

## HEBREWS 2:9: SEPARATED BY GRACE

(χωρὶς χάριτι)

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Bruce M. Metzger's *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* explains why the committee behind the text of Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA) and the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* (UBS) chose one reading over another. However, as Metzger himself admits, given the nature of such meetings it was at times difficult to construe the actual reasons for choosing a particular reading.<sup>1</sup> Given this information, the user of Metzger's *Commentary* must question how faithfully Metzger reported the committee's opinions, and where the line between faithful reporter and knowledgeable commentator becomes less than clear. It is with this cautious attitude that we must approach Metzger's entry for the variant with which we are concerned.

The textual variant in Heb 2:9 centers around Jesus' relationship to God when he "tasted death" (γεύσῃται θανάτου), an important issue in the second century. Our current critical editions favor the idea that Jesus died *χάριτι θεοῦ* ("by the grace of God"), while the alternative reading claims that Jesus died *χωρὶς θεοῦ* ("apart from God"). The reasons for the committee's decision to favor *χάριτι θεοῦ* seem innocuous enough, being based almost solely on strong external evidence from many of the manuscripts that scholars have deemed "best."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the external evidence is so

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2002) vii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 594. "Best" implies that the manuscripts which cite *χάριτι* are spread over a range of text-types and

strong that the committee assigns it a grade of “A” to attest their confidence in this reading.<sup>3</sup> A quick overview of the paragraph that Metzger provides certainly yields a great deal of confidence for *χάριτι θεοῦ*. But a more cautious look raises questions. The internal evidence in support of *χωρὶς θεοῦ* forms an intriguing case as well. When the evidence for the two possible readings is set side by side, internal and external criteria conflict. These readings can illustrate and illuminate not only how we choose to practice the art of textual criticism, but also how we view the effect of early christological debate in early Christianity on the transmission of the New Testament.

What then is the external evidence in favor of each reading? The manuscript evidence in support of *χάριτι θεοῦ* is very strong. The major manuscripts that favor this reading include P<sup>46</sup> Ⲛ A B C D 33 81 330 614 it<sup>ar,b, comp, d, v</sup> vg cop<sup>sa, bo, fay</sup>, as well as others.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Origen, Athanasius, Didymus, Chrysostom, Cyril, Theodoret, and Jerome all testify that the reading exists. Therefore, we have an early reading that is supported by weighty manuscripts spread across several text-types and regions.<sup>5</sup> From the B-Text (Alexandrian) there is P<sup>46</sup> Ⲛ B 33, etc.; from the D-Text (Western)

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geographical places. They can be found in witnesses from the Alexandrian and Western types, as well as patristic authors both in the East and West. See n. 5 for more information on text-types. For more on internal evidence and external evidence in the field of New Testament textual criticism, see *ibid.*, 11\*–14\*.

<sup>3</sup> The Committee assigned a letter rating to each variant to represent their confidence in the reading. According to Metzger, “The letter {A} signifies that the text is certain” (*Textual Commentary*, 14\*).

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the recent discovery of P<sup>116</sup>, which is a witness to Hebrews 2:9-11 and 3.3-6, does not contain the portion of v. 9 in question. See Amphilochios Papatomas, “A New Testimony to the Letter to the Hebrews (2.9-11 and 3.3-6),” *Tyche* 16 (2001) 107–10.

<sup>5</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 15\*–16\*. Here I use Metzger’s arrangement of various major manuscripts into text-types, since he provides a concise and convenient list. Some, including the Alands, would argue that the application of text-types to pre-fourth century manuscripts is an anachronistic practice, since there were, according to them, no text-types during that period: “The text of the early period prior to the third/fourth century was, then, in effect, a text not yet channeled into types, because until the beginning of the fourth century the churches still lacked the institutional organization required to produce one” (Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989] 64).

there is D, as well as the evidence of the earlier “fathers”;<sup>6</sup> and from the A-Text (Byzantine) there is A, as well as a host of unmentioned minuscules.<sup>7</sup> The combination of these external criteria typically leads to an “A” rating.

