

A SPECIFIC PROBLEM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXT AND CANON: THE WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY (JOHN 7:53-8:11)

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Few passages in the NT bring to the interpreter the bewildering variety of problems found in the pericope of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). Problems of text, canon and interpretation are at once evident. Commentators may choose to ignore the section completely by assuming that it is inauthentic,¹ discuss it in an appendix,² or integrate it into the body of John's text.³ A recent monograph⁴ and a host of specialized studies⁵ have all sought some explanation for the story's peculiar textual tradition and significance.

Is this "lost pearl of ancient tradition" original to the text of the fourth gospel? How do we explain the unusual history of its text? Is it an authentic story from the gospel tradition itself? The aim of this paper will be a discussion of these problems as they relate to the problem of canon. We shall hope to employ this pericope as an example of the difficulty of canon studies in the NT.

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¹Bultmann, Dodd, Strathmann.

²Bauer, Barrett, Bernard, Plummer, Hoskyns, Morris, Sanders and Mastin, Marsh, Hunter, R. H. Lightfoot, Lagrange, Holtzmann.

³Brown, Schnackenburg, Lindars, MacGregor, Strachan, Westcott.

⁴U. Becker, *Jesus und die Ehebrecherin. Untersuchungen zur Text- und Überlieferungsgeschichte von Joh 7,53-8,11* (BZNW 28; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963). Schnackenburg refers to a recent updating of Becker (which was unavailable to this author) by K. Aland, *Studien zur Überlieferung des Neuen Testaments und seines Textes* (1967) 39-46.

⁵In addition to the commentaries (esp. Bernard, 2. 715-721; Hoskyns, 673-685; Lindars, 305-312; and Barrett, 2d ed., 589-592), see B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (London: Macmillan, 1881), appendix: 82-88; H. J. Cadbury, "A Possible Case of Lukan Authorship (Jn 7:43-8:11)," *HTR* 10 (1917) 237-244; K. Bornhäuser, "Jesus und die Ehebrecherin," *NKZ* 37 (1926) 353 ff.; O. Voss, "The Sins of Each of Them," *ATR* 15 (1933) 321 ff.; E. F. F. Bishop, "The Pericope Adulterae: A Suggestion," *JTS* 35 (1934) 40 ff.; J. Jeremias, "Zur Geschichtlichkeit der Verhörs Jesu vor dem Hohen Rat," *ZNW* 43 (1950-51) esp. 148-150; T. W. Manson, "The 'Pericope de Adultera' (Joh 7,53-8,11)," *ZNW* 44 (1952-53) 255-256; F. A. Schilling, "The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress," *ATR* 37 (1955) 91-106; J. Blinzer, "Die Strafe für Ehebruch in Bibel und Halacha zur Auslegung von Joh 8,5," *NTS* 4 (1957-58) 32-47; F. Salvoni, "Textual Authority for John 7:53-8:11," *Restoration Quarterly* 4 (1960) 11-15; V. Taylor, *The Text of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1961) 98; J. D. M. Derrett, "The Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery," *NTS* 10 (1963-64) 1-26 (also in *Law in the New Testament* [London: Darton, 1970] 156-188); H. Riesenfeld, "The Pericope 'de adultera' in the Early Christian Tradition," in *The Gospel Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970) 95-110; B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: UBS, 1971) 219-222; H. F. von Campenhausen, "Zur Perikope von der Ehebrecherin (Joh 7:53-8:11)," *ZNW* 68 (1977) 164-175. For a full critical apparatus see K. Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (Stuttgart: UBS, 1975) 208.

I. THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE TEXT

1. *External evidence.* The chief problem usually identified in John 7:53–8:11 is its weak external attestation. The only major Greek MS antedating the eighth century and providing us with the story in its traditional location is Codex Bezae (D [105], fifth or sixth century), a MS noted for its interpolations.⁶ In addition various OL MSS (b, c, e, ff^c, j) join Bezae in this, which suggests to us that the story was especially known in the western Church. While many ninth-century Byzantine MSS include the text,⁷ a good number of scribes expressed their reservations about it by writing in an obelus (so S) or an asterisk (E, M, Λ) in the margin. MSS L (viii) and Δ (viii) do not give the text but leave a space after 7:52, showing that the scribes were familiar with the section but that it was not in their exemplars.⁸

Significantly, in all of the major Greek MSS we find the account absent: p⁶⁶, p⁷⁵, Aleph, B, L, N, T, W, X, Δ, Θ, Ψ (and a host of minuscules). Codices A and C are missing these pages in John, but a measurement of this absent section discloses that there would not be sufficient room. Further, early eastern versions (Syriac, Coptic, and the Coptic dialects Sahidic and Bohairic) are silent, as well as some of the OL texts (it^a). This gives us a general picture that the text was introduced very late and was known for the most part in the west. No significant Greek texts of eastern provenance support the reading.

