

Mark 1:1: How to Display Differences in Biblical Manuscripts in Editions and Translations

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■ Abstract

This study has selected Codex Sinaiticus and Mark 1:1 as a test case to propose a new way for Greek New Testament editions and translations to present textual uncertainties in manuscripts. The article suggests that editors and translators use a ~~partial cancellation type of erasure in a continuous line over problematic text~~. This method draws inspiration from a technique used by Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida known as *sous rature* (under erasure). This form of limited cancellation aims to expel indifference and elicit a visceral reaction in the reader. The technique also has a philosophical and theological aim, namely, to work within Heidegger's view of truth as a process of hiding and revealing. Finally, the limited cancellation, which both conceals and shows, fits with the theme of "messianic secret" in Mark's Gospel, wherein Jesus both reveals and hides his identity.

■ Keywords

square brackets, New Testament manuscripts, Codex Sinaiticus, Mark 1:1, messianic secret

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The history of the New Testament [text] is the most perplexing of the unsolved problems of the universe and has almost as many missing links as the chain of life itself.¹ (James Rendel Harris [1852–1941], English biblical scholar)

■ Introduction

The New Testament manuscripts offer readings that vary from each other in a significant way.² Yet, many Bible readers are unaware of these differences in the ancient documents. This article presents a proposal on how editors could represent these differences in editions and translations so that these insights reach Bible readers. In this study I use Mark 1:1 to illustrate the issue.

The fifth edition of the UBS *Greek New Testament* (2014) prints Mark 1:1 as follows: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ], “A beginning of the good news about/of Jesus Christ [the son of god]” (my translation). The square brackets indicate that textual critics are not convinced of the authenticity of the enclosed

¹ Alessandro Falcetta, *The Daily Discoveries of a Bible Scholar and Manuscript Hunter: A Biography of James Rendel Harris (1852–1941)* (London: T&T Clark, 2018) 20. This quotation comes from a speech titled “On the Origin of the Ferrar-Group: A Lecture on the Genealogical Relations of the New Testament MSS,” which James Harris delivered at Mansfield College, Oxford, on 6 November 1893.

² Claims such as we find in Paul Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its History, Methods & Results* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006) 25, are misleading: “In the New Testament, the fourth edition of the United Bible Societies’ (hereafter UBS) *Greek New Testament* text notes variants regarding approximately 500 out of 6,900 words, or only about seven percent of the text. Textual criticism, therefore, mainly concerns itself with this small portion of the biblical text called ‘variant readings.’” The UBS committee is free to choose which variants to include in its edition. Let us briefly consider the evidence from two significant manuscripts, Sinaiticus and Bezae. It is not only that the text of Sinaiticus is considerably different from Bezae, but Sinaiticus significantly differs from itself! Klaus Wachtel, “The Corrected New Testament Text of Codex Sinaiticus,” in *Codex Sinaiticus: New Perspectives on the Ancient Biblical Manuscript* (ed. Scot McKendrick et al.; London: British Library and Hendrickson, 2015) 97–106, at 97, writes: “One of the unique features of Codex Sinaiticus is the number of corrections made to the manuscript. On just over 800 preserved pages, there are more than 23,000 places where the text has been altered: an average of thirty per page!” Two-thirds of the modifications are orthographical or graphical improvements, that is, insignificant readings. According to Wachtel, the remaining one-third are real variants. Ten significant corrections for each page of a codex of 800 pages makes a total of 8,000 in the entire Bible (ibid.). If you include other manuscripts, it goes without saying that the number goes much higher. So, the number of variants is staggering. Already the Latin church father Jerome of Stridon (c. 347–420) observed that there are “almost as many forms of texts as there are manuscripts” (quoted in Wegner, *A Student's Guide*, 289). This observation is still true. When it comes to the variant readings from Codex Bezae, see Eberhard Güting, “Weakly Attested Original Readings of the Manuscript D 05 in Mark,” in *Codex Bezae: Studies from the Lunel Colloquium, June 1994* (ed. David Parker and Christian-Bernard Amphoux; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 217–31, at 217: “Any reader who opens a Greek synopsis or glances into the apparatus of a New Testament will notice before long that numerous readings of Codex Bezae and its relatives are absent from the text of Mark and are not mentioned in its apparatus.” See also James Voelz, “The Characteristics of the Greek of St. Mark’s Gospel,” in *Texts & Traditions: Essays in Honour of J. Keith Elliott* (ed. Peter Doble and Jeffrey Kloha; Leiden: Brill, 2014) 137–53, at 137.

words.³ Tommy Wasserman argues for their inclusion.⁴ One recent edition, the *Greek New Testament Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge*, also includes them.⁵ However, Bart Ehrman, Peter Head, and Adela Collins take the opposite position.⁶

I propose in this study that future editions print Mark 1:1 as Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ, “A beginning of the good news about/of Jesus Christ the Son of God.” Thus, the two questionable words are under “partial erasure.”

