

LUKE 23:34a – ANSWERING THE APOLOGISTS

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Good Friday, 2017

Part 1

This week, as Christians contemplate the words spoken by Christ during His crucifixion, we shall take a close look at the textual variant in Luke 23:34a, where, in almost all Greek manuscripts (and in the Latin Vulgate and the Peshitta), these words of Jesus are recorded: “[Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.](#)” It may seem overly cerebral to offer a technical analysis of these words which convey such a power message about the love of God – but future Bible-readers won’t see that message if it is taken out of their New Testaments, which is what some evangelical apologists would like to do, claiming that Luke did not write it.

Before we survey the evidence pertaining to this sentence, let’s investigate how a few modern translations treat this passage, remembering that the editors of the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* put it within double-brackets, meaning, according to the Nestle-Aland Introduction, that the words within the brackets “Are known not to be a part of the original text.”

- The New American Standard Bible (© 1995 by the Lockman Foundation) has no footnote at all to indicate that a textual variant exists at this point.
- The 1984 New International Version (no longer in print), had the sentence in the text, with a footnote stating, “Some early manuscripts do not have this sentence.”
- The English Standard Version has a similar footnote, stating that “Some manuscripts” omit the sentence.
- The New Living Translation (© 2004 Tyndale House Publishers) also has a footnote; it says, “This sentence is not included in many ancient manuscripts.”

The *New Living Translation*’s footnote is inaccurate, and it should have been corrected a long time ago.

Now suppose someone asked the footnote-writers, “*If a dozen manuscripts can be described as ‘many,’ then how should one describe the **over one thousand and five hundred** Greek manuscripts that include the sentence?*” Their response would doubtlessly be, “Manuscripts must be weighed, not counted” – the most abused axiom ever spoken in the field of New Testament textual criticism.

The idea behind that saying is entirely legitimate, in theory: if one manuscript is shown to be a direct copy of another manuscript, or if two manuscripts are shown to have been copied from another manuscript, then, in the first case, we have a voice and its echo, and in the second case we have a voice with two echoes. When we have both a manuscript, and its exemplar (that is, the manuscript from which it was copied), we have one witness repeated, rather than two independent witnesses.

This principle may be extended to groups of manuscripts which, although none of them is a direct copies of any of the others, share the same meta-textual features: if they possess the same exact form of canon-tables for the Gospels, the same book-introductions, the same chapter-titles, the same subscription-notes, and the same lection-divisions, it is generally safe to say that they are all twigs on the same branch, so to speak. This is especially true of manuscripts which exhibit the same commentary in the margin alongside the text or interspersed between blocks of Scripture-text.

And what is true of meta-textual features is also true of the text: if, out of a thousand manuscripts, two dozen share the same array of otherwise unattested readings – not just in a few cases which may be explained as randomly recurring scribal errors, but consistently in chapter after chapter – the group of manuscripts with shared rare traits may be considered to be related to each other, like great-grand-children of an ancestor whose rare genetic trait they have all inherited.

And there is no reason to limit this to small groups. Large groups of manuscripts which share the same readings are in some sense specially related; at least they are more closely related to each other than to the families of manuscripts that share rare readings.

That is the main application of the axiom that manuscripts must be weighed: it means that manuscripts must be separated into groups, or branches; the voice of the individual manuscript is not regarded as an independent voice when it sings in unison with fellow-manuscripts in the same choir. Different groups of manuscripts singing different notes – that is, displaying different textual variants – are organized into different groups, providing insights into the contents of their respective ancestor-manuscripts.

Other factors – such as a manuscript’s age, the skill of its scribe, and its physical condition – also come into play when assigning “weight” to a manuscript. The valid objective of this approach is to amplify the ancestral texts that contain the readings shared by distinct groups of manuscripts – to put the focus not on the twigs, but at the points where the branches diverge, so to speak.

Unfortunately that is not what most of today’s textual critics do. For over a century, the “weighing” of manuscripts has been more like the handicapping of horses at a crooked race-track: after several races in which one horse consistently wins, the race-track owners put weights on the other horses, so that the “best” horse wins more and more races – even if they are run at different distances, at different locations, and under different conditions than the races in which that horse won.

With that in mind, we come to the external evidence about Luke 23:34a. In Papyrus 75, Codex Vaticanus, and the earliest stratum of the Sahidic version, the sentence is not there – which implies that these witnesses do not have it because the ancestral text upon which they were based did not have it. Similarly, Codex Bezae, the Sinaitic Syriac, and Old Latin Codex Vercellensis (from the late 300’s) appear to echo an earlier Western form of the verse that did not have this sentence.

