

The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture argues that there are textual variants still preserved among our manuscripts of the New Testament that were generated by scribes who were trying to oppose various kinds of “heretical” Christologies, including the one I discussed yesterday, which said (at least which its opponents said that it said) that Christ did not have a real flesh and blood body, and that as a result he did not really experience pain and death, but only appeared to do so.

The proto-orthodox theologians who responded to this view insisted that Jesus really was human, and they argued that it was precisely the bodily, human nature of Christ that allowed him to bring salvation. By shedding his (real) blood and experiencing a (real) broken, crucified body, Christ brought about salvation for the world. The docetists (those who claimed that Christ only “seemed” to have a body that could bleed and die), in the opinion of their opponents, had gone way too far in asserting that Christ was a divine being. If he wasn’t human, he couldn’t save humans.

It appears that this debate did affect the scribes who copied their texts of Scripture. One passage that was changed is the one I have discussed in two brief threads on the blog, the passage of the so-called “Bloody Sweat” (Luke 22:43-44), where Jesus is shown to be in very real human agony prior to his arrest. It can be shown that this passage was used by proto-orthodox theologians to counter docetic Christologies (see: he really was human!). My argument in my book is that it was not only used to that end, it was actually created to that end. The passage was not originally in Luke but was added by scribes who wanted to stress Christ’s real humanity.

There are other textual alterations that do similar things. And yet others that stress another point that was routinely made against docetists, namely that it was precisely by shedding his blood and by experiencing a painful death that Christ brought salvation. Without the shedding of (real) blood and the crucifixion, there would be no redemption.

This view affected the scribes copying the Gospels in several places, none more significantly, in my view, than a textual variant in...

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