This article does *not* propose placing all “dubious” texts under “partial erasure.” The technique is not a panacea solution for all textual problems. Editors should use common sense in dealing with text-critical issues. The study *does* offer three general principles for editors: 1) make the reader as active in the decision/reading process as possible; 2) do not make the text inaccessible with arcane symbols (critical signs); 3) wake up the reader! Indeed, editors need to shake up readers. The philosopher Martin Heidegger emphasized the need to wake up “being” from her slumber.⁷ The ~~strikethrough~~ of words in the Holy Scripture is like the cut of a knife, threatening the text, perhaps even the reader.

■ Mark 1:1 in Codex Sinaiticus as a Test Case

This study does not aim to revisit the whole manuscript evidence to Mark 1:1.⁸ Instead, I will illustrate the topic with evidence from the famous fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus, “the world’s oldest and most complete manuscript of a Greek

³ *The Greek New Testament* (ed. Barbara Aland et al.; 5th ed.; 2nd corrected printing; Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Münster/Westphalia, under the direction of Holger Strutwolf; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 2015) 58* (hereafter USB³).

⁴ Tommy Wasserman, “The ‘Son of God’ Was in the Beginning (Mark 1:1),” *JTS* 62 (2011) 20–50; idem, “Historical and Philological Correlations and the CBGM as Applied to Mark 1:1,” *TC: A Journal of Textual Criticism* 20 (2015) 1–11.

⁵ *The Greek New Testament Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge* (ed. Dirk Jongkind et al.; Wheaton, IL.: Crossway; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), prints Mark 1:1 as follows: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ.

⁶ Bart 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) 72–75; Peter Head, “A Text-Critical Study of Mark 1:1: ‘The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’” *NTS* 37 (1991) 621–29, at 629; Adela Yarbro Collins, “Establishing the Text: Mark 1:1,” in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts; Essays in Honor of Lars Hartman* (ed. Torn Fornberg and David Hellholm; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995) 111–27; eadem, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia: A Critical & Historical Commentary on the Bible; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 130.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 276.

⁸ For a recent study, see Holger Strutwolf, “Remarks on the Patristic Evidence,” in *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior*, Part 3: *Studies* (ed. Holger Strutwolf et al.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2021) 76–104. Strutwolf concludes that the church fathers “quoting our verse tend to quote the titles of Jesus in an abbreviated way at times, if the full title is not essential for their specific apologetic intentions. . . . Even Origen betrays no knowledge of the longer version in his citations of Mark 1:1” (80).

Bible.⁹ Due to this codex's significance and the ambiguous text it represents in Mark 1:1, I have selected the Codex Sinaiticus as a test case for how modern editions could represent textual ambiguities.¹⁰ Figure 1 reproduces Mark 1:1–2a.

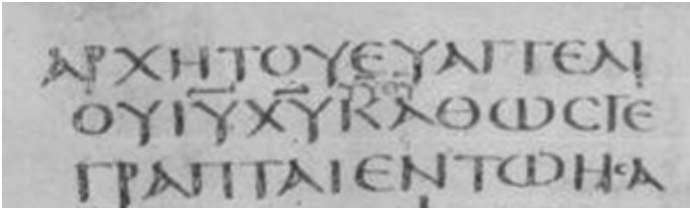


Fig. 1. Codex Sinaiticus. Mark 1:1–2a.

In the second line, above the seventh and the eighth letters, is a tiny addition of four letters: ΥΥ ΘΥ, the abbreviation for Υιοῦ Θεοῦ, “Son of God.”
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The scribe(s) wrote everything in capital letters, as was the custom until the ninth century.¹¹ The first line in figure 1 reads: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “the beginning of the good ne.” The Greek word for “news” continues on the second line. The first six letters of the second line are: ου ΙΥ ΧΥ, “ws about Jesus Christ.” The abbreviation ΙΥ ΧΥ stands for Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Jesus Christ.”

After the letters ΧΥ, the scribe wrote the adverb καθὼς, “as,” which is the first word of Mark 1:2: “As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’” (NIV).¹² This second verse introduces us to John the Baptist. Our interest remains on καθὼς. Look carefully at the first two letters of this adverb in Sinaiticus (fig. 1). Above them, you see a small addition of four letters: ΥΥ ΘΥ, abbreviations for Υιοῦ Θεοῦ, “Son of God.”

Who added these four letters? It might have been the same person who copied almost all the New Testament, including the Epistle of Barnabas. The scribe is

⁹ Christfried Böttrich, “Codex Sinaiticus and the Use of Manuscripts in the Early Church,” *ExpTim* 128 (2017) 469–78, at 469. Robert Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text: Movers, Materials, Motives, Methods, and Models* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010) 90: Sinaiticus “is deservedly celebrated as one of the two most valuable manuscripts of the Greek New Testament in existence, the other being Codex Vaticanus (B).” Likewise, Eldon Jay Epp, “Codex Sinaiticus: Its Entrance into the Mid-Nineteenth Century Text-Critical Environment and Its Impact on the New Testament Text,” in *Codex Sinaiticus* (ed. McKendrick et al), 53–89, at 73.

¹⁰ Similarly, in this article, I discuss only the UBS⁵ edition as an example. For other Greek New Testament editions, see Juan Hernández Jr., “Modern Critical Editions and Apparatuses of the Greek New Testament,” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (2nd ed.; ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes; Leiden: Brill, 2013) 689–710. Since 2017, we also have *The Greek New Testament Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge* (ed. Jongkind et al.).

