



INVESTIGATING TEXTUAL VARIANTS OF MARK 1:1

Do Ngoc Hoa
Institute for Bible and Theology, Ho Chi Minh City
dnhoa1974@gmail.com

Article History

Submitted
January 3th, 2022

Revised
January 30th, 2022

Accepted
January 31st, 2022.

Keyword

Textual Criticism; Mark 1:1; the Markan Opening; Greek of the New Testament.

Kritik Teks; Markus 1:1; Pembuka Markus; Bahasa Yunani Perjanjian Baru.

Abstract: *This article revisits a classical case in textual criticism, textual variants of Mark 1:1. It presents all the variants from the available manuscripts and their respective dating. After that, it investigates all the variants using the textual criticism approach, focusing on the external and internal evidence. While affirming that this paper does not solve the problem since evidence for at least two readings is equally convincing, it concludes by confirming that the variant with longer reading is preferable and more likely to be the original.*

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas kembali kasus klasik dalam studi Kritik Teks, yaitu berbagai variasi teks dalam Markus 1:1. Artikel ini memaparkan semua varian dari pelbagai manuskrip beserta dengan pentarikhannya masing-masing. Setelah itu, artikel ini menginvestigasi semua varian tersebut berdasarkan pendekatan Kritik Teks, dengan fokus pada bukti eksternal dan internal. Mengafirmasi bahwa kajian ini tidak menyelesaikan masalah tekstual dalam teks yang diselidiki karena bukti bagi kedua bacaan yang dominan sama-sama meyakinkan, artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa varian dengan bacaan yang lebih panjang lebih meyakinkan dan kemungkinan besar asli.

INTRODUCTION

We are preparing to step into the opening verse of Mark, which is one of the most frequently debated texts of the second Gospel.¹ In Nestle-Aland text, this verse reads as follows: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (υἱοῦ θεοῦ) [The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, [Son of God]]. According to the Nestle-Aland editors, the square brackets indicate that the phrase υἱοῦ θεοῦ may be regarded as part of the text, but this cannot be taken as entirely sure.² The phrase υἱοῦ θεοῦ has long been one of “the thorniest New Testament textual cruxes.”³ The problem of this verse is expressed in modern translators and commentators. This is shown very clearly when most modern translations and commentaries advocate the longer reading of Mark 1:1, whereas the rest the shorter. This phrase is omitted by Tischendorf, Nestle, Westcott, Hort, Kilpatrick but is included by Soden (in brackets), Vogels, Souter, Lagrange, Taylor, Merk, Turner.⁴ Further, in his survey of available commentaries, M. P. Head found that practically all English commentaries added the words, while continental commentaries differed widely.⁵

All these variant readings bring us to an important question in the opening verse of Mark’s Gospel, where the original text is, of whether the phrase υἱοῦ θεοῦ (Son of God) should be included or omitted? Based on the external and internal evidence, we will evaluate the significant textual variants in Mark 1:1. It is my thesis that the long reading (including the phrase υἱοῦ θεοῦ) is more likely to be original due to its better support.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article uses the qualitative method in biblical studies. To be specific, the approach chosen is Textual Criticism. Following the textual criticism operating mechanism, the article focuses on the external and internal evidence of the variants of Mark 1:1.

¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 149.

² Eberhard Nestle, Kurt Aland, and Barbara Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 54.

³ Alexander Globe, “The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase ‘Son of God’ in Mark 1:1,” *HTR* 75 (2982): 209.

⁴ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Abert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 2.

⁵ Peter M Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1 ‘The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” *NTS* 37 (1991): 621-2.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

External Evidence

This section will go through the variant readings in Mark 1:1 and then examine these readings based upon New Testament Greek manuscripts, versional witnesses, and Patristic citations to evaluate variant readings.

