which is applied to Jesus in this verse was current among Greek-speaking Christians. See James H. Moulton, "Prolegomena." Vol. 1 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), 84.

¹⁰⁰ Several NT scholars also put an asterisk by it because they consider it deutero-Pauline. Yet even if one assumes that Paul did not write Titus, it still would have been written in the first century and, therefore, impervious to some of the critiques above; e.g., orthodox corruption(s) due to the fourth-century Arian controversy. As a side note, David G. Meade's work reveals that *geistiges Eigentum* ("intellectual/creative property") was already known in the sixth-century B.C.E. Greek world (*Pseudonymity and Canon* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 4). Cf. W. Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im Altertum* (München: C. H. Beck, 1971).

behind this translation. Nevertheless, Wallace, in his forthcoming book *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin*, concisely explains:

By way of conclusion, we are reminded of A. T. Robertson's words: "Sharp stands vindicated after all the dust has settled." As I began this investigation, I assumed that perhaps he was too bold, too premature in his assessment. But the evidence has shown that Robertson was right on the mark, and that Sharp's canon has been terribly neglected and abused in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the *least*, it ought to be resurrected as a sound principle that has *overwhelming* validity in all of Greek literature—when properly understood. Consequently, in Titus 2:13 and 2 Pet 1:1 we should at least recognize that, on a grammatical level, a heavy burden of proof rests with the one who wishes to deny that "God and Savior" refers to one person, Jesus Christ.¹⁰¹

This assessment still has its foes,¹⁰² but most grammarians, like Wallace, state that this text clearly indicates one person is in view.¹⁰³ This may also be why no manuscript ever ventures to read τὸν πατέρα καὶ υἱόν.¹⁰⁴ With that aside, the prior question still remains: is the textual pedigree certain?¹⁰⁵ The answer is absolutely yes!¹⁰⁶ The only viable variant concerns the order of the last two words.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, to my knowledge, not one jot or tittle has ever been penned against its textual certainty.¹⁰⁸ The text, then, explicitly refers to Jesus as θεός¹⁰⁹ and reads: "of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Hebrews 1:8

¹⁰¹ Wallace, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin*.

¹⁰² In disagreement, some still argue that θεός should be considered a proper (or even a quasi-proper) name (hence, rejecting Granville Sharp's Rule). For a detailed refutation of this view, see Wallace, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin*.

¹⁰³ Cf. Moulton (1:84), Robertson (786), Wallace (270-278, esp. 276), Moule (Idiom 109-110), Blass-Debrunner (§276), Brooks-Winbery (*Syntax of New Testament Greek*, 76). Furthermore, the majority of critical commentators and exegetes agree with the grammarians.

¹⁰⁴ 1 John 2:22 comes the closest but it has two articles.

¹⁰⁵ This seemingly backwards approach has not influenced my method or conviction that the text determines the grammar; not the reverse.

¹⁰⁶ Though not primarily on textual grounds, Harris over time has amplified his boldness from an earlier work where he stated that this verse "seems probable" (Donald Hagner and Murray Harris, *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to Professor F. F. Bruce on his 70th Birthday* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 273), to his later monograph over a decade later which states "seems highly probable" (Harris, *Jesus As God*, 185). Cf. Spicq, *Les épîtres pastorales* (Paris: Gabalda, 1947), 265-66.

¹⁰⁷ "Jesus Christ" or "Christ Jesus."

¹⁰⁸ As a matter of fact, although Ehrman did not mention Titus 2:13 specifically in *Orthodox Corruption*, by his own argument regarding 2 Pet 1:1, this verse in Titus 2 explicitly equates Jesus with God, "Because the article is not repeated before Ἰησοῦ (in 2 Pet 1:1), it would be natural to understand both 'our God' and 'Savior' in reference to Jesus [our 'God and Savior']." In other words, one article with two referents equals one person according to Ehrman (*Orthodox Corruption*, 267); making Titus 2:13 an *explicit* reference to Jesus as θεός.