By comparison, the manuscript evidence in favor of *χωρὶς θεοῦ* is very weak. Aside from 0121b, which is late, there are no uncial manuscripts.<sup>8</sup> Additional support for *χωρὶς θεοῦ* is provided by the cursive 1739,<sup>9</sup> a few manuscripts of the Vulgate, Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, a group known as the Nestorians (according to Pseudo-Oecumenius), Theodoret, Ambrose, Jerome, Vigilinus, Fulgentius, and syr<sup>p mss</sup>.<sup>10</sup> Here we have a few late manuscripts and a host of patristic witnesses who

<sup>6</sup> The placement of patristic witnesses within the various text-types is, in many cases, dubious as it is extremely difficult to ascertain the character of the New Testament text with which a given author may have been working. For more on the difficulties and rewards of citing patristic witnesses (which will be discussed further below), see Gordon D. Fee, “The Use of Greek Patristic Citations in New Testament Textual Criticism: The State of the Question,” in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 171–84. That said, Metzger lists Greek authors to the end of the third century and early Latin authors as witnesses to the D-Text (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 15\*).

<sup>7</sup> Since the A-Text is a later recension, it is of less importance for determining the originality of a reading than the B-Text and the D-Text. See Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 335–36.

<sup>8</sup> The apparatus of both NA<sup>27</sup> and UBS<sup>4</sup> give 0243 as the uncial manuscript attesting *χωρὶς*. The Alands give 0243 as a tenth-century category II uncial; however, they list it as containing only portions of 1 and 2 Corinthians, not Hebrews. 0121b, however, is the manuscript we are looking for, as the tables in the back of NA<sup>27</sup> clearly indicate. Clarification of such manuscript relationships by the Alands’ *The Text of the New Testament* is in order. See Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 126.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 135. The Alands list 1739 as a tenth-century category I cursive. The copyist of 1739 also took care to copy the prescript and notes of his exemplar. Analysis of this prescript and the notes to the text have led some, including Ehrman and Zuntz, to believe that the text in 1739 is a very faithful copy of a pre-4<sup>th</sup> century text. See Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 146.

<sup>10</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, “Hebrews 2:9 in Syriac tradition,” *NovT* 27 (1985) 236–44. Brock favors the Peshitta reading that would have been produced by *χάριτι*, though the Syriac translations, in general, differ amongst how they choose to render this (a question of “God, in his grace . . .” or “by the grace of God . . .,” which is closer to the Greek). Brock illustrates his reasons for favoring the Peshitta reading, however, by way of a lengthy argument that is certainly not the simplest solution, but does account for the manuscript evidence by showing that the alterations to and from the possible readings were intentional and theologically motivated.

have varying opinions on the validity of the reading. In sum, the external evidence in favor of *χωρὶς θεοῦ* is tenuous at best. Therefore, in terms of external evidence, *χάριτι θεοῦ* should be preferred to *χωρὶς θεοῦ*.

When we turn to internal evidence, however, the argument no longer favors *χάριτι*; indeed, as Bart Ehrman has argued regarding *χωρὶς*, “there can be no doubt concerning the superiority of this poorly attested variant.”<sup>11</sup> This certainty can be illustrated best if we assume the priority of one variant and then attempt to explain how it was altered or corrupted into the other. The majority of commentaries side with NA<sup>27</sup>/UBS<sup>4</sup> in presenting *χάριτι θεοῦ* as the preferred reading.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, they must explain how *χάριτι θεοῦ* was changed, intentionally or unintentionally, into *χωρὶς θεοῦ*. This proves to be a very difficult task.

Beginning with the idea of an intentional alteration, there is little reason why a proto-orthodox scribe would favor changing *χάριτι* to *χωρὶς*. From a christological perspective centered on the idea of Christ as both man and God, the notion that Jesus died “separated” from God (*χωρὶς*) is

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<sup>11</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, “Text and Tradition: The Role of New Testament Manuscripts in Early Christian Studies,” *TC* 5 (2000).