Those witnesses are joined by a few other Greek manuscripts – Codex W (which has an essentially Byzantine text in Luke after 8:12), Codex Θ (which is regarded as having a Caesarean text), 070, 579, and 1241 – but without them, it would be clear that the non-inclusion of the sentence is a very ancient reading, apparently traceable to a point in the transmission-stream when the Alexandrian and Western branches had not yet diverged.

The word “apparently” should not be overlooked, for the non-inclusion of the sentence is also attested by a smattering of relatively late manuscripts. If we apply the canon, *A reading attested sporadically in unrelated manuscripts tends to be non-original*, then this would suggest the existence of a special factor which affected the text of Luke 23:34 in separate branches.

But instead of exploring that possibility today, let’s linger over the external evidence a while longer. While the just-mentioned witnesses lack Luke 23:34a, an imposing array of manuscripts includes the sentence, including Codex Sinaiticus (in which the sentence, after being written by the main copyist, was marked alongside the text with parentheses around each line, after which someone else erased (without complete success) the parentheses-marks) and Codices A, C, N, L, 700, 1424, family 1, and family 13 – plus the Byzantine minuscules, which constitute a huge mass (over 90%) of the Greek manuscripts here. Most of the Old Latin manuscripts also have the passage. So do early versions such as the Vulgate, the Palestinian Aramaic version, the Armenian version, the Old Georgian version, and the Ethiopic version. That covers quite a lot of territory.

So when this evidence is considered in terms of weight, three Alexandrian heavyweights and three Western heavyweights do not have Luke 23:34a; nor do Codex W and Codex Θ. On the other hand, one Alexandrian heavyweight (Codex Sinaiticus), most of the Caesarean heavyweights, and all of the Byzantine heavyweights except Codex W include Luke 23:34a.

However, there is some important and weighty evidence yet to consider: the patristic evidence. Where a patristic writer from the 100's or 200's makes a specific quotation, it is like finding a small papyrus fragment embedded in his writings; where a patristic writer from the 300's makes a specific quotation, it is like an echo of a manuscript from the same time when Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus were made. In addition, the patristic writers' comments sometimes express difficulties that they had when interpreting a passage – and if a passage seemed problematic to a commentator, the probability is high that it seemed problematic to copyists as well. (See [Wieland Willker's textual commentary](#) for details about the following patristic references.)

The patristic evidence shows that “[Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do](#)” is an extremely ancient reading:

- Tatian (170's) had the sentence in his Diatessaron, as shown by three citations in Ephrem Syrus' *Commentary on the Diatessaron* (c. 360).
- Hegesippus (170's) recorded, according to Eusebius in *Ecclesiastical History* Book Two (chapter 23), that when James the Just was killed after being thrown from a tower, he prayed, “I entreat you, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The same anecdote is recorded by [Epiphanius](#) (c. 375) in *Panarion* 77 (*Antidicomanians* 14:5).
- Irenaeus (c. 180), in *Against Heresies*, Book Three, twice mentions the passage: in chapter 16, he alludes to Jesus' prayer that His Father would forgive those who crucified Him; in chapter 18 he quotes Jesus' words.
- Pseudo-Ignatius, in the late 100's, stated that Jesus prayed for His enemies, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”
- Hippolytus (early 200's) uses the passage in *Contra Judaeos* 3, in the course of interpreting Psalm 69. Hippolytus points out that when Jesus said, “Father, forgive them,” those to be forgiven were the Gentiles. The authorship of *Contra Judaeos* is disputed; however, Hippolytus also quoted the passage in *The Blessings of Jacob and Isaac*, in the course of comments about Genesis 27.
- Archelaus (early 200's), in *Disputation with Manes*, quotes the passage and compares Jesus' prayer to Moses' prayer for Pharaoh and the Egyptians.
- The *Syriac Didascalia* (c. 250) includes the following imprecise but recognizable statement: “Our Savior made supplication to His Father for those who had sinned, as it is written in the Gospel, ‘My Father, they know not what they do, nor what they speak; yet if it be possible, forgive them.’”
- Origen (c. 230-250), as translated by Rufinus (in Latin), appears to cite the passage in part of his *Homily on Leviticus*; however there is a chance that this is a parenthetical comment inserted by Rufinus. In *De Pascha* 2:43, a text recovered among the Tura Papyri and published in 1979, Origen appears to utilize the passage.
- Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 330) included the passage in his canon-tables, in Canon Ten.
- *Acts of Pilate/Gospel of Nicodemus* (300's), in chapter 10, uses Jesus' words in Luke 23:34a along with some of the surrounding text of Luke.
- *Apostolic Constitutions* (c. 380), which depends at some points upon the *Syriac Didascalia*, quotes the passage more precisely in II:16, and again in V:14.
- Ambrose (late 300's), in his *Commentary on Job*, cites this passage twice (in 2:6 and 5:12).
- Many others use the passage – all without raising any question about its genuineness: Gregory of Nyssa (late 300's), Hilary (c. 350), [Acts of Philip](#) (300's), *Clementine Recognitions* (300's), Chrysostom – several times (c. 400), Pseudo-Justin (c. 400), Jerome, in [Ad Hedibiam](#) (c. 400), Hesychius (early 400's), Augustine (early 400's), and Theodoret (c. 450). The only writer who challenges the sentence's right to be in the text is Cyril of Alexandria (c. 425) – hardly surprising considering his