The Variant Readings

Variant Readings	Date	Alexandrian	Western	Caesarean	Byzantine	Unclassified
Omit υιοῦ θεου	3					Origen ^{gr, lat}
	4	κ*, Cop ^{sa ms}				Asterius, Serapion, Cyril of Jerusalem, Hesychius, Victorinus Pettau, Jerome 3/6
	5			Arm geo 1 syr ^{pal}		Epiphanius, Jerome
	6-10			θ	2211	
	11-16			28*		
Omit Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ	3					Irenaeus
	4					
	5					Epiphanius
υιοῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ	11-16				1241	
υιοῦ θεου	4	B, κ ¹	W			
	5		D			
	6-10	L				
	11-16					2427
υιοῦ τοῦ θεου	3					Irenaeus
	4	Cop ^{sa_ms, bo}	ita	geo2	eth	Vg, Ambrose, Fautus-Milevis
	5		It ^{b, d}		A, Syr ^p	Chromatius, Jerome, Augustine
	6-10	Δ. 33, 892	It ^{aur, c, f, ff_2, 1, q, r_1}	565	1424	Syr ^h
	11-16			1071, f ^l , 13, 579	1006, 1010, 1292, 1505, Lect, slav	180, 205, 597, 700, 1071, 1243, 1342

Above is the list of all the variants according to NA27 and UBS4. Thus, there are five variant readings of Mark 1:1:

1. Reading 1: "Αρχή του ευαγγελίου Ιησού Χριστού."
2. Reading 2: "Αρχή του ευαγγελίου."

3. Reading 3: "Αρχή του ευαγγελίου Ιησού Χριστού υιού του κυρίου."
4. Reading 4: "Αρχή του ευαγγελίου Ιησού Χριστού υιού θεού."
5. Reading 5: "Αρχή του ευαγγελίου Ιησού Χριστού υιού του θεού."

Before concentrating on the primary readings in this verse, it is easy to see that the second and the third readings, which have the least number of witnesses, are most likely the secondary. Concerning the second reading, which omits not only υιού θεού but also Ιησού Χριστού, we may at once eliminate this reading because it is unattested in any Greek manuscripts. The absence of these vital and fundamental external evidence makes this reading be set aside as almost undoubtedly secondary. Regarding the third reading, its support is only present in minuscule 1241 (Byzantine family) derived from the twelfth or thirteenth century.⁶ According to Alexander Globe, this variant "may have unconsciously substituted the abbreviation 'Lord,' KY, for 'God,' ΘΥ."⁷ Furthermore, this reading can hardly be considered an original text because lacking in uncial manuscripts (versions and patristic citations) and its later date. Weaker evidence supporting this reading shows that this reading is not popular, at least until we can find new evidence that supports this reading.

When these two variant readings have been eliminated, we are left with three readings, which we can divide into two main groups: the short reading without the phrase υιού θεου and the long reading with υιού (του) θεου. On a closer inspection, concerning the long reading, it is obvious that while the fourth reading is strongly supported by early manuscript κ¹, B, D (Alexandrian and Western family), the support for the fifth is slighter. The fifth reading is supported by A, Δ, and some manuscripts which come from a somewhat later date, such as 33, 565, 180, f¹, 13. As a result, it appears that earlier and better texts favor the omission του. Nevertheless, these two readings are nearly the same and closely related.⁸ Globe even stated that the fifth reading supports the fourth reading.⁹ Thus, we can combine these readings into one group, called the long reading with υιού (του) θεου. We also have the other called the short reading without the phrase υιού θεου.

The New Testament Greek Manuscripts

Because none of the readings has support from the early papyri, therefore, in this section, we will rely on uncials, minuscules, and lectionaries to evaluate variant readings. However, there is no doubt that the long reading with υιού (του) θεου has

⁶ Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of The New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷ Globe, "The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase 'Son of God' in Mark 1:1," 215.

⁸ Head, "A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1 'The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,'" 623.

⁹ Globe, "The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase 'Son of God' in Mark 1:1," 215.

overwhelmingly strong manuscript support.¹⁰

Firstly, the support for the long reading is superior in terms of numbers.¹¹ While $\kappa^* \Theta$ (28) and a few others omit $\nu\iota\omicron\upsilon$ ($\tau\omicron\upsilon$) $\theta\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma$, all the rest of the witnesses virtually have the phrase. The manuscripts lacking the words are very few, so the longer reading should be regarded as authentic.

In addition, the support for the long reading is superior in terms of the diverse geographical areas. While the short reading has support only in the Alexandrian and Caesarean traditions, along with several unclassified witnesses, the inclusion of $\nu\iota\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma$ finds support in all four text types, with a significant number of manuscripts of the Alexandrian tradition. Of course, the text-critical principle that manuscripts should be “weighed rather than counted holds true”¹² therefore, we need to be concerned about the weight of the short reading. Although the Alexandrian type supports this reading, this support is minimal. Only one Alexandrian Greek manuscript (κ^*) supports the short reading. By contrast, the longer reading has an impressively wide textual and geographic distribution. It is found in most of the Neutral and Alexandrian witnesses (κ^1 , B, L, 33, 892) and the majority of Western witnesses (including D and W, all the twenty-two extant Old Latin manuscripts).