¹⁰⁹ For the most recent treatment against this view, see Gordon Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007). Cf. Wallace, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin*.

For centuries, the book of Hebrews has been the combat zone of many impasses and cacophonous speculations: its juncture is unstated, its author is unknown,¹¹⁰ and its destination ambiguous. Fortunately, these matters, while fascinating, are not at the viscera of the book's significance.¹¹¹ What interests us here, then, is one verse in the first chapter that possibly denotes the deity of Christ: namely, 1:8. Since the hermeneutical and exegetical issues here are beyond the scope of this paper, I will proceed by simply addressing the textual issues. In this verse, two main interconnected textual issues exist which possibly help resolve the broader grammatical dilemma of how ὁ θεός is to be interpreted in vv. 8 and 9.¹¹²

The first textual variant is pretty straightforward: the presence or absence of τοῦ αἰῶνος (“and ever”) after εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (“forever”).

ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος
ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα

Externally, the absence of τοῦ αἰῶνος is significantly inferior with only a small handful of concentrated MSS omitting it (B 33 *t vg^{ms}*). Although it is true that scribes often expanded readings (with the apocoped reading generally being preferred), it is not the situation here for several reasons. First, τοῦ αἰῶνος is a direct quotation from the OT with both the LXX [44:7] and MT [45:7] supporting it. Second, this reading is supported by the best and earliest MSS (only a few omit it: B 33 *t vg^{ms}*). Third, every time עַלְמָו occurs in the OT the LXX translates it with τοῦ αἰῶνος (Ps 10:16; 21:5; 45:7; 48:15; 52:10; 104:5).¹¹³ Putting it another way, if one accepts the shorter Greek rendering of the OT quote in Heb 1:8 (simply by εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα), and does not include τοῦ αἰῶνος, it goes against all the ancient versions.¹¹⁴ Fourth, faulty eyesight could easily explain the omission.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Although Hebrews' author is anonymous, the author was at least a male (11:32) contemporary of the Apostle Paul's protégé Timothy (Heb 13:23); placing Hebrews in the first century.

¹¹¹ Simplistically put, the Book of Hebrews focuses on Jesus in His exaltation as the fulfillment of the entire OT. In other words, He is the final culmination of the redemption and revelation of God (“already-not-yet”). Cf. Craig Blaising & Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 102-03.

¹¹² Actually, two other variants in this verse exist (the omission of the conjunction καὶ and the word order of ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος) that do not need further discussion here. The second one in no way affects our question of whether Jesus is explicitly called θεός and the first one, according to Metzger and others, would only slightly reduce the difficulty of the last variant if it were to read αὐτοῦ. Still, for clarity sake, I feel confident that these two variants together should read καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος (maintaining the καὶ and subsequent word order).

¹¹³ The only possible exception is Ps 21:5, but it still has the resemblance (εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος).

¹¹⁴ “It is not impossible that the uniform testimony of the ancient versions in support of the vocative may reflect a messianic re-reading which stresses the transcendence of the King – Messiah, but it is at least equally possible that all these versions testify to the most natural way of construing אֱלֹהִים, whether they understood the word in reference to the Messiah, or, as Mulder believes (*Psalm 45* 48), to God” (Murray Harris, “The Translation of *Elohim* in Psalm 45,” *TynBull* 35 [1984], 77-78).

¹¹⁵ For this and other possibilities see Ernest C. Colwell, *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 106-24. Cf. J. R. Royse, “Scribal Tendencies in the Transmission of the Text of the New Testament,” *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, 239-252; J. R. Royse, “The Treatment of Scribal Leaps in Metzger’s *Textual Commentary*,” *NTS* 29 (1983) 539-51; Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 250-71.