location – as reported by the writer Oecumenius, around the year 600, in Asia Minor, in his commentary on Revelation. In the course of commenting on the first part of Revelation 7, Oecumenius cites Luke 23:34a and mentions that “Although Cyril, in the thirteenth book of *Against Julian*, says that this prayer of the Lord is not found in the Gospels, we use it nevertheless.”

Now that we have some idea of the scope of early evidence in favor of the inclusion of this passage – for in the case of most of these patristic references, it is perfectly clear that Luke 23:34a was in the Gospels-manuscripts used by the writer, and that he expected the passage to be found in his readers’ copies as well – we can proceed, in the following post, to analyze the treatment of the passage in more detail. First, though, as I conclude today, I wish to address a claim that [Alan Kurschner](#) recently made.

At James White’s Alpha & Omega website, Kurschner stated: “If this is an excision,” – that is, if the sentence is original and has been removed in the early Alexandrian text – “it is difficult to explain its omission *in toto* from an anti-Judaic tendency of a scribe. There are examples in which over-pious scribes in the copying process would omit *a single* word with theological, pious, or “harshness” effects. . . . Surely then, we should see at least one example of a witness altering Jesus’ prayer for theological reasons. But this is not the case; the witnesses either omit the prayer all together, or it is all intact.”

However, not only does this line of reasoning seem circular – claiming that copyists could not remove a sentence because copyists did not remove sentences – but according to [Nathan Eubank](#) in a [detailed 2010 essay](#) about this variant-unit, Epiphanius altered the wording slightly, so as to say, “Father, yield to them,” or, “Father, be patient with them” – a shift from ἄφεες to συγχώρησον. This is how Gregory of Nyssa cited the passage as well. This little clue provides some guidance about the significance of some other patristic treatments of the passage – as we shall see in Part 2.

Part 2

Previously, we looked at the external evidence regarding Jesus’ saying from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” found in Luke 22:34. We saw that although this sentence is included in 99% of existing Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of Luke, the copyists of six early manuscripts – Papyrus 75, Codex Vaticanus, Codex Bezae, Codex W, Codex Koridethi, and 070 – did not include it in the text, and because these particular manuscripts constitute early representatives of diverse branches of the text’s transmission, this is seen by some researchers – including James White of Alpha & Omega Ministries – as evidence that the passage was not in the original text. On the other hand, we also saw that this passage was used by over a dozen patristic writers in the 100’s, 200’s, and 300’s.

Either these words were put into the text of Luke, or else someone took them out. A few theories have been proposed as attempts to explain why and how someone would put these words into the text:

(1) After someone in the early church noticed that Jesus made six pronouncements from the cross, he decided that it would be an improvement if Jesus had made seven statements from the cross, so he created one, or borrowed an oral tradition, and put it into the text.

(2) These words circulated in the early church as an *agraphon*, or unwritten tradition about the sayings of Jesus, and someone, somewhere, decided to put them at this location in the text.

(3) A copyist did not want Jesus to appear less forgiving than Stephen, who prayed to Jesus as he was being stoned to death, “Lord, do not hold this sin to their account” (in Acts 7:59-60).

Let's briefly look at each of these theories.

DID SOMEONE ADD THESE WORDS DUE TO A DESIRE FOR THERE TO BE SEVEN SAYINGS FROM THE CROSS?