In brief, based upon the New Testament manuscripts, the long reading is slightly stronger than the short readings in terms of the number, geographical distribution, and witness families.

The Versions

Turning now to the versional witnesses, we need to note that none of the original manuscripts exists, so “existing manuscripts must be subjected to textual criticism to determine the original text as nearly as possible.”¹³ On the one hand, we look at the versional witnesses of the short reading. These versions attested to the short reading: Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Sahidic Coptic, the first Georgian recension, and one valuable Latin and Greek translation version of Origen. These witnesses are regarded as the most significant of the early versions of the New Testament.¹⁴

At the same time, the long reading is not poorly attested. The following

¹⁰ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd editio. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 62.

¹¹ Ehrman, *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 149.

¹² Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 240.

¹³ David A. Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 23.

¹⁴ Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of The New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 94-126.

versions attest to it: Old Latin, Vulgate, Peshitta, and Harklean Syriac, at least two Sahidic Coptic textual groups, and the Bohairic Coptic, the second Georgian recension, and Ethiopic. From the lists mentioned above, we can easily recognize that both readings found further support in the early centuries. However, while both readings have early support, the long reading is superior in terms of the number and the widespread of versional witnesses. On the one hand, the shorter text appears only in witnesses with a marked Caesarean or Western affinity, mainly confined to Egypt, Palestine, Armenia, and Georgia. The Caesarean sources include the Old Georgian and Old Armenian versions; the Palestinian Syriac also has some Caesarean traits. On the other hand, the long reading has a more diverse geographical distribution with support from Egypt, Italy, Palestine, North Africa, and areas near modern Ethiopia, the Baltics, and Georgia.¹⁵

In short, with such an impressive range of witnesses, it shows that while both readings have strong support from versional witnesses, the long reading seems slightly more dominant than the other in terms of the number and the widespread of the witnesses.

Patristic Citations

The patristic evidence is precious in assessing a text, especially when no papyri texts (nor the early Syriac) are found.¹⁶ However, it must be used with caution because its accuracy is difficult to rate. Church Fathers may directly quote a text from a Greek manuscript or several manuscripts. Sometimes, they allude to a text or even quote loosely from memory.¹⁷ That is the reason a scholar has stated, “patristic citations are not citations unless they have been adequately analyzed.”¹⁸ This is especially true when the patristic evidence for Mark 1:1 is described as “fragmentarily, confusingly, and even inaccurately.”¹⁹

It is easy to see that most Latin Church Fathers support the long reading, such as Irenaeus, Chromatius, Augustine, Ambrose, and Faustus-Milevis. As Head comments, “The bulk of the patristic support for the long reading is limited to what may be called Western witnesses.”²⁰ Nevertheless, there is some Greek patristic support for the long reading, such as Severian and Cyril of Alexandria.²¹ On the other hand, the shorter reading has earlier and more diverse patristic witnesses. The presence

¹⁵ David Hutchison, “The ‘Orthodox Corruption’ of Mark 1:1,” *SWJT* 48, no. 1 (2005): 41.

¹⁶ Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1 ‘The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” 624.

¹⁷ Wegner, *A Student’s Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible*, 236.

¹⁸ Robert M Grant, “The Citation of Patristic Evidence in an Apparatus Criticus,” in *New Testament Manuscript Studies: The Materials and the Making of a Critical Apparatus*, ed. M. M. Parvis and A. P. Wikgren (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 124.

¹⁹ Globe, “The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase ‘Son of God’ in Mark 1:1,” 211.

²⁰ Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1 ‘The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” 624.

²¹ *Ibid.*

of the short reading is not only in the West from the second century (Irenaeus, Victorinus, et al.), but also in the East, in Alexandria and Caesarea from the third century (Origen, Basil, Cyril of Jerusalem, et al.).²² Nevertheless, it is to be noted that some patristic writers who support the short reading tend to depend on previous sources. For example, in *Man.* 25 and 37, Serapion's argument directly depends on Origen's argument, similar to some passages in Origen where Mark 1:1 is cited.²³ Similarly, some scholars, in fact, also suggested that Cyril of Jerusalem, like Serapion and Titus, depend directly on Origen and Serapion; this citation carries less weight as evidence for the short reading.²⁴ In addition, there is also a tendency for patristic writers to abbreviate the text for certain purposes. Severian is a typical example. In *De Sigill* xii. 412, after pointing out that Saint Mark begins his Gospel by concluding "Son of God," he immediately cites verse one without the words. Responding to this issue, Wasserman suggests that "Severian either abbreviated his text or the words were accidentally omitted" in his quotation during manuscript transmission.²⁵

