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Doxology or Devil? A Case for the Longer Ending of the Lord's Prayer

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For millenia, Christians have been praying as Jesus taught them to pray: "Our Father, which art in heaven…." This prayer is so significant that the Heidelberg and Westminster Catechisms include detailed explanations of it. Millions of Christians have memorized both the prayer itself and the catechisms that expound on it. And yet, despite such universal acceptance and usefulness for piety, the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Matt. 6:13 KJV), does not appear in many modern versions of the Holy Bible. The New International Version, for example, reads, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"; the popular English Standard Version reads, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

As is observable in the difference of the final phrase in the NIV and ESV, there is also a long-standing debate over how best to translate the Greek words τοῦ πονηροῦ—whether it should be personified as "the Evil One" or simply "evil." But the scope of this article is interested in the narrower question: Does the doxology properly follow? That is a question that can only be answered through textual criticism.

Protestant Christians do not believe that the Holy Bible fell out of heaven into the lap of some church father or onto the desk of an infallible Pope. They readily acknowledge that Scripture was written over many centuries, copied by hundreds of hands, and occasionally miscopied—hence, the need for textual criticism. Textual critics compile manuscripts, compare variants, and come to educated conclusions as to what readings best represent the original or authentic text. Their curated version of the text is finally published as a "critical edition," and because not all textual critics come to the sacred text of Scripture with

the same assumptions or rules of criticism, they often come to different conclusions as to which reading is to be accepted.

As it stands today, there are essentially five critical versions of the Greek New Testament: (1) The *Textus Receptus* or Received Text, (2) The Majority Text, (3) The Tyndale House, (4) Nestle-Aland, (5) United Bible Societies. It should be noted that the first two are very similar and that the last two, in their current editions, are identical. The Tyndale House version is very similar to the Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies, but it differs in some passages. The variance between the first two (TR/MT) and last two text platforms (NA/UBS) on the doxology is the focus of this article.

The *Textus Receptus*[1] renders Matthew 6:13b as follows, "οτι σου εστιν η βασιλεια και η δυναμις και η δοξα εις τους αιωνας αμην" [KJV: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."]

Every Reformation-era Bible (later Tyndale [see explanation below], Coverdale, Matthews, Great, Geneva, Bishops, and King James) contains the doxology in Matthew 6:13. Every edition of the TR (Stephanus 1550, Beza 1598, Elzevir 1624, and Scrivener 1894) is identical in this verse. The entire doxology is not found in the body of the Nestle-Aland or United Bible Societies editions of the Greek NT, but it is found, in various forms, in the critical notes of these editions. Various explanations for this omission are offered by scholars, but one of the most common assumptions made by textual critics deserves some scrutiny.

Shorter is Better?

One of the twelve most widely accepted canons of modern text criticism is "*lectio brevior lectio potior*," or "the shorter reading is the more probable reading."[2] This "shorter is better" rule is based on the assumption that ancient copyists were more prone to add material to Scripture than accidentally to omit. This assumption simply cannot be taken for granted in light of Revelation 22:18: "For I testify unto

1. Frederick Henry Ambrose Scrivener, *The New Testament: the Greek Text Underlying the English Authorised Version of 1611* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1980).

2. 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* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 281.

every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book."

Due to this divine threat, and assuming that most ancient copyists were reasonably pious men, it would seem more probable that accidental omission would occur more often than intentional forgery. Those who fear the Lord, if asked to handwrite a copy of the Word, would not dare to add words of their own and pass them off as divinely inspired. They might, however, accidentally skip over a line on occasion. Unintentional mistakes (homeoteleuton, homeoarchy, etc.) are well-attested in all ancient copies of literature. The authors refuse to believe that the vast majority of copyists did their work with either a well-meant or subversive intent to alter the text of Scripture. Therefore, we reject the "shorter is better" canon of the modern textual critics.

Assumptions are inescapably influential when evaluating textual variants, but all critics must eventually proceed to a more objective consideration of the evidence at hand.

Internal Evidence

Internal evidence refers to material in the Scriptures that may shed light upon the authenticity of a disputed reading. There are three passages typically cited in discussions concerning the proper form of Matthew 6:13: Luke 11:2–4, 1 Chronicles 29:11, and 2 Timothy 4:18. We will give brief attention to each.

Luke 11:2–4

The Lord's Prayer as recorded by Luke clearly differs from that recorded by Matthew, but this proves nothing other than the fact that Jesus taught His disciples how to pray on more than one occasion. The sermon recorded by Matthew was delivered from a mountain (5:1) and the sermon recorded by Luke also seems to indicate that there was a different audience and intent on both occasions. Thus, this is not a compelling reason why the text of Luke 11:2–4 should be used to modify the text of Matthew 6:13.