¹¹ Hull, *The Story of the New Testament Text*, 25: “Minuscules, written in small, running hand, began to displace majuscules in the ninth century.”

¹² Mark 1:2: Καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἰσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ· Ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου·.

known as “A.”¹³ Alternatively, scribe “D” is responsible for the addition.¹⁴ This D is known as the supervisor of the project Codex Sinaiticus.¹⁵ Scribes A and D were contemporary, and they worked together, “since they take over from each other within a quire, a book, and even a column,” observes Peter Head.¹⁶

We now have a short and long version of Mark 1:1, one *without* and one *with* Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ, “Son of God.” Are these four letters original or a later addition?

According to Adela Yarbro Collins, the reading Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ, “Son of God,” is “most likely secondary, because an accidental omission in the opening words of a work is unlikely.”¹⁷ In other words, the *Vorlage* (the manuscript that scribe A or D used as their source) did not contain Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ. Thus, there would have been no error on the part of the scribe of Sinaiticus, and it was the scribe’s “invention” to add these extra words.

Tommy Wasserman argues instead that there was indeed a mistake, that is, the scribe’s *Vorlage* *did* have these Greek words.¹⁸ According to Wasserman, the (supposed) error depended on the *homoioteleuton*, a term meaning “similar ending.” *Homoioteleuton* designates a type of error made when a scribe’s eye accidentally skips from one word or letter to the same word or letter later in the line because they look identical. In Mark 1:1, the (alleged) error would have depended on all the abbreviations ending with an upsilon: ΙΥ ΧΥ ΥΥ ΘΥ.¹⁹

However, Bart Ehrman observes that since the shorter form of Mark 1:1 occurs in such a wide spread of the tradition, we cannot easily explain it away as an accident.²⁰ David Parker concurs and comments on the short variant of Mark 1:1 in Sinaiticus: “Did the scribe know the shorter form in his head, and then when checking the manuscript against his exemplar realize he had omitted words present in it, and supplied them? Was the absence of the words noticed in some other way? To be fanciful, did a visitor walk into the scriptorium, glance at a few sheets, and suggest that other copies read ‘son of God’ at the beginning of Mark?”²¹

¹³ Peter Head, “Some Observations on Various Features of Scribe D in the New Testament of Codex Sinaiticus,” in *Codex Sinaiticus* (ed. McKendrick et al.), 127–37, at 127.

¹⁴ Peter Malik, “The Earliest Corrections in Codex Sinaiticus: A Testcase from the Gospel of Mark,” *BASP* 50 (2013) 207–54, at 214, is unsure whether it was the scribe A or D who wrote “Son of God.”

¹⁵ Head, “Some Observations on Various Features of Scribe D,” 127: “Scribe A corrected his own work, but not that of Scribe D, while Scribe D corrects both his own work and that of Scribe A.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 136 n. 10.

¹⁷ Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 130. Similarly, David Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus: The Story of the World’s Oldest Bible* (London: British Library; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010) 108.

¹⁸ Wasserman, “Historical and Philological,” 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, 73.

²¹ Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus*, 109.

■ Messianic Secret

Parker comments on the mystical addition of the phrase Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ, “Son of God,” into Sinaiticus. Indeed, in Mark 1:1, we are facing a mystery, with two Greek words appearing and disappearing in the NT manuscripts. It is possible to associate this enigma with a motif in Mark’s Gospel known as the “messianic secret,” meaning that Mark would have represented Jesus ordering his disciples to be silent about his messianic mission. William Wrede, in 1901, was the first to draw attention to the “messianic secret”.²² One key passage is Mark 8:30: ἐπετίμησεν αὐτοῖς ἵνα μηδενὶ λέγωσιν περὶ αὐτοῦ, “Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.”

Larry Hurtado has pointed out that “it is very significant that Jesus is called the ‘Son of God’ only by God (1:11, 9:7), by demons (3:11, 5:7), and by one man, the centurion at the cross (15:39), illustrating Mark’s emphasis upon the blindness of people in his own ministry.”²³ Thus, three categories of beings recognize Jesus’s identity. They have something in common, namely, that they are outsiders who have inside knowledge, as observed by Stephen D. Moore.²⁴ Since the demons are opposers to Jesus, they are outsiders. However, they are also insiders because they know who he is.

As for the centurion, as a pagan he is an outsider, but he becomes an insider when he makes his so-called confession at the foot of the cross: Ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἦν, “Truly this man was God’s son” (Mark 15:39).²⁵ Yet, as Hurtado observes, God’s people, that is, the Jews—the insiders—do not acknowledge that Jesus is God’s son. The Jews are (allegedly) insiders, since they have the scriptures (the Hebrew Bible) and since Jesus performs many miracles among them.²⁶

²² William Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien. Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901).

²³ Larry Hurtado, *Mark* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995) 23.

²⁴ Stephen D. Moore, “Deconstructive Criticism: Turning Mark Inside-Out,” in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (2nd ed.; ed. Janice Anderson and Stephen Moore; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008) 95–110, at 102–3.