<sup>12</sup> Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ed. Helmut Koester; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989); Samuel Benetreau, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Vaux-sur-Seine: Édifac, 1989); Franz Delitzsch, *Der Hebräerbrief: Mit einem Geleitwort von Otto Michel* (Geißen: Brunnen Verlag, 1989); Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Erich Gräßer, *An die Hebräer* (Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1990); Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 2001); James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (eds. S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1924; repr., 1979); Gerd Shunack, *Der Hebräerbrief* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2002); Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; New York: MacMillan, 1892). One of the few commentaries that prefers to adopt the *χωρὶς* reading is Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

more troublesome than the idea that he died by the grace of God (χάριτι).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, we must find a plausible scenario in which χωρίς might have been unintentionally written for χάριτι. Metzger provides the common arguments for this change:

The latter reading [χωρίς θεοῦ] appears to have arisen either through a scribal lapse, misreading χάριτι as χωρίς, or, more probably, as a marginal gloss (suggested by 1 Cor 15.27) to explain that “everything” in ver. 8 does not include God; this gloss, being erroneously regarded by a later transcriber as a correction of χάριτι θεοῦ, was introduced into the text of ver. 9.<sup>14</sup>

The first suggestion—that of the scribal lapse—even Metzger and the committee do not accept, admitting that it is less probable than the other explanation. First of all, such a lapse would require substituting a less common word (χωρίς) for a more common word (χάρις). Second, while the nominative χάρις looks and sounds similar to χωρίς,<sup>15</sup> the dative χάριτι neither looks nor sounds similar. In addition, even if we consider that manuscripts may have been copied in scriptoria through oral recitation, the difference in accent still discounts the prospect of itacism—even if χάρις were in the nominative. The second suggestion occurring in Metzger’s *Commentary*, which also seems to be the majority opinion of the various commentaries, is that χωρίς θεοῦ was a marginal gloss incorporated into the text.<sup>16</sup> This too is highly unlikely. Were this so, the marginal gloss would have

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<sup>13</sup> Though, it should most certainly be noted that both notions are troublesome. The idea of Jesus dying “by the grace of God” is not without its own problems.

<sup>14</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 594.

<sup>15</sup> The notion that χάρις in the nominative is the original has been posited based on the idea that *gratia* in the Vulgate manuscripts is actually a nominative rather than an ablative. In this theory, χάρις θεοῦ becomes a title for Jesus. This theory was first put forth by Moffatt, but only as a possibility; and he does not seem to take it very seriously. See Hughes, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 97; and Moffatt, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 594; Constantin Tischendorf, *Novum Testament Graece* (8<sup>th</sup> Major Edition; Leipzig: Giesecke & Devrient, 1872) 785–86; Moffatt, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 27; Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 77. Westcott (*Epistle to the Hebrews*, 46) dismisses the reading based on the difficulty of the Greek—what could χωρίς θεοῦ possibly mean? This seems to be a common problem. See also Ceslas Spicq, *L’Épître au Hébreux* (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1977) 419.

to refer to οὐδέν or τὰ πάντα a full 30 words (several lines) back from where it was later incorporated into the text—a theory that requires no small leap of faith.<sup>17</sup> In addition, if the hypothetical gloss was done with regard to 1 Cor 15:27, it would be more likely that the scribe would use ἐκτός, since this is the term used in 1 Corinthians.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, χωρίς has a claim to originality based on a number of internal criteria. While it is less common than χάρις in the New Testament, it is actually more common than χάρις in Hebrews. Discounting the verse in question, χάρις appears 154 times in the New Testament, while χωρίς appears 41 times; χάρις appears 107 times in the Pauline epistles (all “Pauline” letters, not just those considered “genuine” by modern scholars since at this early period Hebrews was most assuredly associated with Paul), whereas χωρίς appears only 29 times. In Hebrews, however, χάρις occurs 7 times, and χωρίς occurs 13 times. Therefore, the word χωρίς is also more in accord with the vocabulary of Hebrews than χάριτι. Further, the phrase χωρίς θεοῦ appears nowhere else in the New Testament, while χάριτι θεοῦ appears some 20 times.<sup>19</sup> It is more likely that a scribe would replace χωρίς with the more common χάριτι than the other way around. In addition, as we have mentioned before, the idea of Jesus dying separated from God is a much more difficult reading in terms of proto-orthodox christological ontology than dying by the grace of God. The orthodox scribe is more likely to have altered the phrase in an effort to dispel questions about the ontological