The second main variant in 1:8 is whether the last word should read αὐτοῦ (“his”) or σου (“your”). The outcome, simply put, will help determine whether ὁ θεός is a nominative for vocative or a predicate nominative:

1. Nominative for vocative = “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and a righteous scepter is the scepter of *your* kingdom” (explicitly attributing deity to the Son).
2. Predicate nominative = “God is your throne [or, Your throne is God] forever and ever, and a righteous scepter is the scepter of *his* [i.e. God’s] kingdom.”¹¹⁶

Internally, whereas they are both grammatically possible, only the first is conceptually plausible because it resonates with the central theme of the section and book (i.e., the exalted Christ).¹¹⁷ Ehrman believes the orthodox party corrupted this text because of their “need to differentiate Christ from God.”¹¹⁸ He concludes by saying, “... we are now dealing not with a corruption of the original text but with a corruption of a corruption.”¹¹⁹ What I think Ehrman may be missing is that the author of Hebrews stands in the exegetical tradition of the Psalm being quoted.¹²⁰ Attridge points out, “That Jewish exegetes regularly understood the text as an address is clear, both from the Targum and from the revision of the LXX by Aquila.”¹²¹ The NT surely utilizes this text as a Davidic fulfillment escalated and culminated in Christ. Consequentially, Heb 1:8 addresses the Son (Christ) as God by depicting ὁ θεός as a nominative for vocative.¹²²

Moreover, Wallace’s grammar perceptively brings forward the μέν ... δέ construction in vv. 7-8. He feels that the nominative for vocative syntax adequately handles this construction; the predicate nominative does not. “Specifically, if we read v 8 as ‘your throne is God’ the δέ loses its adversative force, for such a statement could also be made of the angels, viz., that God reigns over them.”¹²³ To sum this up another way, if one holds to the predicate nominative view

¹¹⁶ Nowhere else, to my knowledge, is the phrase “God is your throne” ever used. The expression, according to Cheyne, is not “consistent with the religion of the psalmists” (*The Book of Psalms* [London, 1888], 127). Put yet another way, “Grammatically, no valid objection may be raised against these renderings [‘God is your throne’ or ‘Your throne is God’], but conceptually they are harsh” (Harris, “The Translation of *Elohim* in Psalm 45,” 72). Cf. Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 336-37; B. B. Warfield, “The Divine Messiah in the Old Testament,” *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia, 1952), 79-126.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 13.

¹¹⁸ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 265.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹²⁰ I propose that Psalm 45:7 refers to the Davidic dynasty. This Davidic king is addressed as אֱלֹהִים because he is God’s delegate on earth. Cf. Isa 9:6 (John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 246-48; Richard Meyers, “The Meaning and Significance of the Messianic Epithets in Isaiah 9:6,” ThM. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992).

¹²¹ Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews*, 58. Cf. T. K. Cheyne, *The Book of Psalms* (London, 1888), 127.

¹²² Little doubt exists that the Septuagint translator construed it so; leaving ὁ θεός in the NT to suggest Jesus’ essential unity with God while preserving his functional subordination (see ὁ θεός σου in v. 9). See, for example, Murray Harris, “The Translation and Significance of ho theos in Hebrews 1:8-9,” *TynBull* 36 (1985), 129-162.

¹²³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 59. Similarly, F. F. Bruce says, “Whatever be said of the force of δέ in v. 6, there is no doubt about its strongly adversative force here, where it harks back to μέν in v. 7 (καὶ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους...πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱόν)” (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 59).

then there is no clear distinction between the angels (subordinate; ephemeral; servants) and Christ (superior; eternal; deity).

Lastly, various translators handle the preposition *πρός* differently throughout this pericope (namely; 1:7, 8, 13). Several translators translate it “of” (ESV, NAS, NET, RSV), some “to” (KJV, NJB, NLT), and still others “about” (CSB, NIV); with varying combinations throughout all three instances. However, the translations with “of” or “about” reflect a “misconstrual of the citation as a word about [of] the Son, not to him.”¹²⁴ In other words, vv. 8 and 13 “must be translated ‘to’.”¹²⁵ This pertains to our present internal investigation because it strengthens the *μὲν ... δέ* discussion above towards a nominative for vocative translation.