²⁵ Translation by Philip Harner, “Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John 1:1,” *JBL* 92 (1973) 75–87, at 81. Harner explains his translation, “God’s son”: “It minimizes the question whether the word ‘son’ should be understood as indefinite or definite. At the same time, it leaves open the possibility that Mark was thinking of Jesus at this point as ‘a’ son of God in the Hellenistic sense, or ‘the’ son of God in a specifically Christian sense, or possibly both. In all of these ways the translation ‘God’s son’ would reflect the various shades of meaning that may be present in Mark’s word-order” (ibid.). Adela Yarbro Collins, “Mark and His Readers: The Son of God among Greeks and Romans,” *HTR* 93 (2000) 85–100, at 96: “The acclamation of the centurion in Mark is ambiguous. It may be understood as a definite reference to the Son of God. . . . But for those familiar with the terminology of the imperial cult, the lack of the articles makes the acclamation similar to the imperial epithet θεοῦ υἱός. The earliest recoverable reading of Mark’s text has the nouns in the opposite order, υἱός θεοῦ; but some manuscripts, including Codex Bezae and most of the Old Latin manuscripts, attest a reading in which the phrase has the same form as the imperial title: θεοῦ υἱός.”

²⁶ Cf. Mark 7:27.

These comments by Hurtado and Moore help us understand the ramifications of including or omitting Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ, “Son of God,” in Mark 1:1: if we keep the phrase, we are like the centurion who recognizes the divine nature of Jesus.²⁷ The shorter variant emphasizes the secrecy motif in Mark’s Gospel.

Jesus himself used the word “mystery.” He proclaimed τὸ μυστήριον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, “the mystery of the Kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11).²⁸ A spiritual mystery depends as much on an absence as on presence.²⁹

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida has argued that Western thinking prefers presence to absence.³⁰ Instead, we should balance these two concepts—presence and absence. They are not opposites but accomplices of each other.³¹ It is necessary not to suppress or downplay either component in the couple “presence and absence.” In Mark 1:1, the words Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ, “Son of God,” being both present and absent, create a mystical contradiction, in harmony with the themes of Mark’s Gospel: “messianic secret” and the “mystery of the Kingdom of God.”

■ The Problem with Square Brackets and the Footnote System

Peter Malik observes: “Sinaiticus provides genetic support for both the omission *and* the inclusion of the title ‘son of God’ in the beginning of Mark’s Gospel. Deciding on which of the two readings is to be preferred, however, is not the matter for our discussion.”³²

Since Sinaiticus supports both the omission and the inclusion of Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ, “Son of God,” would it not be preferable for editors to display this ambiguity in a way that reaches—through translations—readers of the Bible?

We have seen that the UBS⁵ Greek New Testament uses square brackets to display the ambiguous nature of Mark 1:1: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ]. The question is whether square brackets are the proper way to present the difficulties in that verse. My main argument against them is that translators treat Mark 1:1 as if the square brackets do not exist in the critical editions of the Greek New Testament: all translations (that I have consulted) include the phrase “Son of God” but, at the same time, square brackets are missing.

²⁷ Abraham Smith, *Mark: An Introduction and Study Guide (Shaping the Life and Legacy of Jesus)* (T&T Clark Study Guides to the New Testament; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017) 83, argues that Mark represents Jesus as a Socratic hero, “as one who died well.” According to Smith, the centurion’s declaration is an “example of the astonishment of those who look on the noble suffering and death of a hero” (*ibid.*).

²⁸ David Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 111.

²⁹ Cf. Camille Focant, “Une christologie de type ‘mystique’ (Marc 1.1–16.8),” *NTS* 55 (2009) 1–21, at 20.

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (corr. ed.; trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 18–19.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Peter Malik, “Myths about Copying: The Mistakes and Corrections Scribes Made,” in *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism* (ed. Elijah Hixson and Peter Gurry; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019) 152–70, at 166 (emphasis in the original).

For instance, the New International Version translates Mark 1:1 as “The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” The New Living Translation renders it: “This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” As a third and final example, there is the English Standard Version: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”³³

The result is that the reader does not know how uncertain the status of the phrase $\Upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, “Son of God,” is. The introductory verse to the Gospel is of utmost significance, since it presents the most challenging claim: the protagonist is the Son of God! This affirmation is problematic, as its status among manuscripts is uncertain. The editions display the uncertainty of $\Upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ with square brackets. However, translators ignore them. Therefore, NT editors must find a more efficient way of showing textual ambiguities.

Should translators and editors inform readers about such uncertainties with the use of a footnote? The footnote system would not be sufficient, because many readers would miss “the important variant readings,” observes Eldon Jay Epp.³⁴ He continues: “If numerous variants have a story to tell—as they do—their delegation to the footnote style apparatus mutes their voices and suppresses their narratives.”³⁵

I propose in this article a more efficient way of treating problems like that of Mark 1:1. The idea draws inspiration from the philosophers Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida.