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<sup>17</sup> J. C. O’Neill, “Hebrews II.9,” *JTS* 17 (1966) 79; and Gräßer, *An die Hebräer*, 125. There is an instance of τὰ πάντα that occurs a little closer to χωρίς, but it would make little sense for the marginal gloss to refer to this phrase. It makes far more sense in connection with the οὐδέν and the other τὰ πάντα.

<sup>18</sup> O’Neill, “Hebrews II.9;” Ehrman, “Text and Tradition.”

<sup>19</sup> Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 147. J. K. Elliott discusses the use of these words together in terms of the usage of χωρίς with articular versus anarthrous nouns. His conclusion is that the use of χωρίς with an anarthrous noun is totally in accord with both New Testament usage and the usage of Hebrews. See James K. Elliott, “When Jesus Was Apart from God: An Examination of Hebrews 2:9,” *ExpTim* 83 (1972) 339.

nature of Jesus, thus inserting *χάριτι* for *χωρίς*.<sup>20</sup> Bart Ehrman has argued that such an alteration of the text may well have been in reaction to so-called “heretical” doctrine running rampant during the second century about the humanity and divinity of Christ:

We know that the scribal alteration of the text of Heb 2:9 occurred precisely during the time that the controversy between proto-orthodox Christians and Gnostics was raging. It is not at all implausible to think that it was just this controversy then that led to the modification of this text, that proto-orthodox scribes, who shared the christological views of Irenaeus, modified the text so that Gnostics could not use it as a scriptural warrant for saying that Jesus died “apart from God,” since the divine Christ had already left him.<sup>21</sup>

For Ehrman, the christological debate of the second century, which was ultimately won by those whose theology would become the “orthodox” view, provides the theological motivation for overly pious scribes to alter the text in an effort to disallow the use of Scripture by those they deemed “heretics.” It is clear, then, that *χωρίς* is the *lectio difficilior*. It is also a word used more frequently in Hebrews than elsewhere, and its change to *χάριτι* can be explained both by scribal lapse (substituting the more common word for the less common, creating an easier phrase from something more complex) or by a theologically motivated scribe.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the two readings conflict, creating a gulf between those who find the external evidence more persuasive, and those who find the internal evidence more persuasive. From the time of Tischendorf, the external evidence in this case has dictated the variant selected for inclusion in the

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<sup>20</sup> Patristic writers were fond of disproving another group’s heretical christological belief based on textual criticism—showing that they altered the text. Bruce Manning Metzger, “The Practice of Textual Criticism Among the Church Fathers,” *Studia Patristica* XII (1975) 340–49. It is striking to me that until Ehrman’s *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, little attention had been paid to the reverse—namely, the theologically motivated alteration of texts by proto-orthodox scribes in an effort to control the christological debate.

<sup>21</sup> Ehrman, “Text and Tradition.” I am a bit uncomfortable with Ehrman’s use of “Gnostic” as a kind of collective, as if there were only two groups waging this theological war—but the point is still valid. For more on “Gnosticism,” see Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> See also Paul Garnet, “Hebrews 2:9: *Χαριτι* or *Χωρις*?” *Studia Patristica* 18 (1985) 324.

majority of critical editions. However, this denies the relative ancientness of the alternative reading, *χωρίς*. For, while it is true that the weight of the manuscript evidence strongly favors *χάριτι*, it cannot be said to be more ancient than *χωρίς*—both readings originate extremely early, by the end of the second century. This is obvious for *χάριτι*, since it appears in P<sup>46</sup>, a manuscript dated to somewhere around 200 CE. However, the same can be shown to be true of *χωρίς*—Origen’s usage proves this point most aptly.