Externally, I believe the pronoun *σου*¹²⁶ has more impressive weight and variety than *αὐτοῦ*.¹²⁷ This assessment was kept even after recognizing that the combination of *Ϟ⁴⁶ ⚭ B* “has the original reading in eleven other cases of minority readings in Hebrews.”¹²⁸ Still, one more external issue requires a response. Ehrman remarks, “It is interesting to observe that the same MSS that evidence corruption in Hebrew 1:8 do so in John 1:18 as well, one of the other passages.”¹²⁹ First, while this brief statement is basically correct, he leaves the reader with a distorted view of scribal activity and transmissional history. Indeed, many examples of the reverse exist. I will briefly list six examples from the MSS he used numerous times regarding our present topic:

- I. *Ϟ⁴⁶*
 - a. Corrupted text(s) according to Ehrman: Gal 2:20.
 - b. Text(s) that support Ehrman’s reading: Heb 1:8.
- II. *⚭ (01)*
 - a. Corrupted text(s) according to Ehrman: John 1:1; 1:18, 20:28.
 - b. Text(s) that support Ehrman’s reading: Acts 20:28; Gal 2:20; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:1.
- III. *D (05)*
 - a. Corrupted text(s) according to Ehrman: John 1:1; 1:18.
 - b. Text(s) that support Ehrman’s reading: John 20:28.
- IV. *L (019)*
 - a. Corrupted text(s) according to Ehrman: John 1:18, 20:28.
 - b. Text(s) that support Ehrman’s reading: John 1:1.
- V. *L (020)*
 - a. Corrupted text(s) according to Ehrman: Heb 1:8; Jude 4 (Ehrman does not mention this text directly but see n25 above).
 - b. Text(s) that support Ehrman’s reading: Gal 2:20.

¹²⁴ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 57.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *σου* (A D F K L Ψ 0243 33 81 104 326 1739 1881 it vg cop^{sa,bo,fay} geo *Byz Lect*); *αὐτοῦ* (*Ϟ⁴⁶ ⚭ B H S W*).

¹²⁷ For detailed understanding of the MSS for Hebrews see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 31-32 (Cf. Zuntz, *The Text*, 64; Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 592-93; Beare, “The Text of the Epistle to the Hebrews in P⁴⁶,” *JBL* 63 [1944] 379-96; and Spicq, *Hébreux* 1:412-32).

¹²⁸ Harris, *Jesus as God*, 210.

¹²⁹ Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 265.

VI. W (032)

- a. Corrupted text(s) according to Ehrman: John 1:1; John 20:28.
- b. Text(s) that support Ehrman's reading: John 1:18.

In light of these six examples, which are only a small sampling, I first conclude that much more work needs to be done in the realm transmissional history. More importantly though, just given my examples above, my second, and main, conclusion is that no one would have received a truncated view of the deity of Christ if they only received their manuscript. Each manuscript listed above has at least one “Jesus-θεός” verse that affirms the deity of Christ. It is inconsequential, then, that every potential “Jesus-θεός” passage in every manuscript affirm the same. This evidential conclusion causes another major problem in Ehrman's overall orthodox corruption thesis.

My second, and final, observation regarding the above quote is that Ehrman emphasized and accepted the “ubiquitous” reading of υἱός over the “fairly localized” reading of θεός in John 1:18. This assessment was used to support his orthodox corruption thesis. On the other hand, he emphasized and accepted the fairly localized reading αὐτοῦ over the ubiquitous reading of σου in Heb 1:8 (see n126). This assessment was also used to support his orthodox corruption thesis. This is not to say that one should never do this (e.g., Mark 1:41), but as Ehrman has said elsewhere, “[i]t is sometimes possible to detect a clear bias in an author—for example, when just about every story in his or her account drives home, either subtly or obviously, the same point.”¹³⁰

In the end, I believe that the preponderance of evidence points to the true textual reading, “but to the Son [he declares], ‘*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and a righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom.*’ ” To put it another way, the probability is high that Jesus is explicitly called θεός in Heb 1:8.