First Chronicles 29:11

"Thine, O LORD is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as

head above all." Some critics have suggested that this prayer of David is the source of the allegedly "added" doxology, but this assumes that at least one ancient copyist thought it appropriate to modify the exemplar that was before him by adding material. Critics may assume this, but it remains just an assumption. The similarity of these two doxologies can just as easily be explained by the fact that David's Son and David's Lord prayed from the same Spirit as David.

Second Timothy 4:18

Another internal evidence for the doxology's authenticity is this expression of the Apostle Paul: "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." There are identical words used in both Matthew 6:13 and 2 Timothy 4:18. These words, allowing for necessary differences in conjugation, are πονηρου (evil), βασιλεια (kingdom), δοξα (glory), εις τους αιωνας (for ever), αμην (amen). While Paul did not offer a direct quotation of Jesus's doxology, he does seem to allude to it (which would assume prior knowledge of it).

Thematic Consideration

A thematic element in Matthew 6 could also be offered as internal evidence in favor of the doxology's inclusion. Immediately before Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He offered warnings about seeking the "glory of men" (Matt. 6:2). He exhorted them to set their aim and affections toward their Father in heaven. The closing doxology is thematically consistent with such warnings and exhortations.

An argument might also be made based on the literary device of *inclusio* (the repetition of a word, phrase, or theme at the beginning and ending of a literary unit). There are many examples of this device being used in the Gospel According to Matthew (5:3–10, 4:23–25, 9:35–38, etc.). With the doxology included, Jesus began and ended the Lord's Prayer with a reference to His Father's heavenly abode and most hallowed glory. With the doxology omitted, He began the prayer with a reference to His Father and ended it with a reference to the devil.

Considerations related to internal evidence can only take the critic so far. He must also assess witnesses to the text of the Greek New Testament—materials outside of Scripture that support a disputed reading. This evidence includes Greek manuscripts, versions,

lectionaries, sermons, or commentaries. Several of these witnesses support the doxology as apostolic and authentic.

Greek Manuscripts

The witnesses deemed most valuable in modern text criticism are two Greek Uncials (manuscripts written in majuscule script) considered to be very early, called *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*. These manuscripts are typically dated from the fourth century and they both omit the doxology. While this settles the case for many critics, it should be noted that these two witnesses disagree with each other over three thousand times in the Gospels and over five thousand times in the New Testament.[3] Such a joint witness is dubious.

Besides these two Uncials, there is, interestingly, also an Uncial dated only a little later in history (fourth or fifth century) that does contain the doxology: Codex *Washingtonianus*. Modern critics simply do not value the witness of *Washingtonianus* as much as that of *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* and this hints at the highly subjective nature of much of their work. There are currently extant over 5,800 Greek manuscripts, ten thousand Latin manuscripts, and 9,300 manuscripts in other languages. Nevertheless, two Uncials reign supreme. For a more thorough listing of external evidence related to Matthew 6:13, consult the textual apparatus in the NA28 or UBS5.

The doxology enjoys very early attestation in the witness of Codex *Washingtonianus*. Even if *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* are dated slightly earlier, the doxology's authenticity cannot be immediately dismissed due to the extremely early witness of Codex *Washingtonianus* alone.

Other Ancient Witnesses

Critics do well not only to examine ancient copies of Scripture, but also ancient writings that quote Scripture; for how can a homilist or commentator refer to an unknown passage? The Didache is one the earliest Christian writings in existence. It is typically (and conservatively) dated to the late first century A.D. If that date is correct, it would suggest that the author may have even had access to the

3. Cf. H. C. Hoskier, *Codex B and Its Allies: A Study and an Indictment* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2001). Part II is subtitled, "Chiefly concerning Aleph, but covering three thousand differences between Aleph and B in the Four Gospels, with the evidence supporting each side, including the new manuscript evidence collected by VON SODEN, and the collateral readings of other important authorities."

original copies of the Greek New Testament. Even if he did not, the witness still predates that of *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* by three centuries. In Didache 8:2,[4] the Lord's Prayer is quoted with the doxology. The only omission is the word βασιλεια (kingdom) and the quotation concludes with this instruction: "Thrice in the day thus pray."

Also predating (or at least being contemporary with the witness of *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*) are the writings of John Chrysostom (347–407). Twice in his Nineteenth Homily on the Gospel of Matthew[5] he quotes and comments upon the doxology. Other early quotations of the doxology include Chapter XVIII of Book III in the Apostolic Constitutions[6] (375–380), a contemplative paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer by Isidore of Pelusium (died c. 450), and a translation called the Syriac Peshitta (fifth century). Again, a more thorough listing of ancient witnesses for-and-against the inclusion of the doxology can be found in the critical apparatus of the NA28 or in Bruce M. Metzger's *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*.[7]

It has been sufficiently demonstrated that the doxology was known to and used by Christians from the earliest of times. Its eventual omission may also be traced to the same era due to an interesting development in early Christian liturgy.