Before considering Origen’s citations, however, let us review the methodological considerations relevant to the use of “patristic” citations. One of the issues associated with using patristic citations as text-critical evidence involves the notion of quotation in the ancient world. Those who seek to use patristic evidence must adequately address a host of issues in order to deem those citations useful. First, the patristic author should be citing the text in such a way that the grammar of the citation is not greatly affected by the author’s employment thereof. If the author’s grammar requires that a different verbal form be used (for example, in indirect discourse or within a result or final clause), then the usefulness of the citation is diminished to the extent that it is now more difficult to ascertain what form of the verb the author’s text may have originally had. This is not to say that such usage yields a citation unprofitable for textual criticism, but it does complicate the argument to some degree. Second, one has to take into account how close the patristic author is to the text. If the author can be shown to be quoting from memory rather than from a manuscript, the fruitfulness of the citation is diminished. Third, there is the issue of critical editions of patristic works. It is well known that the editions prepared by Jacques-Paul Migne (*Patrologia Latina* and *Patrologia Graecae*) are often fraught with bad readings and errors. But as more and more critical texts become available, such as those in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series, this problem becomes less relevant. Finally, there is the matter of translation. If, for example, a Latin author is quoting the text,

then it must be clear which reading of the Greek manuscript produced the translation.<sup>23</sup> If these four concerns about the author’s citation can be shown to be nonexistent, negligible, or irrelevant, then the patristic citation is important for text-critical arguments.

Origen mentions the *χωρίς* reading of Heb 2:9 six times, four of which are preserved in Greek, two in the Latin translations by Rufinus.<sup>24</sup> While Origen does not seem to declare a preference for either reading, he does seem to favor the *χωρίς* reading over *χάριτι*. First, let us consider his use of Heb 2:9 in the *Commentary on John*: *χωρὶς γὰρ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ παντὸς ἐγέυσατο θανάτου* (“for apart from God on behalf of all he tasted death”). He then adds the phrase *ὅπερ ἐν τισὶ κέῖται τῆς πρὸς Ἑβραίων ἀντιγράφοις χάριτι θεοῦ* (“which among some copies of the [epistle] to the Hebrews is set down ‘by the grace of God’”)—clearly indicating that he knows of manuscripts with both readings.<sup>25</sup> As Paul Garnet points out, Origen here seems—somewhat tacitly—to support the originality of *χωρίς*, and his choice of this reading in no way affects the theological point that he is trying to make (namely, that “Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice not only for men, but for every rational being”).<sup>26</sup> For Origen, the point is not that Jesus tasted death *χωρὶς θεοῦ*, but that he tasted death *ὑπὲρ παντός*. So, whether or not the manuscript says *χωρίς* or *χάρις* is inconsequential for his purpose. If the reading were necessary for Origen’s argument, then it would be easy to infer why he

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<sup>23</sup> For difficulties in going from a versional translation back to Greek, see Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). It should also be noted that the text-critical issues associated with patristic citations carry over into translations of those patristic authors. For example, many of Origen’s works have survived only in Rufinus’s Latin translation. We must ask ourselves all of the questions in the text above about both Origen and Rufinus. What text of Origen was Rufinus using? How faithfully does Rufinus translate Origen? Etc.

<sup>24</sup> *Commentary on John*, I.35, XXVIII.18 (bis); *Dialogue with Heraclides*, 27; *Commentary on Romans* III.8 and V.7. See Garnet, “Hebrews 2:9.” I have adopted where applicable the *Sources Chrétiennes* system for labeling chapters, rather than the system used by Garnet.