2 Peter 1:1

2 Peter is one of the most disputed letters in the NT. Not only has this book been debated historically, canonically, and doctrinally, but it recently has had some hefty skepticism thrown towards it textually. With that in mind, 2 Pet 1:1 is potentially one of the last NT verses for explicitly equating Jesus with θεός.¹³¹ Hence, this verse needs a reexamination textually.

Some MSS (Ⲭ Ψ pc sa syr^{ph} vg^{mss} cop^{sa})¹³² read κυρίου (“Lord”) instead of θεοῦ (“God”) in v. 1:

ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

As with John 1:18, either variant could have arisen due to a scribal oversight of the *nomen sacrum*; Υ̅Ϛ vs. Θ̅Ϛ. Those who support κυρίου attempt to justify their conclusion several

¹³⁰ Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: OUP, 1999), 89.

¹³¹ Keep in mind that depending on dating and authenticity the later one dates the NT books the more probable its theological development.

¹³² NA27 and Tischendorf differ on 2 Pet 1:1 regarding Ⲭ. Nevertheless, after personally checking a facsimile, the NA27 is correct; Ⲭ attests to κυριοῦ.

different ways.¹³³ First, the phrase “Lord and Savior” is statistically superior when referring to Christ in 2 Peter.¹³⁴ Second, all NT references to *righteousness* refer to God, not to Christ.¹³⁵ Third, a shift to θεοῦ could have been a motivated orthodox corruption to make the text speak unambiguously of Jesus as God due to the Christological controversies during the early centuries.¹³⁶ Fourth, κυρίου maintains the alleged parallelism between 1:1 and 1:2, distinguishing God and Jesus. Fifth, κύριος is used repeatedly in this phrase elsewhere in 2 Peter (1:11; 2:20; 3:2, 18). Sixth, the doxology to Jesus in 3:18 (αὐτῷ [Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ] ἡ δόξα καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς ἡμέραν αἰῶνος) could be an inclusio with 1:1. Seventh, θεός is rarely used of Jesus in the NT.

Those who accept θεοῦ as original reverse most of those critiques while including a few additional observations. First, “Lord and Savior” is the NT norm and a scribe could have harmonized it. Second, almost all references to *righteousness* in the NT do refer to God so a scribe may have assimilated it. Third, κυρίου might have been sought to maintain this alleged parallelism between 1:1 and 1:2.¹³⁷ Fourth, θεοῦ is the harder reading as the opposing critiques reveal. Fifth, the entire phrase “Lord and Savior” always refers to Jesus in 2 Peter. Sixth, the construction is different when an author desires to distinguish two persons.¹³⁸ Seventh, the doxology in 3:18 and the phrase in 1:1 are attesting to Jesus’ exalted status and are both consistent Christologically with the rest of the NT.¹³⁹ Eighth, this phrase might be in sync with Hellenistic religious language in order to communicate the gospel meaningfully to Gentile converts.¹⁴⁰ Ninth, the external evidence is better and earlier.¹⁴¹ Tenth, the identification of Jesus as θεός is entirely realistic in light of progressive revelation (2 Peter being one of the last NT

¹³³ In order to avoid an over-large footnote, please see critical commentaries.

¹³⁴ Four times it reads “Lord and Savior” (1:11; 2:20; 3:2; 3:18) while only once it reads “God and Savior” (1:1).

¹³⁵ Except maybe Phil 1:11 (πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης τὸν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς δόξαν καὶ ἔπαινον θεοῦ).