■ *Sous Rature*

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger placed the term “being” (*Sein*) under erasure by placing an X over it. Although partially erased, the word remains visible.³⁶ Jacques Derrida, too, used the “under erasure” technique, as seen in the quotation below. Thanks to Derrida, this technique is better known under its French name: *sous rature*. In fact, he popularized it.³⁷

... the question of essence, to the “*ti esti*.” The “formal essence” of the sign can only be determined in terms of presence. One cannot get around that response, except by challenging the very form of the question and beginning to think that the sign ~~X~~ that ill-named ~~Being~~, the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: “what is . . . ?”³⁸

³³ This website lists 29 translations: <https://biblehub.com/mark/1-1.htm>.

³⁴ Eldon Jay Epp, “It’s All about Variants: A Variant-Conscious Approach to New Testament Textual Criticism,” *HTR* 100 (2007) 275–308, at 297.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, “Zur Seinsfrage,” in *Wegmarken* (2nd ed.; Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1978) 405 (239); Dominique Janicaud and Jean-François Mattéi, *Heidegger from Metaphysics to Thought* (trans. Michael Genre; New York: State University of New York Press, 1995) 91–102.

³⁷ Peter Salmon, *An Event, Perhaps: A Biography of Jacques Derrida* (London: Verso, 2020) 215.

³⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (corr. ed.; trans. Gayatri Spivak; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 18–19.

The literary critic Gayatri Spivak explains why Heidegger and Derrida placed certain words under erasure: “In examining familiar things, we come to such unfamiliar conclusions that our very language is twisted and bent even as it guides us. Writing ‘under erasure’ is the mark of this contortion.”³⁹ According to Heidegger, a word’s current and metaphorical meanings can mislead us. The X-sign is a call to return to etymology. *Being* speaks to us through language, which is entangled with the world and its history.⁴⁰

Heidegger explains: “The crossing out of this word initially has only a preventive role, namely, that of preventing the almost ineradicable habit of representing ‘being’ as something standing somewhere on its own that then on occasion first comes face-to-face with human beings.”⁴¹ He continues: “the sign of this crossing through cannot, however, be the merely negative sign of a crossing out. It points, rather, toward the four regions of the fourfold and their being gathered in the locale of this crossing through.”⁴² Thus, the X evokes the four regions of the quadrant, intersecting in the middle of being (us).⁴³ The crossing over of “being” shows that we are, or should be, in the world.

When Derrida places the X over the French verb *est* (is), he criticizes the Western preference for presence. Derrida’s X-sign partially cancels “presence” to reveal its opposite.⁴⁴

The erasure technique can provide guidance when we edit the Greek New Testament. For example, when we encounter questionable words, such as $\Upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon$ $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, “Son of God,” in Mark 1:1, we could use the X-type of cancellation. Instead, I propose that we draw a continuous line through them: $\Upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon$ $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$.⁴⁵ This strikethrough pays homage to another device Heidegger used, which is the extra hyphen that he sometimes added to words such as *Dasein*, spelling it *Da-sein*. In everyday German, the noun means “existence.” Taylor Carman explains that *Dasein*

³⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” in *ibid.*, ix–xc, at xiv.

⁴⁰ Matthew King, *Heidegger and Happiness: Dwelling on Fitting and Being* (London: Continuum, 2009) 42–43; Matthew King, “Heidegger’s Etymological Method: Discovering Being by Recovering the Richness of the Word,” *Philosophy Today* 51 (2007) 278–89.

⁴¹ Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks* (ed. and trans. William McNeill; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 310.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 310–11.

⁴³ Janicaud and Mattéi, *Heidegger from Metaphysics to Thought*, 95.

⁴⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 18–19.

⁴⁵ Where did the “under erasure” technique originate? With Heidegger? The philosopher Immanuel Kant used a variant of it: “Kant put a line through fourteen paragraphs in his own copy of the first edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. In the second edition, he added two opening paragraphs but kept the fourteen deleted paragraphs as they were. In my fancy, they are forever ‘under erasure,’” writes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “Notes Towards a Tribute to Jacques Derrida,” in *Adieu Derrida* (ed. Costas Douzinas; New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) 47–60, at 49. See eadem, *Other Asias* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008) 67 and 76; and eadem, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 168, for further comments on the “under erasure” technique.

“denotes a human being’s existence, or one’s ‘living’ or ‘daily bread.’ Heidegger uses the term to refer to an individual human being.”⁴⁶

Heidegger did not invent a new meaning for *Dasein*. Instead, he believed that he revived its original sense, which is “being there.”⁴⁷ *Da* is an adverb meaning “there,” and *sein* means “being.” By adding the hyphen, the philosopher brought attention to the prefix, *da*.

The hyphen in *Da-sein* has many meanings. The German term for “hyphen” is *Bindestrich*, coming from *binden*, “to join,” and *Strich*, meaning “line.” Metaphorically speaking, the hyphen in *Da-sein* is a line or a path that joins humans to the world.

The *Strich* (line) relates to “reading.” Heidegger points out that the original meaning of *lesen* (reading) is “to collect” or “to gather.”⁴⁸ Sarah Pourciau explains that, in Heidegger, *Strich* designates the path that the primordial reader-gatherer followed.⁴⁹ Thus, Heidegger associates written signs with the “physical landscape of hunting and gathering out of which they are presumed to have emerged,” concludes Pourciau.⁵⁰

The hyphen in *Da-sein* also shows a *lack* of relationship to the world. Ivo De Gennaro aptly comments: “the hyphen is not a punctuation mark used to divide two syllables or word elements. Rather, the hyphen is *the cut (or schism) itself*.”⁵¹ So, in De Gennaro’s interpretation, the hyphen in Heidegger’s *Da-sein* represents our unfortunate and violent separation from the world.