We can say that while the shorter reading has earlier and more diverse patristic witnesses, it is to be noted that some patristic writers who support the short reading tend to rely on previous sources as well as truncate the text for certain purposes. Consequently, several other authors may have intentionally omitted $\nu\iota\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}$ ($\tau\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}$) $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$. In this case, evidence for the long text should be weighted more heavily because of its accuracy and independence of witnesses.

Conclusion Based on External Evidence

Given the evaluation of the manuscripts, versions, and Fathers, it is likely that while the short reading has rather early and widespread support, the long reading has the strongest support in terms of the number, the impressive wide textual, and the geographic distribution.

As mentioned above, in terms of the traditional textual groupings, the long text is found in most of the Neutral and Alexandria witnesses ((κ^1 , B, L, 33, 579, 892, the Coptic, and Cyril of Alexandria), which is commonly considered to be superior, whereas a few attest to the short reading (κ^* , Or, sa^{ms}). It also appears in the majority of Western witnesses (D, W; Old Latin, Vulgate; Irenaeus and the Latin Fathers). In addition, the long reading "was accepted as genuine by most fourth-century textual traditions in both the East and west-the Byzantine Greek, many Caesarean sources,

²² Ibid., 626.

²³ Tommy Wasserman, "The 'Son of God' Was In The Beginning (Mark 1:1)," *JTS* 62 (2011): 29.

²⁴ J. W. Burgon and E. Miller, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), 281.

²⁵ Wasserman, "The 'Son of God' Was In The Beginning (Mark 1:1)," 31.

the Syriac-Peshitta, the Vulgate, and every known Latin writer.”²⁶ By contrast, “the evidence for the omission of these words is weighty but meager.”²⁷

Thus, in comparison with the short text, there is no doubt that the long reading has better support in the manuscripts, Fathers, and versions because of its impressive range of witnesses covering virtually every text type and geographical location from the early centuries. Nevertheless, this external evidence alone is not sufficient to lead to an objective conclusion about the origin of a text. Therefore, let us now turn to the internal evidence.

Internal Evidence

As we have seen above, the external evidence comes from outside the text, such as various manuscripts, versions, and citations from church fathers. Conversely, internal evidence comes from the text itself, such as the author’s style and scribal habits. Specifically, internal evidence involves two kinds of probabilities, intrinsic probabilities and transcriptional probabilities.

In discussions of Mark 1.1, we will analyze and evaluate the internal evidence, beginning with intrinsic probabilities.

Intrinsic Probabilities

As Bruce M. Metzger said, “the reading deemed original should be in harmony with the author’s style and usage elsewhere.”²⁸ Therefore, we need to evaluate Mark’s style and usage in the second Gospel to recognize which reading has better support.

To begin with, it is evident that most scholars agree on the importance of the phrase “Son of God” to Mark’s narrative and admit its harmony with Mark’s Christology.²⁹ According to Craig L. Blomberg, although not often used, the phrase appears in “strategic places” to emphasize Jesus’ exalted role. It also forms part of Mark’s “headline” to the Gospel.³⁰ It is easy to understand that the theme Son of God forms a crucial theme in Mark (1:1; 3:11; 5:7, 8:38; 9:7; 12:6; 13:32; 14:36, 61; and 15:39), and would be appropriate to indicate in the introduction. Hence, one should expect it to occur in the opening verse of this Gospel.³¹ As Robertson suggests, “If

²⁶ Alexander Globe, “Serapion of Thmuis as Witness to the Gospel Text Used by Origen in Caesarea,” *NovT* 26 (1984): 216.

²⁷ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark. The Greek Text With Introduction, Notes and Indices* (New York: The MacMillan company, 1898), 2.

²⁸ Metzger and Ehrman, *The Text of The New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 314.

²⁹ Ehrman, *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 152-3.

³⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 118.