¹³⁶ Ehrman is correct in saying that “... manuscripts were produced by scribes and scribes were human beings who had anxieties, fears, concerns, desires, hatreds and ideas—in other words, scribes worked in a context, and prior to the invention of moveable type, these contexts had a significant effect on how texts were produced” (Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 277). Yet errors occur all the time, even today (which he readily admits in *Misquoting Jesus*, 208). And even if the rise of the variant could be exclusively shown to be different from the original, it would still be uncertain whether that means the translator was theologically motivated and, if so, whether the choice was deliberate or subconscious. Unfortunately, it seems Fee was correct, “Ehrman too often turns mere *possibility* into *probability*, and probability into *certainty*, where other equally viable reasons for corruption exist” (“Review of *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*” in *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 8 [1995], 204).

¹³⁷ Even though this alleged parallelism would be extremely rare in the NT.

¹³⁸ E.g., 2 Pet 1:2 (τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν) and 2 Thess 1:12 (τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). The Granville Sharp Rule does not include proper names; and ‘Jesus’ and ‘Lord Jesus Christ’ are both proper names. Cf. Wallace, *Granville Sharp’s Canon and Its Kin*; B. Weiss, “Der Gebrauch des Artikels bei den Gottesnamen,” *TSK* 84 (1911).

¹³⁹ It should not be argued that the differing words (“God” in 1:1 and “Lord” in 3:18) refute this concept since similar parallels can be shown elsewhere with differing words (e.g., Matt 1:23 & 28:20; Mark 1:1 & 15:39; John 1:1 & 20:28).

¹⁴⁰ See Tord Fornberg, “An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter” (Doctoral diss., Uppsala University, April 1977), 143. Cf. Michael Amaladoss, *Making All Things New* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990).

¹⁴¹ Not to mention the existing unanimity within all major published Greek texts: NA27, Tischendorf, UBS⁴, Bover, Merk, von Soden, Westcott and Hort, Vogels, and Weiss.

books written).¹⁴² Eleventh, the Granville Sharp Rule unequivocally applies to this construction thereby referring both titles, “God” and “Savior,” to Jesus Christ.¹⁴³

At the end of the day, I believe θεοῦ goes back to the original because it best accounts for all the evidence. If this verdict is correct, it is highly probable that Jesus is explicitly called θεός and the verse reads: “of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

CONCLUSION

No one contests that the NT usually reserves the title θεός for God the Father.¹⁴⁴ Yet as the charts below demonstrate, this usage, though dominant, is not exclusive.¹⁴⁵ The question now before us is not whether Jesus is explicitly called θεός in the NT, but how many times is he thus identified and by whom.¹⁴⁶

In conclusion, Orthodox Christology was never jeopardized in this discussion. The textual proof of the designation θεός as applied to Jesus in the NT merely confirms what has already been established on other grounds. One can, therefore, be confident in the midst of this debate. In fact, the title θεός only makes explicit what is implied in other Christological titles such as κύριος and υἱὸς θεοῦ. Harris adds:

Even if the early Church had never applied the title θεός to Jesus, his deity would still be apparent in his being the object of human and angelic worship and of saving faith; the exerciser of exclusively divine functions such as creatorial agency, the forgiveness of sins, and the final judgment; the addressee in petitionary prayer; the possessor of all divine attributes; the bearer of numerous titles used of Yahweh in the OT; and the co-author of divine blessing. Faith in the deity of Christ does not rest on the evidence or validity of a series of ‘proof-texts’ in which Jesus may receive the title θεός but on the general testimony of the NT corroborated at the bar of personal experience.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² This is in response to one of the major critiques often used, that if an earlier NT account is imbued with a highly developed Christology than it is less likely to be historically accurate since the greater passage of time was needed to allow a greater sustained theological reflection.

¹⁴³ Green proposes, “It is hardly open for anyone to translate 1 Pet 1:3 ‘the God and Father’ and yet here decline to translate ‘the God and Saviour’ ” (Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 69). Edmond concludes, “Elsewhere, this epistle never uses the word Savior alone but always coupled with another name under the same article (cf. 1:11; 2:20; 3:2; 18)” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expository Commentary* [Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1989], 37). Cf. Wallace, *Granville Sharp’s Canon and Its Kin*.