When we turn to patristic evidence the results are the same. In the east, no Greek father mentions the passage for one thousand years. Euthymius Zigabenus (twelfth century) mentions it first, but even he deems it an insertion.⁹ Westcott and Hort point out that the earliest lectionary readings also omit it. The Constantinopolitan Lection, for example, lists John 7:37–52 for Pentecost but moves on immediately to 8:12 ff.¹⁰

Other early fathers are equally silent. In his commentary on John, Origen (d. 253) moves directly from 7:52 to 8:12. The metrical paraphrase of Nonnus (c. 400) also skips from 7:52 to 8:12, and Cosmas of Jerusalem (c. 700) in his list of unique Johannine narratives omits our story altogether. More surprising are the works of Tertullian (*De Pudicitia*, c. 220) and Cyprian of Carthage (55th epistle,

⁶"No known manuscript has so many and such remarkable variations from what is usually taken to be the normal NT text. Codex Bezae's special characteristic is the free addition (and occasional omission) of words, sentences, and even incidents." B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (London: Oxford, 1968) 50.

⁷E (vi), F (ix), G (ix), H (vi), K (ix), M (ix), S (x), U (ix), Γ (x), Λ (ix), Π (ix). Cf. Becker, *Jesus* 8-25. In addition, many late minuscules provide the passage—e.g. 28, 700, 892—but often with an asterisk and/or obelus. In MS 565 the scribe has not given the text but indicates his knowledge of it with a space. (Letters in parentheses indicate MS date—e.g., "vi" means "sixth century.")

⁸In Δ the space is an afterthought. It is preceded by *palin . . . legōn* (8:12), which was written and then deleted. Cf. Westcott and Hort, *New Testament* 83; Becker, *Jesus* 10.

⁹Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* 563. Euthymius remarks that "accurate copies" either omit it or provide an obelus.

¹⁰Westcott and Hort, *New Testament* 84.

c. 250), where judicial directions are given in cases of adultery but no reference is made to Jesus and the adulterous woman.

But there is firm patristic support in the later west. The text was known to Ambrose (d. 397), Pacian of Barcelona (c. 350), Ambrosiaster (d. c. 350) and Augustine (d. 430). Jerome (d. 419) makes an intriguing remark, commenting that he found the story in the gospel of John in many Greek and Latin codices (*contra Pelag.* 2.17). When Jerome began his work on the Vulgate in the late fourth century the section was included into the mainstream of the Latin text tradition and the western Church canon.

Against this largely negative evidence two more parts of the puzzle must be added. While the earliest MSS, lectionaries and fathers are silent, two sources may point to the narrative's antiquity. First, in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (2.24)¹¹ bishops are exhorted to receive mercifully those who repent. Then an illustrative story is mentioned describing a woman deposited before Jesus for judgment: "But he, the searcher of hearts, asked her and said to her, 'Have the elders condemned you, my daughter?' She said to him, 'No, Lord.' And he said to her, 'Go your way. Neither do I condemn you.'"¹² This is a clear hint of our pericope and not without some importance in our study.

Second, Eusebius (d. 340) speaks of a story related to him about Papias (c. 60-130). Papias knew a story of a woman who was maliciously accused before Jesus concerning her sins, and this was to have been recorded in the "Gospel according to the Hebrews."¹³ While the description is incomplete, the story is generally taken to be that of our Johannine pericope.

To sum up, our text is absent from all early Greek MSS of note. The whole range of Greek patristic literature virtually ignored it, while it seems to have had an early currency in the Latin west. The only certain eastern witness of antiquity comes from the Syrian *Didascalia*, but still this is far from solid grounds for inclusion into John. In short, our most reliable and important external witnesses (p⁶⁶ p⁷⁵ Aleph B) are completely silent about the text until the seventh or eighth century.