³¹ Hutchison, “The ‘Orthodox Corruption’ of Mark 1:1’,” 46

Mark wrote the words, there is no reason to doubt the genuineness since he uses the phrase elsewhere.”³²

Furthermore, Mark likely intends to express his theological horizons by including the title “Son of God” in the introduction of his Gospel. Specifically, this title would bring two kinds of theological horizons to Mark’s original audiences, the Jewish and the pagans.³³ Firstly, for the Jews in that period, the term “Son of God” is used to refer to the expected Davidic Messiah. It is similar to how the Old Testament used to denote a chosen ruler who represents God among men, such as Israel’s kings and judges.³⁴ Secondly, the term “Son of God” occurring at strategic places in the Gospel can be used against the concepts of sonship popular in the Graeco-Roman world.³⁵ At the time of Mark’s writing, the Roman Empire was in a state of political turmoil. The emperors who had been hailed “son of god” are seemingly worse and more impotent than their predecessors. It was against this setting that Mark dared to declare that the true son of God was Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and “king of the Jews.”³⁶ From this, we can see that, by including the phrase “Son of God,” on the one hand, Mark may proclaim to the Jewish people Jesus is the expected Davidic ruler. But, on the other hand, he may boldly announce to the Graeco-Roman world that neither Julius Caesar nor any one of his descendants a properly be regarded as the “son of God”; only Jesus the Messiah.³⁷

In sum, it is evident that the intrinsic evidence, especially the argument from the Markan style, supports the long reading. Therefore, it seems better to include the phrase “Son of God” as intrinsic to Mark’s intentions.

Transcriptional Probabilities

Regarding the transcription of Mark 1:1, three most possibilities exist:

Accidentally Omitted due to Scribe’s Parablepsis

The first possibility is an accidentally omitting due to the scribe’s parablepsis. It means the original text included the words *υιου θεου*, and a scribe accidentally omitted these words due to an “eye-skip,” arising from *homoioteleuton* (“words

³² A. T Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Mk. 1:1.

³³ Tan Kim Huat, *The Gospel According to Mark*, ed. Bruce J. Nicholls (Manila: Asia Theological Association, 2011), 21-2, 389.

³⁴ Ezra Palmer Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York: C. Scribner’s sons, 1922), 3.

³⁵ Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, s.v. “Son of God.”

³⁶ Craig Evans, “Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel,” *JGChJ* 67–81 (2000): 79.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

ending in the same way”).³⁸ In the case of Mark 1.1, the words Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ would have been abbreviated as nomina sacra (“sacred names”).³⁹ And as D. Hutchison explains:

Using nomina sacra, the phrase Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ would become ΙΥΧΥΥΥΘΥ. Each pair of letters would normally include a horizontal stroke above them to indicate the abbreviation. It is easy to see how, after recording ΙΥΧΥ, a scribe’s eye could have accidentally skipped from the final upsilon in ΧΥ to the final upsilon in ΘΥ, continuing on with the next words after failing to record ΥΥ-ΘΥ.⁴⁰

By contrast, some scholars argue that it is an unusual case of a fault of vision (*homoioteleuton*) that occurred at the beginning of the sentence. According to Ehrman, a scribe is more careful at the beginning of a book and likely to plunge into his work with refreshment.⁴¹ Besides, Head suggests, the purpose of nomina sacra is used to draw attention to and protect the highlighted terms.⁴² Therefore, it is unlikely such an error from the first verse, especially if υἱοῦ θεοῦ is an important theme in Mark’s Gospel.⁴³ Nevertheless, D. Hutchison suggests that “renewed strength and vigor” does not mean the scribe cannot make such a mistake.⁴⁴ Additionally, in the New Testament, such accidental omissions of nomina sacra appeared at the beginning of books, such as 2 Corinthians. 1:1, Titus 1:1, and 1 Peter 1:1.⁴⁵ Therefore, an oversight in copying Mark 1:1 is entirely possible.

Intentionally Added due to Reverential Reasons

The second possibility insists that the original text did not include υἱοῦ θεοῦ, due to a possible “pious expansion” of the divine name.⁴⁶ Some scholars state that a scribe may intentionally add the phrase Son of God for reverential reasons, similar to how Palestinian Syriac inserted the word “God” before “Jesus Christ” in Mark 1:1.⁴⁷ However, Globe against this opinion by pointing out that the scribe did not follow Attic usage, with one or two articles,⁴⁸ in the phrase Son of God (του υἱοῦ του θεοῦ). Instead, in its most primitive form in Mark 1:1, an anarthrous “Son of God” (υἱοῦ θεοῦ) is used, as in Mark 15:39, and like the rest of the nouns in the first verse

³⁸ Ehrman, *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 150.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 626.