Liturgical Use

In *The Divine Liturgy of Saint Chrysostom*[8] (attributed to the fifth-century Archbishop of Constantinople), the Lord's Prayer was rendered into a responsive format—that is, after the congregation prayed the body of the prayer in unison, the priest would conclude by alone reading the doxology. It is not difficult to imagine how this might affect the congregants. If they were never asked or allowed to recite

4. Kurt Niederwimmer, Harold W. Attridge, and Linda M. Maloney, *The Didache: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 135–38.

5. John Chrysostom, *Homily 19 on Matthew* in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Shaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 10:136–37.

6. Apostolic Constitutions in Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 7:432.

7. Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (3rd ed.) (London: United Bible Societies, 1995), 16–17.

8. The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, *Service Book of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church according to the use of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America* (2012), 118.

the doxology, then it would be most natural for a mental distinction to develop between the body and the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer. In fact, this mental or liturgical distinction seems eventually to have evolved into a formal textual separation, as can clearly be observed in the Bible versions and liturgies of the Roman Catholic Church today.

Roman Catholic Usage

The omission of the doxology of the Lord's Prayer was, at least historically speaking, a decidedly Roman Catholic distinctive. John Calvin intimates this in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew:

> "For thine is the kingdom": It is surprising that this clause, which agrees so well with the rest of the prayer, *has been left out by the Latins*: for it was not added merely for the purpose of kindling our hearts to seek the glory of God, and of reminding us what ought to be the object of our prayers; but likewise to teach us, that our prayers, which are here dictated to us, are founded on God alone, that we may not rely on our own merits.[9]

Calvin attributes the omission of the doxology to "the Latins," by which he meant either the Latin copies of Scripture or the Roman Catholics of his day. When it comes to the old Latin manuscripts, we admit that at least four (K, F, G, Q, per Dean William Burgon)[10] or five (per Rev. Dr. Edward F. Hills)[11] omit the doxology. The Latin Vulgate omits it, but such an omission should not prove ultimately persuasive because final appeal must always be made to the inspired Hebrew and Greek rather than the Latin. Consider this statement in the Westminster Confession of Faith:

> The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by his singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are

9. John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 329.

10. John William Burgon, ed. Jay P. Green, *Unholy Hands on the Bible* (Lafayette, Ind.: Sovereign Grace Trust Fund, 1990), B-39.

11. Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended: a Christian View of the New Testament Manuscripts* (Des Moines, Iowa: Christian Research Press, 2006), 194.

> therefore authentical; so as, in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them.[12]

The fiercest "controversies of religion" at that time were the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, and the divines explicitly stated that all final appeals were to be made to the inspired Hebrew and Greek texts rather than the Latin translation. This was the standard Protestant position until the late nineteenth century, when Protestants began to allow their translations of sacred Scripture to be influenced by Latin and Syriac readings. Including the doxology of the Lord's Prayer was a Protestant distinctive, which can also be proven by surveying the versions and translations produced in the early Reformation era.

Reformation Era

After centuries of exclusive use, the Latin Vulgate began to be supplanted by other versions in the sixteenth century. The place of the disputed doxology in these versions proves, if anything, interesting.

The Complutensian Polyglot was a project by the Roman Catholic Church that sought to create the modern equivalent of a parallel translation in Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Latin. The Polyglot does include a note indicating the doxology's inclusion "in the Greek copies," but omits it from its rendering of the Lord's Prayer. Two years later, the doxology does appear in the 1516 edition of the Greek NT published by Desiderius Erasmus who, although he was Catholic, was critical of his church and by no means beholden to the Latin versions in his work as a critic and translator. Curiously, the doxology was omitted ten years later in Tyndale's English Translation (1526).

This was an era of extreme ecclesiastical upheaval. Both the inspired Scriptures and the eternal souls of men were being led out of the Catholic church into Christ's true church. This was a gradual process, admittedly, and we should not read too much into the earliest expressions of Reformation thought. By the time Tyndale published his definitive version in 1534, the doxology had found a permanent place in Matthew 6:13b. After that, all Protestant versions of Scripture included it. Though the Catholic Church continued to challenge the reading, the doxology stood firm as part of a distinctively Protestant

12. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1997), 1.8.

reading of the Lord's Prayer for nearly four hundred years. We find no Protestant challenging it until the late nineteenth century.