<sup>25</sup> Cecile Blanc, *Commentaire Sur Saint Jean* (SC 120; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966) 186–87; and Garnet, “Hebrews 2:9,” 321.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

might prefer it. Contrast this, for example, with Ambrose’s repeated citation of Heb 2:9 in *De Fide*.<sup>27</sup> Because Ambrose finds Jesus’ separation from God (*sine Deo*) to be so theologically significant, it is obvious why he might prefer that reading.<sup>28</sup> It is also possible to conjecture that whichever manuscripts he had in front of him, he would continue to prefer *χωρίς* every time. So also for Theodore of Mopsuestia, who refers to the *χάριτι* reading as *γελοιώτατον* (“most ridiculous/most laughable”). Origen’s use of Heb 2:9, however, does not seem to suffer from the four aforementioned shortcomings of patristic citations. For, the syntax of the sentence does not significantly alter the quotation (though he does add *γάρ* and change the mood of *γέυομαι* to the indicative); while he does not explicitly claim to be quoting from a text in front of him, the nature of the quotation (and the appendage of the phrase about other manuscripts) seems to indicate that he is reproducing the text somewhat faithfully; the text we have is found in a good critical edition; and finally, we do not need to worry about issues of translation, since this text is preserved in Greek.

Another citation by Origen that may be significant is found in the *Dialogue with Heraclides* 27: *ζητῶ ἵν’ εὕρω ὅτι Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀπέθανεν χωρὶς θεοῦ* (“I seek so that I find that Christ Jesus died apart from God on behalf of all”).<sup>29</sup> Garnet contends that the phrase which introduces this quote (*ζητῶ ἵν’ εὕρω*) indicates the Origen has actually taken the time to search out the verse.<sup>30</sup> While Garnet’s argument for Origen’s direct use of the manuscript for his citation is not altogether convincing (mainly because the citation has Jesus dying rather than “tasting death”—a variant not to be found elsewhere), this citation is important because it comes amidst christological

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<sup>27</sup> Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 95.

<sup>28</sup> Ambrose, in *De Fide* 2.3.65, during a discussion of what it means for Christ to be “made lower,” uses Heb 2:9, making the following statement: “How wisely the Apostle wrote: ‘In order that apart from God He might taste death on behalf of all,’ lest we should think that the Godhead, rather than the flesh, had endured the passion.”

<sup>29</sup> Jean Scherer, *Entretien avec Héraclide* (SC 67; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Garnet, “Hebrews 2:9,” 321–22.

debate.<sup>31</sup> As we have discussed earlier, Ehrman is convinced that the alteration of *χωρίς* to *χάριτι* most likely centered around christological debate. In the case of *Heraclides*, we clearly have Heb 2:9 being used as a scriptural argument for a discussion about the nature of Christ. Hebrews 2, in fact, is most intimately concerned with Christology. Verses 5–18 provide a concise description of Jesus’ status as a human being. He was made lower than the angels and crowned with glory and honor because of his suffering of death (2:8–9), and he is put on the same level as humans (2:11), taking on the same nature and sharing flesh and blood (2:14).<sup>32</sup> In Hebrews 2, the very nature of Christ is at stake, just as it was for scribes of the second century. The passage puts a great deal of emphasis not only on Jesus’ divinity (all things are subjected to him), but also on his humanity (he shares in flesh and blood). Therefore, the text becomes important for two different christological camps—those who would wish to proclaim Jesus’ full divinity, as well as those who might argue that the Divine is incapable of suffering death and thus that the Divine must have left Jesus before his suffering.