It is intrinsically unlikely that anyone would deliberately invent a saying and insert it into the text just to make the total number of sayings from the cross total seven. The notion that Jesus only spoke six words from the cross could only exist after all four Gospels were considered a distinct narrative unit – that is, after all four had been composed, collected together, and recognized as specially authoritative – by which time, the individual Gospels would have already circulated for decades, making it difficult for any such novel insertion to suddenly appear and gain acceptance from church leaders such as Irenaeus.

Recent supporters of the idea that the sentence was added in order to bring the number of Jesus' sayings from the cross to a total of seven have pointed to the order in which the sayings appear in Tatian's *Diatessaron* (to the extent that it can be reconstructed); however, changes in order in the *Diatessaron* occur often, and in this case the re-ordering of the sayings from the cross appear to be a side-effect of Tatian's attempt at chronological harmonization of the four Gospels' accounts; they are not indicative of any instability in the text, as if the sentence was floating around somewhere further along in Luke 23. Furthermore, I cannot find any comment by any patristic writer about the significance of there being seven sayings of Christ from the cross. Without question, people mildly appreciated groups of seven when they found them in the text, but I know of no case whatsoever in which any early Christian writer altered the text to create a total of seven of *anything*. (And would this not be intrinsically unsatisfying to the person making the alteration?)

DID SOMEONE CREATE AN AGRAPHON, WHICH SOMEONE ELSE INSERTED INTO THE TEXT?

Did someone in the early church value an agraphon (an unwritten tradition consisting of, or centered around, a saying of Jesus) so highly that he thought it should be inserted into the text of the Gospel of Luke? That is the theory proposed by Bruce Metzger in his *Textual Commentary* on the United Bible Society's compilation: "The logion," he wrote, "though probably not a part of the original Gospel of Luke, bears self-evident tokens of its dominical origin." However, there is no physical evidence that this statement ever circulated in any form other than as part of the text of Luke 23:34. The statement, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," demands a narrative context: *who* is being forgiven for *what*? It seems unlikely that this sentence would ever circulate without a framework.

Several agrapha were mentioned in patristic writings – but the intrusion of an agraphon into the Greek text of the Gospels is exceptionally rare. Interpolations in Codex Bezae, and Codex W's "Freer Logion" between Mark 16:14 and 16:15, are almost unique in this respect. Codex D has interpolated sayings of Jesus after Matthew 20:28, after Luke 6:4, and after John 6:56. These features – and a few others which resemble parallel-passages – display the influence of a loosely translated and interpolated Old Latin text, which is in the same codex on alternating pages. But though attested in Codex D, these readings are not in the Byzantine Text, indicating that either copyists possessed considerable resistance against novelties in their exemplars, or that only a very few copyists were reckless enough to insert them in the first place, or both.

Consider the curious incident of the saying about money-changers: Γίνεσθε δόκιμοι τραπεζίται ("Be ye approved money-changers"). Brook Foss Westcott (of Westcott & Hort fame) liked this saying so much that he put it on a preface-page in his *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*. Several patristic writers used it too, including Clement of Alexandria (who referred to it as a saying of Jesus in *Stromata* 1:28), Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyril of Alexandria, and even John of Damascus in *Orthodox Faith, Book 4, chapter 17* – a composition from the early 700's).

But even though this saying circulated in the churches for over 500 years (and here we are, still discussing it!), how many copyists inserted it into the Greek text of Scripture? Inasmuch as it appears in no Greek manuscript of any part of the New Testament, the answer seems to be zero. This does not bode well for the plausibility of the theory that typical copyists were open to the idea of putting additions of any kind into the Greek text of the Gospels.

DID SOMEONE THINK THAT JESUS SEEMED TO BE LESS FORGIVING THAN STEPHEN, AND CREATED THESE WORDS TO EVEN THE SCORE?

The idea that someone in the early church created Luke 23:34a so that Stephen would not appear more altruistic than Jesus has several problems. First, nothing in the account of Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7 matches the phrase, "for they know not what they do." Second, while the statement of Stephen and the statement in Luke 23:34a are conceptually similar, they are diverse where vocabulary is concerned. Third, inasmuch as Stephen made his statement a gasp away from death, a person desiring to create a parallel in Luke's narrative of Jesus' crucifixion would be more likely to insert it at the point of Jesus' death, not more than three hours earlier. Fourth, the actions of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke are repeatedly emulated by Jesus' followers in the book of Acts; to whatever extent Stephen's statement in Acts 7:70 resembles Luke 23:34a, it is just the sort of resemblance that points to Luke as the author.