In other words, the hyphen in *Da-sein* is paradoxical: it is both a lifeline and a cut; it is a desire of bringing the being into the world but also an acknowledgment of her deplorable distancing from it.⁵²

In the term *Da-sein*, the prefix *da* (there) represents the object (the cosmos), while the *sein* (being) is the subject (the “I”). Thus, the hyphen separates and joins the subject and the object.

⁴⁶ Taylor Carman, *Heidegger’s Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity in “Being and Time”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 35.

⁴⁷ Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) 42.

⁴⁸ Sarah Pourciau, “Heidegger’s Hyphen/Heidegger’s Bindestrich,” in *Die Schönsten Schweizer Bücher* (ed. Laurenz Brunner and Tan Wälchli; Bern: Bundesamt für Kultur; Mainz; Hermann Schmidt, 2008) 76–87, at 81.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Ivo De Gennaro, “Husserl and Heidegger on *Da-sein*: With a Suggestion for Its Interlingual Translation,” in *Heidegger, Translation, and the Task of Thinking: Essays in Honor of Parvis Emad* (ed. Frank Schalow; Heidelberg: Springer, 2011) 225–52, at 241 (italics in original).

⁵² *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (ed. Tom McArthur, Jacqueline Lam-McArthur, and Lise Fontaine; 2nd ed.; online version; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) s.v. “hyphen”: this punctuation mark “has two main functions in present-day English: as a *link hyphen* (or *hard hyphen* in printing terminology), joining whole words or elements of words into longer words and compounds (*house-plant*, *Anglo-French*); as a *break hyphen* (or *soft hyphen*), marking the division of a word at the end of a line.” Similarly, the hyphen has two functions in Heidegger, being both a link and a break.

Heidegger hyphenated other words as well, such as *Er-eignis* and *Ab-grund*. Frank Schalow comments: “By hyphenating these words, Heidegger assigns an independent status to the prefixes. . . . He thereby leads us into the space of freedom, which remains inaccessible through the simple use of a dictionary.”⁵³ Indeed, the hyphen also symbolizes freedom.

The strikethrough in ~~Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ~~, “~~Son of God~~,” is the multiplied hyphen that joins and cuts. The method of partial cancellation restores freedom to the reader; instead of the editor or the translator making a choice, you (the reader) now have the power to keep these words or eliminate them.

The strikethrough pays homage to two philosophical methods: the X-sign of partial cancellation and the hyphen in words such as *Da-sein*. Their common denominator is that they unite and separate. But, most significantly, the partial cancellation and the hyphen restore freedom to the *Da-sein* (us), the liberty to cut or restore.

In other words, the term *Da-sein/Dasein* describes who we are and explains our relationship to the world. Mark 1:1, in turn, describes who Jesus Christ is. The appearance and disappearance of ~~Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ~~, “~~Son of God~~,” makes us reflect on Christ’s identity and his relationship to us. The strikethrough over this phrase represents the divine mystery that we can never wholly understand (Mark 4:11).

■ Clearing: A Place of Concealing and Lightening

For the sake of argument, suppose now that the scribe of Codex Sinaiticus was only absentminded. In Mark 1:1, he or she made an error and corrected it. Even so, we should signal it in an edition and translation since “error is not just accidental but belongs to the very essence of truth as unconcealment,” as the American philosopher Graham Harman says.⁵⁴

It is my hope that future editions will print Mark 1:1 as Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ~~Υἱοῦ Θεοῦ~~, “A beginning of the good news about/of Jesus Christ ~~the Son of God~~.” This procedure would be truthful to the manuscript evidence, which shows that the last two words are questionable.⁵⁵

The partial cancellation aims to bring forth the idea that truth is a process of continuous unconcealment and hiding. Heidegger writes:

The “Being-true” of the λόγος [word] as ἀληθεύειν [to speak truly] means that in λέγειν [to speak] as ἀποφαίνεισθαι [make known], the entities of which one is talking must be taken out of their hiddenness; one must let them be seen as something unhidden (ἀληθές); that is, they must be *discovered*.

⁵³ Frank Schalow, introduction to *Heidegger, Translation* (ed. Schalow), 11–46, at 27.

⁵⁴ Graham Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing* (Chicago: Open Court, 2007) 139.

⁵⁵ Malik, “Myths about Copying,” 166: “Sinaiticus provides genetic support for both the omission and the inclusion of the title ‘son of God’ in the beginning of Mark’s Gospel.”