⁴⁰ Hutchison, “The ‘Orthodox Corruption’ of Mark 1:1,” 42.

⁴¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scriptures: The Effects of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 73.

⁴² Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1 ‘The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” 628.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Hutchison, “The ‘Orthodox Corruption’ of Mark 1:1,” 43.

⁴⁵ Codex Augiensis F (010) omits Ἰησοῦ in Titus 1:1, which is then corrected; and Codex 206 omits Χριστοῦ in 1 Pet. 1:1. See Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God’ Was In The Beginning (Mark 1:1),” 47.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Globe, “Serapion of Thmuis as Witness to the Gospel Text Used by Origen in Caesarea,” 217.

⁴⁸ See Mark 3:11; 14:61; Rom 8:19; and Gal 2:20 for the double article.

of Mark.⁴⁹ Therefore, intentionally adding the phrase “Son of God” for reverential reasons was not the cause of the longer reading.

Intentionally Added due to Theological Reasons

The third possibility suggests that the addition appeared for theological reasons.⁵⁰ There are two main arguments concerning doctrine reasons. For one thing, the scribe could add this title because it is not significant. As far as we have compatible and reasonable that Mark would use this title in his introduction, discussed, it is so especially in the beginning of his Gospel. However, at the same time, because of such compatibility and rationality, some scholars have suggested that the scribes could intentionally add this title to the text “to expand Christologically loaded title.”⁵¹ Further, Head also mentioned Irenaeus as an example of the introduction to summarize the whole message.⁵² He insisted that adding “Son of God” to the text is more than possible.⁵³ Nevertheless, a given question is whether the scribes were perceptive of the Markan style.⁵⁴ There is no credible evidence given to assert this, so we cannot firmly assert that the scribe has included this title in the opening of Mark. Besides, in *Against Heresies* 3.11.8, Irenaeus skips from Αρχή του ευαγγελίου in Mark 1:1 right to the prophetic reference in verse 2. In other words, he could remove not only “Son of God” but also “Jesus Christ” in the opening verse. Thus, as Wasserman states, “on the whole, the tendency in this ‘milieu,’ if any, was to abbreviate the text of Mark 1:1.”⁵⁵

In addition, some scholars believe that the phrase υιού θεού was added against adoptionist Christology. As Ehrman suggests, when a scribe is concerned that the Gospel did not mention the virgin birth or pre-existence of Christ, he may add the title to “affirm Jesus’ status as the Son of God prior to his baptism.”⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Globe, “The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase ‘Son of God’ in Mark 1:1,” 217.

⁵⁰ Hutchison, “The ‘Orthodox Corruption’ of Mark 1:1’,” 44.

⁵¹ Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1 ‘The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” 627; Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scriptures: The Effects of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, 74; N. B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* (London: Tyndale Press, 1944), 12.

⁵² Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1 ‘The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” 625. In *Against Heresies* III.11.8, Irenaeus compares the four gospels to the four creatures of Rev 4:7. He often uses the gospel incipit to summarize the total message. Thus, John’s Gospel is likened to the lion, and he quotes John 1:1, 3. Luke is likened to the calf (no quotation from Luke). Matthew is likened to the manlike animal, and he quotes Matt 1:1, 18. Finally, Irenaeus turns to Mark and likens it to the flying eagle, and he quotes Mark 1:1, 2.

⁵³ Ibid., 627.

⁵⁴ Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God’ Was In The Beginning (Mark 1:1),” 45.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scriptures: The Effects of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*, 75.

However, this issue is still a hypothesis, and as Collins says, it is “difficult to prove.”⁵⁷ Hutchison even claims that “there is nothing in Mark 1:1 to suggest an adoptionist position.”⁵⁸ Besides, if the scribes intend to be against adoptionist Christology, whether such a subtle addition would have effectively resisted it. Church Fathers Irenaeus and Epiphanius, who have abbreviated their citation of Mark 1:1, were firmly against adoptionism.⁵⁹ Hence, resisting adoptionism by adding “Son of God” in the text is unnecessary. In other words, the probability of the scribes intentionally correcting the text to fight adoptionist Christology is unlikely to occur.