These proposals do not plausibly explain the ancient and widespread presence of "[Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do](#)" in the text of Luke. In addition, an internal feature of the passage constitutes subtle but forceful evidence that it was written by Luke: it exemplifies Luke's distinct emphasis on ignorance (the term "ignorance" is used here in its technical sense, not in a derogatory sense) as an extenuating circumstance capable of eliminating or reducing a perpetrator's guilt.

Some examples of this emphasis may be listed: among the Evangelists, Luke, and Luke alone, records the saying of Jesus in which He establishes different measures of judgment for those who know their master's will, and for those who do not know it. In Acts 3:14-7, Luke records Peter's statement that although members of his audience had "killed the Prince of life," they had acted in ignorance, and so had their rulers. He proceeds to invite them to repent. In Acts 13:27, Luke records Paul's statement that the inhabitants of Jerusalem and their rulers handed Jesus over to be executed "because they did not know Him." And Acts 17:30 – part of Paul's address to the Athenian philosophers – states, "God overlooked these times of ignorance, but now commands all men everywhere to repent."

The probability that someone in the 100's perceived and mimicked what [Eldon Epp](#) has called Luke's "Ignorance Motif," and expressed it in a 12-word insertion (with syntax consistent with Luke 11:4), seems very far lower than that alternative explanation that Luke wrote these words.

OR: DID SOMEONE REMOVE THE PASSAGE BECAUSE HE THOUGHT THAT THE JEWS HAD NOT BEEN FORGIVEN?

A strong motivation existed for early copyists to omit these words: **a desire to avoid the impression that Jesus' prayer had been rejected.** About 40 years after Jesus' crucifixion, [Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans](#), and it was devastated again in the [Bar Kokhba Revolt](#). Hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed; many others were enslaved, and they were deprived of their homeland. The pagan jibe can easily be written: *"Is this what happens when Jesus asks for people to be forgiven? Their city is laid waste, and they and their families are slain or enslaved? His intercession does not seem very effective."* Even without a pagan around to express the objection, an ordinary reader could perceive a difficulty when comparing Christ's prayer to the history of the Jews in the century that followed.

Many early Christian writers considered the Jewish nation corporately responsible for Christ's death; they interpreted Matthew 27:25 as if it referred to all Jews. Compositions such as Melito of Sardis' *Easter Homily*, a.k.a. *Peri Pascha* (c. 170) display this interpretation very clearly. Melito, in the course of addressing the Jews in a diatribe, says, "You did not recognize the Lord; you did not know, O Israel, that this one was the firstborn of God" – but he also insists that the Jews should have known, in light of the prophecies about the Messiah.

Origen, writing *Against Celsus* (Book 4, chapter 22), similarly regarded the destruction of Jerusalem as divine retribution. And about 150 years after Origen wrote, *John Chrysostom*, in *Homilies Against the Jews* (better titled, *Sermons Against Those Who Partake in Jewish Customs*), preached that the Jews, collectively, were in a situation similar to that of Cain – guilty but unwilling to admit that they had done wrong – and he advised that Christians should not even pray for them, alluding to Jeremiah 7:16 and 15:1 as justification.

So when Chrysostom (or someone whose works have been mixed up with the sermons of Chrysostom) commented on Luke 23:34 in *Homily on the Cross and the Robber*, he began with the obvious question: "Did He forgive them the sin?" – and Chrysostom's answer was that forgiveness was given to those who repented – to Paul, and to the multitudes of Jews who became Christians in the book of Acts – but then, judgment fell.

Hippolytus found a simpler solution in the incomplete composition *Demonstratio Contra Judaeos*; he concluded that Jesus' prayer was on behalf of the Gentile soldiers who did the actual work of crucifying Him.

The unknown author of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (c. 250) resorted to a more reckless course: he altered Jesus' prayer to make it conditional, like Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, adding the phrase "if it be possible" – the implication being that just as it turned out to *not* be possible to let the cup of suffering pass, it was likewise not possible to forgive those responsible for Christ's crucifixion, in light of their non-repentance.

This use of the destruction of Jerusalem as an interpretive lens was not limited to commentators of the early church, but also was employed by copyists. Eldon Epp, in his book, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts*, devoted a chapter to the subject of anti-Judaic tendencies in the text of Codex D – i.e., in the Western Text that is displayed in Codex D. Epp showed that a scribal tendency to alter features in the text that could be understood to excuse or reduce the guilt of the Jews for Jesus' death is discernible in the Western Text. (C. K. Barrett wrote a response to Epp's claim, challenging it, but Barrett's answers, for the most part, are far from effective; it is like watching someone turn "they killed him" into "those evildoers deliberately rebelled and killed him" and then be told that the person making the changes was just trying to make the sentence more clear.)