Similarly, “being false” (ψεύδεσθαι) amounts to deceiving in the sense of *covering up* [*verdecken*].⁵⁶

Heidegger compares the concept of truth with a clearing, in German *Lichtung*. Inwood comments: “*Lichtung* and *lichten* stem from *Licht*, ‘light,’ but have since lost this link and mean, in standard usage, a ‘clearing, glade’ in a forest and ‘to clear’ an area. Heidegger restores their association with light, so that they mean, ‘light(en)ing; light(en).’ His use of the terms is influenced by Plato’s story of prisoners in a cave.”⁵⁷ Inwood adds: “Being is lightened and concealed. Being lightens and conceals, both itself and entities.”⁵⁸

The gesture of striking through words is like cutting down trees: both cases have the unexpected effect of bringing forth light. The clearing becomes a brighter place when the trees disappear. Yet, this same process hides/destroys the trees. Revelation means disappearance.

■ Distancing from Textual Conventions

Would it not suffice that Bible translations alone use the “under erasure” technique?

One might argue that scholars who have been trained to use the Greek New Testament editions understand the complexity of the transmission of the NT text. However, the epigraph that introduces this article—a quotation from James Rendel Harris—suggests that no one can grasp its complexity.⁵⁹ But for the sake of argument, let us suppose that textual critics possess this ability. If so, why change textual conventions and symbols such as the use of square brackets?

One could furthermore affirm that the more pressing problem is the translations that obscure variation by printing rarely consulted footnotes that share no information about the extent of the variation that is flagged.

However, the translations are only the symptom. The root of the evil is the editions. Jennifer Knust comments that the custom of bracketing beloved texts is “a fitting material symbol of what it has meant to produce a ‘modern text,’ a visible proof of a willingness to embrace the secular distancing modern criticism demands.”⁶⁰

In other words, editors began to place certain cherished text passages, but not necessarily “original,” within square brackets to have more distance from them.

⁵⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson; Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) 56–57 (italics in original).

⁵⁷ Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 238; Plato, *Rep.* 514a–520f (the allegory of the cave).

⁵⁸ Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 239. Cf. Richard Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger* (foreword by William Richardson; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011) 87–101.

⁵⁹ “The history of the New Testament [text] is the most perplexing of the unsolved problems of the universe and has almost as many missing links as the chain of life itself”; see n. 1 above.

⁶⁰ Jennifer Knust, “On Textual Nostalgia: Herman C. Hoskier’s Collation of Evangelium 604 (London, British Library Egerton 2610; GA 700) Revisited,” in *The Future of New Testament Textual Scholarship: From H. C. Hoskier to the Editio Critica Maior and Beyond* (ed. Garrick Allen; WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019) 79–101, at 89 n. 43.

At a distance, editors and readers could, supposedly, better observe and judge the texts placed between square brackets. However, as Yii-Jan Lin has observed, “the clinical distance textual critics maintain from their work is a fiction.”⁶¹

Yet, one might instead ask if textual critics should keep a distance in the first place. Looking at things from afar makes them unreal and dim. Heidegger warns against the danger of distancing: “remoteness, like distance, is a determinate categorial characteristic of entities whose nature is not that of Dasein [human being].”⁶² He compares the idea to wearing glasses: when “a man wears a pair of spectacles which are so close to him distantly that they are ‘sitting on his nose,’ they are environmentally more remote from him than the picture on the opposite wall.”⁶³

To illustrate the idea of “real” space and its relationship to us, Heidegger introduces the concepts *zuhanden* (ready-at-hand) and *vorhanden* (presence-at-hand). Inwood explains: “*Zuhanden*, literally ‘to, towards, the hands,’ is now, unlike *vorhanden*, not a common word. It is used in such phrases as ‘for the attention of [*zuhanden*] so-and-so.’ Again, Heidegger breathes new life into the word and applies it to things that serve human purposes in some way: articles of use, raw material, footpaths, etc.”⁶⁴

As for *vorhanden*, it literally means “before the hands, at hand”. The extended meaning is “available,” “existing”—both in everyday German and in Heidegger’s usage.⁶⁵ Things are *vorhanden* (existing), for instance, for a scientist looking at them from an emotional distance. Broken artifacts are also *vorhanden*.⁶⁶

Spectacles—that you wear—are “ready-at-hand” (*zuhanden*) because they are a useful item that you hardly observe. They are a part of you, an extension of you. However, they become *vorhanden* (presence-at-hand) when they break. You observe the broken glasses from a distance.⁶⁷

We can compare the damaged glasses with the text “under erasure.” Both are “broken” and thus at a distance. However, you can heal the text by discarding the partial cancellation. If so, the text is close—*zuhanden*. You can also reject the text, which then becomes *vorhanden*.

On the other hand, text within square brackets is *permanently* at a distance since the editorial committee has decided for you that the text is “unreliable.”⁶⁸

⁶¹ Yii-Jan Lin, *The Erotic Life of Manuscripts: New Testament Textual Criticism and the Biological Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) 158.

⁶² Heidegger, *Being and Time* (trans. Macquarrie and Robinson), 139.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁶⁴ Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, 129.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 154.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, comments on the Heideggerian concept of *Gestell* (framing).