Textual Reconstruction

As mentioned above, modern text critics value readings found in *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* more than readings found in the majority of Greek manuscripts. We owe this dynamic to two Anglican Bishops: Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. Mr. Hort hated the *Textus Receptus* with a passion, as is obvious from the following rant:

> I had no idea till the last few weeks of the importance of texts, having read so little Greek Testament, and dragged on with the villainous Textus Receptus. Westcott recommended me to get Bagster's Critical, which has Scholz's text, and is most convenient in small quarto, with parallel Greek and English, and a wide margin on purpose for notes. This pleased me much; so many little alterations on good MS. authority made things clear not in a vulgar, notional way, but by giving a deeper and fuller meaning. But after all Scholz is very capricious and sparing in introducing good readings; and Tischendorf I find a great acquisition, above all, because he gives the various readings at the bottom of his page, and his Prolegomena are invaluable. Think of that vile Textus Receptus leaning entirely on late MSS....[13]

Judging the *Textus Receptus* to be "villainous," Mr. Hort sought to replace it with an entirely new Greek text based upon *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* readings. These two witnesses disagree with each other 3,036 times in the Gospels, but when they do agree, it often leads to changes in modern Bibles. When it came to Hort's methods of determining authentic readings, Prebendary Frederick H. A. Scrivener, one of the men who worked with Hort on the Revision Committee, expressed grave concerns:

> There is little hope for the stability of their imposing structure, if its foundations have been laid on the sandy ground of ingenious conjecture. And, since barely the smallest vestige of historical evidence has ever been alleged in support of the views

13. Fenton John Anthony Hort and Arthur Fenton Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort...by His Son Arthur Fenton Hort* (London: Macmillan, 1896), 1:211.

> of these accomplished Editors, their teaching must either be received as intuitively true, or dismissed from our consideration as precarious and even visionary.... Dr. Hort's System is entirely destitute of historical foundation.... We are compelled to repeat as emphatically as ever our strong conviction that the Hypothesis to whose proof he has devoted so many laborious years, is destitute not only of historical foundation, but of all probability, resulting from the internal goodness of the Text which its adoption would force upon us.[14]

Despite these protestations and criticisms, Dr. Hort succeeded in his project of overthrowing the Protestant New Testament. The *Textus Receptus* was replaced with a reconstructed critical text which continues to be revised to this very day (the NA is in its 28th edition and the UBS in its fifth, but both will publish more volumes with the completion of the CBGM, see below). As might be expected, this particular text platform omits the doxology in its current editions.

Tomorrow's Text

The text critical canons developed by Dr. Hort in the nineteenth century and then expanded upon by Dr. Kurt Aland in the twentieth century have enjoyed unchallenged reign in academia until just recently—and the challenge is coming from within the text critical camp. With the development of computer technology, a new approach to evaluating textual witnesses has been developed called the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method [CBGM]. In short, this is a computer-assisted model that enables text critics to observe and assess relationships between variant readings on a scale previously not possible. This new method has been in use since the early 2000s; it is anticipated that it will be applied to all the NT books by the early 2030s, resulting in yet another edition of the Greek NT named *Editio Critica Maior* [ECM]. A number of new English Bible versions (and then commentaries and study Bibles) will be published throughout the 2030s and 2040s with the completed ECM as the new base text.

While it is far too early to guess what standing, if any, will be given to the doxology in this new Greek edition and subsequent English translations, the CBGM does seem to offer some hope concerning

14. F. H. A. Scrivener and E. Miller, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament for the Use Ed, of Biblical Students* (London, 1894), 531, 537, 542.

its potential re-inclusion. A popular textbook on the CBGM reveals an interesting discovery that it admits was anticipated over fifty years prior: "With the advent of the CBGM…the editors of the ECM (and NA28/UBS5) have reevaluated the external evidence and concluded that the Byzantine manuscripts may indeed preserve very early readings, even ones that have disappeared from other streams of textual transmission."[15]

With this "new approach" to textual criticism, with its admission that Byzantine (i.e., TR/MT) readings may better represent authentic readings, and especially in light of the fact that the CBGM has not yet been applied to the entire NT, it would seem prudent for critical scholars to adopt a "wait and see" approach before pronouncing a verdict on the authentic form of the Lord's Prayer. As for the church, we have a much better confidence, knowing that the doxology was known to—and used by—Christians from the earliest era of ecclesiastical history. Let all Christians therefore receive it as God's Word without qualification or mental reservation, and safeguard its place in our churches' standards.

15. Tommy Wasserman and Peter J. Gurry. *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method* (Atlanta, Ga.: SBL Press, 2017), 72.