2. *Internal evidence.* Difficulties also accompany the inherent authenticity of the text in John. Internal factors give substantial proof that the section is foreign to the fourth gospel. This is initially indicated by MSS that locate the passage in a diversity of places. It appears after John 7:36 (MS 225), 7:44 (some Georgian MSS), or at the end of the gospel (fam. 1: MSS 1, 118, 131, 209). One significant group of MSS, the Farrer Group (fam. 13: 13, 69, 124, 230 *et al.*), even places it after Luke 21:38, while a corrector of MS 1333 locates it after Luke 24:53. This

¹¹The *Didascalia Apostolorum* was a third-century Church order written originally in Greek but now surviving complete only in Syriac. The Greek text is generally reconstructed from the fourth-century Apostolic Constitutions that embodied it. For the Greek text and a German translation of the Syriac see Becker, *Jesus* 126.

¹²Lindars, *The Gospel of John* 306-307, gives the English text of the section.

¹³Lightfoot printed John 7:53-8:12 as a surviving fragment of Papias. See his *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan, 1907) 530.

shows that an important text-tradition in the later Church viewed the story as free from its traditional mooring and possibly even Lucan.¹⁴

But even as we glance at its setting in John, we see how awkwardly it fits. At the end of John 7 Jesus is at the Feast of Tabernacles, but chap. 8 begins as if Jesus were approaching his final Passover when he retires to the Mount of Olives and returns each day (Mark 11:11, 19; 13:3). John 8:9 leaves Jesus alone, but 8:12-13 presumes a crowd once more (cf. 7:40). Further, if the section were omitted the discourse of Tabernacles would flow smoothly from 7:1 to 8:59. This awkwardness of placement must surely explain the massive number of textual variants in these twelve verses (line per line, one of the highest in the NT). The text must have floated unattached to any canonical authority and in this process suffered many changes.

Why the passage landed in its traditional place may be easier to explain. The theme of Jesus' discourse in 8:14 ff. turns on judgment: Jesus judges no one (8:15). Our text may have been attracted to this setting as a brilliant example of just this absence of judgment in Jesus: The woman's judges have disappeared and Jesus does not judge her either (8:11).¹⁵ Derrett, on the other hand, adds another possibility. John 7:51 refers to evidence, and the balance of chap. 8 is preoccupied with the admissibility and compelling quality of Jesus' claims. This would lead to a typically Jewish debate about the sufficiency of his evidence. Our pericope, to be sure, fits just this context.¹⁶

A final factor makes the unjohannine nature of the incident certain. Numerous terms, while common in the synoptics, appear nowhere else in John.¹⁷ Unconscious syntax stands out as well. Sentences are connected with *de* in the pericope (vv 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11) and this is unparalleled in John (for every five uses of *de* in Matthew, John has two).

Together these items result in a consensus of opinion among scholars. The internal evidence makes it clear that the passage is foreign to its present setting and interrupts it. Most likely, it is not even Johannine.

3. *Antiquity and authenticity.* It seems easy enough to compile a host of reasons why this passage is foreign to John. But does this mean that it should be

¹⁴Lindars, *Gospel* 307, notes that the ancient Byzantine Lectionary has Luke 21:12-19 and the pericope of the adulteress on successive days. On Lucan authorship, see n. 17 below as well as the articles of Cadbury and Bishop. Cadbury concludes, "It can safely be affirmed that the passage in its oldest form contained as much distinctively Lukan language as the average passage of equal brevity and simplicity in Luke's acknowledged works." Cited in Becker, *Jesus* 69 n. 130.

¹⁵Westcott accepted the theory of Lightfoot that Papias knew the story and used it as an illustration of John 8:15—from where it became a part of the text or the margin. See Westcott, *Commentary on John* (1881) 142.

¹⁶Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* 156 n. 3.

¹⁷R. Morgenthaler makes a careful study of the section [*Statistik des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zürich: Gotthelf, 1958) 60-62] and finds that 14 of the section's 82 vocabulary words are unjohannine—a figure he compares to the inauthentic longer ending of Mark. Becker, *Jesus* 43-74, draws out the Lucan parallels (summarized on pp. 68-69). Becker also weighs seriously the use of *hōs* as a temporal conjunction and the repeated use of *de* while John would use *oun*.

expunged from the NT and relegated to the graveyard of quietly dismissed passages like Mark 16:9-20? This is where our mystery takes a fascinating turn. It is most likely that the text is authentic in the sense that it originated from the oral tradition that supplied our gospels with their raw materials. Bultmann, for example, classifies this narrative among the synoptic conflict stories: Jesus is asked to make a judgment on the law and demonstrates great skill as he holds his ground before his opponents while not repudiating the law.¹⁸ His final words to the scribes and the Pharisees, "Let him who is without sin throw the first stone," serves as a pronouncement bringing the episode to a crisp ending. This may even be compared to the conflict story about tribute money (Matt 22:15-22).