Text within square brackets gives the impression that you do not have any control. On the other hand, the ~~text under partial erasure~~ is controllable, being both close and at a distance; both healed and broken; both “ready-at-hand” and “presence-at-hand”; both “so secret and so close.”⁶⁹

If you are an editor of the Greek New Testament, you might ask if you should apply the “under erasure” technique to all text currently between square brackets. The answer is affirmative. The same goes also to *double* square brackets. They “enclose passages which are regarded as later additions to the text, but which are of evident antiquity and importance.”⁷⁰ The UBS⁵ places Mark 16:9–20, for instance, within double square brackets.⁷¹ Compared with single square brackets, double ones are a further step away from the world where being belongs; the double square brackets create a second wall of defense against a possible intrusion from the reader. Consequently, editors should avoid the double square brackets as well.

What hinders editors from placing texts, such as Mark 16:9–20, under partial erasure?

Besides the single and double square brackets, the UBS⁵ Greek New Testament uses many other symbols to indicate textual problems. All these symbols serve to distance the reader from the text. Editors should therefore shun them.

I do *not* propose placing all “dubious” text under “partial erasure.” The technique is not a panacea solution for all textual problems.⁷² Editors should use common sense in dealing with text-critical issues. However, editors do need to shake up readers. Heidegger emphasized the need to wake up “being” from her slumber.⁷³

Editors should throw away their bracketing habits. This habit is dangerous because it makes readers passive; it gives the impression that the text is far away,

⁶⁹ Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, act 1, scene 1.

⁷⁰ UBS⁵, 58*. For the bracketing habit in New Testament editions, see Jennifer Knust and Tommy Wasserman, *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 23–31.

⁷¹ See the recent study of Nikolai Kiel, “Die frühen Kirchenväter als Zeugen des kurzen und langen Markusschlusses,” in *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (ed. Strutwolf et al.), 105–32.

⁷² There are manuscripts of Mark 1:1 that read υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, meaning, “son of (the) God.” In Greek, if you want to refer to a specific god, you *can* add an article but that is voluntary. Holger Strutwolf, Gregory Paulson, and Klaus Wachtel, “Text-Critical Commentary,” in *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (ed. Strutwolf et al.), 8–34, at 9, add a definite article to the *ECM* edition of Mark’s Gospel. If future editors want to include the extra article, they could print Mark 1:1 as follows: Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ (τοῦ) θεοῦ, “A beginning of the good news about/of Jesus Christ the son of (the) God.” How should we view the extra article? It could symbolize the unhealthy grip on “presence” about which Derrida warned. In other words, textual critics who want to keep υἱοῦ θεοῦ, “God’s son,” might believe that they eliminate the problem with the absence of this phrase in many manuscripts by adding an extra article, as if that article (for us, a fortified “presence”) would strengthen the argument that υἱοῦ θεοῦ is “original.” So, what is the solution? In this case, we can place the article τοῦ, “(of) the,” within parentheses, because it lessens the weight on “presence.” Editors could draw inspiration from the ambiguous reading of Sinaiticus in Mark 1:1, where “presence” and “absence” are somewhat in balance.

⁷³ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 276.

that it is beyond their control. Instead, the partial erasure technique helps expel indifference and, we hope, elicits a visceral reaction in the reader.

Spivak explains her role: “My peculiar theme is always *persistent* critique.”⁷⁴ She focuses “on different elements in the incessant process of re-coding that shifts the balance of the *pharmakon*’s effect from medicine to poison.”⁷⁵ Tat-Siong Benny Liew affirms the need for a “persistent critique,” which must be “a negation of positives, a constant challenge to closure.”⁷⁶ An example of a closure can be the square brackets that close the text, making a barrier around it.

How can Bible readers become persistent critics when the editors have already made all the decisions for them and closed the text to intervention?

■ Conclusion

Derrida has argued that Western thinking prefers presence to absence. Instead, it is healthier to balance these two concepts—presence and absence. Thus, scholars working with new editions of the New Testament should remember that their preference for presence or absence of the phrase $\Upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, “Son of God,” will create an unfair imbalance. The evidence from paleography shows that the words $\Upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ are both absent and present. A way to communicate this ambiguity for readers is to place them under partial erasure: $\Upsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$.

Present editions place this phrase within square brackets. The rationale for this procedure is highly dubious, since it creates distance to texts placed within them. As Heidegger has argued, “remoteness, like distance,” is not characteristic of the human being. On the other hand, a ~~text under partial erasure~~ is both close and at a distance. Texts under partial erasure are both dead and living, while texts in square brackets are only far away—dim. Such texts encourage passivity in the reader.

What is the final message to editors? Heidegger compared truth to the process of creating a clearing, in German, *Lichtung*. Cutting down trees is destructive but subsequently allows the appearance of light. However, leaving a forest intact also has an obvious advantage.

As for the Bible text, if you, as an editor, place it within square brackets, readers will see the text dimly, like you would see a forest from afar. If you strike ~~through~~ it, you are in the process of cutting it down. Here, readers step in by becoming fellow lumberjacks. They can help you cut down the trees (the text). Alternatively, readers can decide to leave the forest intact. Thus, may editors turn into lumberjacks but let the readers decide if they want to become fellow lumberjacks or tree saviors.

⁷⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Reading *The Satanic Verses*,” *Third Text* 4.11 (1990) 41–60, at 55.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Tat-Siong Benny Liew, *Politics of Parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 167.