In short, although the scribe, sometimes, tends to expand book titles due to reverential and theological reasons, “this tendency is balanced in Mark 1:1 by the opposite demonstrable tendency to omit nomina sacra due to *homoioleuton* in this and other passages, including several other book openings.”⁶⁰

Conclusion Based on Internal Evidence

It is evident that while the internal evidence supporting the short reading is unconvincing, the argument favors the long reading. As Wasserman concludes, the intrinsic argument from the Markan style in favor of the long reading is possible “balanced by the corresponding argument from transcriptional probability.”⁶¹ Thus, although there are some controversies about the Markan style, the scribe’s parablepsis, and the ability of the scribes to expand the opening verse due to reverential and theological reasons, the long reading has better support from the internal evidence.

CONCLUSION

As we have mentioned in the introduction, there are arguments over whether the phrase υἱοῦ θεοῦ (Son of God) may be included or omitted in the original text. It is still one of the tough New Testament textual cruxes, and we cannot reach an unequivocal conclusion. Nevertheless, based upon evaluating the important textual variants in Mark 1:1, it is probable that the long reading is more likely to be original.

Firstly, the long reading has better support from the external evidence. While both readings have the early and widespread external witnesses’ support, the long reading has the stronger support in the manuscripts, the versions, and the patristic

⁵⁷ Adela Yarbro Collins, “Establishing the Text: Mark 1:1,” in *Text and Contexts: The Function of Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts*, ed. Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 116.

⁵⁸ Hutchison, “The ‘Orthodox Corruption’ of Mark 1:1,” 44.

⁵⁹ Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God’ Was In The Beginning (Mark 1:1),” 49.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

citations. In addition, it has an impressive slate of witnesses covering virtually every text type and geographical location from the early centuries.

In addition, regarding the internal evidence, the long reading is to be preferred because it provides the most plausible explanation for all the phenomena. In terms of the intrinsic evidence, the long reading is attested by the Markan style. The idea “Son of God” plays a significant role in Mark. It gives an important theme as indicated in the introduction properly. In terms of the transcriptional probabilities, omitting the words because of *homoioioteleuton* is entirely possible for scribes. Besides, there are no compelling arguments for including this phrase due to reverential and theological reasons. Thus, including “Son of God” is the reading that best explains the other readings.

In conclusion, though the status of the opening verse of Mark “continues to provoke disagreement, the external and internal evidence favors the long reading, which adds υιού θεού (Son of God). Therefore, the long reading is more likely to be original.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Black, David A. *New Testament Textual Criticism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997.
- Bratcher, Robert G., and Eugene Abert Nida. *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1993.
- Burgon, J. W., and E. Miller. *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*. London: George Bell and Sons, 1896.
- Collins, Adela Yarbro. “Establishing the Text: Mark 1:1.” In *Text and Contexts: The Function of Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts*, edited by Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm, 111–127. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- . *The Orthodox Corruption of Scriptures: The Effects of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Evans, Craig. “Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel.” *JGChJ* 67–81 (2000).
- Globe, Alexander. “Serapion of Thmuis as Witness to the Gospel Text Used by Origen in Caesarea.” *NovT* 26 (1984).
- . “The Caesarean Omission of the Phrase ‘Son of God’ in Mark 1:1.” *HTR* 75 (1982).
- Gould, Ezra Palmer. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*. New York: C. Scribner’s sons, 1922.
- Grant, Robert M. “The Citation of Patristic Evidence in an Apparatus Criticus.” In *New Testament Manuscript Studies: The Materials and the Making of a Critical*

- Apparatus*, edited by M. M. Parvis and A. P. Wikgren. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950.
- Head, Peter M. "A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1.1 'The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.'" *NTS* 37 (1991).
- Huat, Tan Kim. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Edited by Bruce J. Nicholls. Manila: Asia Theological Association, 2011.
- Hutchison, David. "The 'Orthodox Corruption' of Mark 1:1." *SWJT* 48, no. 1 (2005): 33–48.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. 2nd editio. New York: United Bible Societies, 1994.
- Metzger, Bruce M., and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of The New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Nestle, Eberhard, Kurt Aland, and Barbara Aland. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 27th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993.
- Robertson, A. T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997.
- Stonehouse, N. B. *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ*. London: Tyndale Press, 1944.
- Swete, Henry Barclay. *The Gospel According to St. Mark. The Greek Text With Introduction, Notes and Indices*. New York: The MacMillan company, 1898.
- Wasserman, Tommy. "The 'Son of God' Was In The Beginning (Mark 1:1)." *JTS* 62 (2011).
- Wegner, Paul D. *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006.