Irenaeus seems to be fighting the same battle in Book 3 of *Adversus haereses*. In III.16.9, he lays out the testimony of Paul in an attempt to refute the notion that there is a divine Christ distinct from a human Jesus; he wants to show that they are one and the same:

Christ suffered, and he himself was the Son of God, who died on our behalf, and with his blood he redeemed us at the pre-appointed time . . . he [Paul] proclaimed most plainly that this same one who was apprehended and suffered and shed his blood for us, this is the Christ, this is the Son of God, who also rose again and was taken into heaven.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Contrast this with the Origen’s use of Heb 2:9 in *The Commentary on John* where he is discussing the efficacy of the cross and the redemptive nature of Jesus’ death. The Latin translations by Rufinus for *The Commentary on Romans* also employ Heb 2:9 in discussion of Jesus’ sacrifice. It is also worth noting that in *Commentary V.7*, a discussion of grace, Rufinus preserves *ut sine Deo pro omnibus gustaret mortem* (“So that without God, on behalf of all, he tasted death”). Certainly some form of *χάριτι* would be preferred in a section about grace. In both Latin cases, Rufinus preserves the Hebrews word order, unlike the Greek citations we have. See Garnet, “Hebrews 2:9,” 322.

<sup>32</sup> Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 149.

<sup>33</sup> Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, *Contre Les Hérésies* (SC 211; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1974) 322–25: *Christum*

And later, in III.17.4, he describes the “heresy”:

They understand Christ to be one, and Jesus another, and they teach that there was not one Christ, but many. And if they say that they are united, again they show that this one underwent suffering, but this one remained impassible; that one ascended to the Pleroma, but the other remained in the intermediate area, and that this one in invisible and unnameable areas feasted and reveled, but this one sat by the Demiurge emptying his power.<sup>34</sup>

Irenaeus is very concerned with this notion that “heretical” groups are splitting Christ into multiple persons. His tactic is to show how scripture, especially Paul, refutes such a notion. Within this sort of climate, it is not difficult to see how a pious, proto-orthodox scribe, knowing that the christological debate is of great concern, might alter the text to say not that Jesus tasted death *χωρὶς θεοῦ* (a reading that, according to all intrinsic factors, appears to be genuine), but that he was crucified *χάριτι θεοῦ* (a reading that is extremely well-attested, but falters when the internal evidence is gathered). Indeed, the former reading could provide ammunition for those who believe that the Divine left Christ, while the latter is a gloss more friendly to Irenaeus and the like.

Thus, we have demonstrated the importance of patristic evidence for the textual criticism of Heb 2:9. Because Origen’s citations pass the appropriate tests (the grammar of the citation is not significantly affected; the author may be quoting directly from a text; our critical edition is reliable; and the readings are preserved in the original Greek), it should be reckoned as a powerful witness to the text of Hebrews during that time period. Moreover, since in context it makes little difference

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*passum et ipsum esse Filium Dei, qui pro nobis mortuus est et sanguine suo redemit nos in praefinito tempore . . . hunc eundem qui apprehensus et passus est et effudit sanguinem suum pro nobis, hunc Christum, hunc Filium Dei manifestissime adnuntians, qui etiam surrexit et adsumptus est in caelos.* Adelin The translation here is my own.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 338-41: *Alium autem— Christum et alium Iesum intellegunt, et non unum Christum sed plures fuisse docent; et si unitos eos dixerint, iterum ostendunt hunc quidem participasse passionem, hunc autem impassibilem perseuerasse; et hunc quidem ascendisse in Pleroma, hunc autem in Medietate remansisse; et hunc quidem in inuisibilibus et innominabilibus epulari et oblectari, hunc autem adsidere Demiurgo euacuantem eum virtutem.* The translation again is my own.

which variant he chooses, Origen’s witness seems rather strong, at least for Alexandria. Further, we have illustrated the importance of internal evidence for assessing this particular variant. *χωρὶς* is not only the *lectio difficilior*, but also a more common word in Hebrews than *χάρις*; and, while its alteration can be explained by scribal lapse, it is more likely the work of a theologically motivated scribe. When this internal evidence and the evidence of Origen and other patristic authors is combined with the manuscript evidence that heavily favors *χάριτι*, we are confronted with the realities of an early christological debate that has manifested itself as a text-critical quandary. The earliest version of the text probably read *χωρὶς θεοῦ*, but proto-orthodox scribes, sensitive to the “heretical” practice of splitting Christ into multiple persons, have elected to alter the text in an effort to reclaim Paul as a witness to their view.