Westcott and Hort, in 1881, had little reason to suspect that the text found in their favorite manuscript could be contaminated with Western readings. However, the discovery of the *Glazier Codex (G67) of Acts* shows that the Western Text was used at an early period in Egypt. (Although James White has spread the claim that "Every one of the papyrus manuscripts we have discovered" represents the Alexandrian text (see *KJV-Only Controversy*, page 152, 1995 edition), that is simply false; papyri that have a text that is not Alexandrian include P29, P38, P45 (which is quite a substantial manuscript), P48, P54, P59, P69, and P88.)

Codex Glazier's Egyptian text confirms the antiquity of the anti-Judaic tendency that is displayed in the text of Codex Bezae's Greek and Latin text: in Acts 10:39, it is not enough to say simply that "they" killed Jesus; there is, in the Glazier Codex, an alteration, specifying that *the Jews rejected Him* and killed Him. (According to Epp, this reading is supported by the Old Latin Codex Legionensis, MS VL 67. Unfortunately this variant was not selected to be mentioned in the apparatus of the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*.)

Without further ado, let's consider what all this implies:

- The scribes who made the Western form of the text of the Gospels and Acts in the 100's and 200's had a bias against the Jews, regarding them as corporately responsible for Christ's death and understanding the destruction of Jerusalem as evidence that God had not forgiven them. This affected their treatment of some passages.
- Various patristic writers in the 100's and 200's (and later) express the opinion that the Jewish nation as a whole could not have been forgiven for Christ's crucifixion; those who accept Luke 23:34a tend to feel obligated to explain that it does not mean that the Jews were forgiven then and there.
- Some writers altered the text of Luke 23:34a to make it interlock with their understanding that the destruction of Jerusalem signaled that God had not forgiven the Jews. (The *Didascalia* added, "if it is possible;" Gregory of Nyssa and others changed "forgive" to "bear with.")
- In Codex D – the flagship Greek manuscript of the Western Text – Luke 23:34a is absent. (That is, although a later corrector put the passage in the margin, it is not in the text.) The copyist of D did not create this reading; it is also shared by the Old Latin Codex Vercellensis and the Sinaitic Syriac; these three witnesses echo an older form of the text.
- The Western text, and its creators' anti-Judaic sentiment, circulated in Egypt, as shown by the Glazier Codex and other evidence.

Thus considerable force drives the hypothesis in which Egyptian copyists around the end of the second century were aware of two forms of the text of Luke 23:34 – one (echoed by Sinaiticus, C, L, 33, 892, *et al*) that contained "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and one (echoed by P75 and Vaticanus), that did not. But a review of the allies of P75 and B in this case – D, *a, d*, the Sinaitic Syriac – informs us that this originated as a Western reading.

Once this reading (or, rather, this omission) was known in Egypt, it was very difficult for scribes to resist adopting it, because it was consistent with their understanding that the destruction of Jerusalem implied that the Jews, collectively, were unforgiven. Rather than face the foreseeable jibes and questions that the inclusion of these words would invite, they concluded that such a statement could not be original, and so they adopted the omission (which first emerged in part of the Western Text) into part of the Alexandrian transmission-stream.

This conclusion – that a scribal prejudice elicited the omission of Luke 22:34a, and the adoption of the omission – is further confirmed by the observation that the sentence is omitted in a smattering of Byzantine manuscripts. Rather than suggest that these particular copies are somehow genealogically connected to manuscripts such as P75 and B, this shows that a non-textual factor – scribes' anti-Judaic prejudice – could independently elicit the omission of this sentence in unrelated witnesses.

Inasmuch as "[Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do](#)" is in Luke 23:34 in a massive majority of Greek manuscripts representing multiple transmission-branches, as well as in massive versional evidence, and is supported by very ancient and very widespread patristic evidence, and inasmuch as there is compelling evidence that its rival-reading originated as the result of scribes' prejudice against Jews, I conclude that this sentence is original to Luke.

And since it is inspired Scripture, let us not perpetually cause Bible-readers to question its authority by introducing oversimplified footnotes, as if we suffer from the delusion that such vague notes do justice to the evidence. Let us acknowledge that it is original – and may we therefore be inclined to forgive, and to yearn for the forgiveness of those who do not know their Master's will.