¹⁴⁴ Bultmann was correct that, “In *describing Christ as ‘God’* the New Testament still exercises great restraint” (*Theology of the New Testament*. Ed. by Kendrick Grobel of Theologie des Neuen Testaments, I [London, 1952] 129f).

¹⁴⁵ I should also note that an argument based on the NT’s usage or non-usage of the title θεός for Jesus is different from the claim that the NT authors were so embedded with Jewish monotheism that they could not have thought of Jesus as God. Such a claim assumes that they could not reconcile two truths or break away from their prior presuppositions. Even though they may use “contradictory” terminology, they believed in the divinity of Jesus; sometimes even in preexistent categories. Cf. Larry Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁴⁶ A conceptual fallacy exists for any scholar to reject every possible text to show that the original author(s) did not support this concept. Nevertheless, I feel the answer to this question will inevitably boil down to the presuppositions of each scholar (See, for example, Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996], 17).

¹⁴⁷ Murray Harris, “Titus 2:13 and the Deity of Christ” in *Pauline Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 271.

Still, with *at least* one text that undoubtedly calls Jesus θεός in every respect (John 20:28), whether Jesus is ever called θεός in the NT has been resolved.¹⁴⁸ Surely, attempts will continually be made to declare the opposite. Nevertheless, as we have seen, such a conclusion divorces itself from the textual evidence internally and externally. In other words, the overwhelming evidence clearly attests to the fact that Jesus as θεός is a scriptural fact. Whether one chooses to believe *in* Him as such is another matter.

Textual Derivation¹⁴⁹

Passage	Certain	Highly Probable ¹⁵⁰	Dubious
Matt 1:23	X		
John 1:1	X		
John 1:18		X	
John 17:3	X		
John 20:28	X		
Acts 20:28		X	
Rom 9:5			X
Gal 2:20		X	
Eph 5:5		X	
Col 2:2		X	
2 Thess 1:12	X		
1 Tim 3:16	X		
Titus 2:13	X		
Heb 1:8		X	
2 Pet 1:1		X	
1 John 5:20	X		
Jude 4		X	

¹⁴⁸ Wainwright makes two additional points: first, he says that many critics have chosen a less natural translation of the Greek because they believe it was psychologically impossible for the writer to have said that Jesus was God. Second, he feels that the argument from inconsistency in usage must be used with care because we are not certain that the writer saw an inconsistency in only occasionally using a title (the rarity of usage to some extent is dependent on the rejection of most of the potential “Jesus-θεός” passages. If only a few of these instances are joined with the others then the usage is not so rare). His conclusion, therefore, is that just because “God” for Jesus seems rare in the NT it should not always be considered improbable. “The Confession ‘Jesus as God’ in the New Testament,” *SJT* 10 (1957), 274-299 esp. 277.

¹⁴⁹ This first chart is meant to reveal the *textual* certainty of each passage whether or not it refers to Jesus as θεός.

¹⁵⁰ While another reading is still *possible* I do not think it is *probable*.

Jesus as Θεός¹⁵¹

Passage	Certain	Highly Probable ¹⁵²	Dubious	Does not
Matt 1:23			X	
John 1:1	X			
John 1:18		X		
John 17:3			X	
John 20:28	X			
Acts 20:28			X	
Rom 9:5		X		
Gal 2:20			X	
Eph 5:5			X	
Col 2:2			X	
2 Thess 1:12				X
1 Tim 3:16				X
Titus 2:13	X			
Heb 1:8		X		
2 Pet 1:1		X		
1 John 5:20			X	
Jude 4				X

¹⁵¹ This second chart is meant to reveal my level of certainty of whether each passage explicitly refers to Jesus as Θεός.

¹⁵² While it is still *possible* to interpret it another way I do not think it is not *probable*.