Becker offers three reasons for the originality of the passage:¹⁹ First, a debate ensued in Jesus' day about how the death penalty should be carried out (stoning or strangling). Jesus refuses to be embroiled and (typically) expresses criticism of the sinners who want to judge sin.²⁰ Second, Jesus decides unequivocally against the Torah and its representatives. This is common in the synoptics. And finally, Jesus forgives the woman unconditionally on nothing but his own authority.

If our assessment thus far is correct, we have here a unit of oral tradition that circulated in the early Church but was never included in any of the gospels. It illustrated effectively a repeated gospel theme: Jesus and the law. And it first entered an early uncial MS in Codex Bezae. Remarkably, this interest may have been at work elsewhere in this codex. At Luke 6:5 Bezae inserts a well-known *agraphon* (unwritten or lost saying) of Jesus after a pronouncement story centered on Jesus breaking the Sabbath. Again it is an illustrative story of a man who demonstrates the full effect this teaching about the law may have.²¹ Does this parallel the insertion we have examined in John? Is it a stray authentic story culled from a reservoir of sayings to serve the needs of discipline in the early Church? If so, then we have a substantial parallel from the same codex explaining the phenomenon of our story.

4. *Summary.* We have been able to see the contours of this mystery. We have in our passage a story that is quite foreign to its Johannine context. While it was known in the Latin west in the fourth century, it did not appear in a Greek codex until three or four centuries later. Possibly it hibernated in Syria (cf. the *Didascalia*), but now we must ask, "Why?"

¹⁸R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968) 63. Bultmann judges the later dialogue with the woman to be an expansion.

¹⁹Becker, *Jesus*, summarized by Schnackenburg in his commentary (2. 170).

²⁰See further D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Althone, 1956) 304-305, who shows how the Pharisees believed that stoning would violate the doctrine of the resurrection. Cf. Blinzer, "Strafe" 38 ff.

²¹Codex D inserts after Luke 6:4: "On the same day he [Jesus] saw a man performing a work on the Sabbath. Then he said to him, 'Man! If you know what you do, you are blessed. But if you do not know, you are cursed and a transgressor of the law.'" See J. Jeremias, *The Unknown Sayings of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1964) 61-65; V. Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1935) 84.

II. THE HISTORY OF THE TEXT

What happened to this text for almost 350 years? Why was it ignored by the Church and only squeezed in artificially at the last moment? Certainly its imagery and powerful message could have moved audiences then as it moves them today. This is the puzzle before us: How can we explain the temporary disappearance of our story?

1. *The ethos of early Christianity.* From the earliest days of the Church, Christian communities took seriously their ethical perfection. This is even clear in the NT where lists of sins are found rendering violators disqualified from fellowship.²² This ethical righteousness is especially acute for Paul, who exhorts believers to dismiss their old natures, be renewed in the Spirit, and walk in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:17-32).

While the relation between sin and sinlessness is complicated, early Christianity still faced the reality of post-baptismal sin. 1 John 1:8 thus says, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (but cf. 2:1). Even within this allowance given by John, there is still a high call for superior righteousness (2:3-6; cf. 3:9, "No one born of God commits sin"). Within the early communities this led to the legislation of signs of repentance even in the NT (Jas 5:16; cf. 2 Cor 12:21).

Ethical perfection and penance clearly hallmarks the patristic era. In the *Didache* sinners are to be excluded from fellowship until a proscribed repentance/penance is complete: "And let no one speak to any that has gone wrong towards his neighbor, neither let him hear a word from you until he repent" (*Did.* 15:3). In First Clement repentance must be accompanied by tears and moving prayers.²³ This underscored the severe jeopardy one might encounter if he violated the laws of the Church.

2. *Sexual sin and discipline.* Both the NT and the patristic writers demonstrate that some sins called for special warnings and discipline. In the Pauline lists, adultery and immorality appear repeatedly (1 Cor 6:9 ff.; Gal 5:19 ff.; Eph 5:3 ff.; Col 3:5).²⁴ No doubt the frightful licentiousness that pervaded the Roman Empire in this period explains Christianity's harsh attitude toward sexual sin. Paul finds in this an evidence of the general godlessness of his age (Rom 1:26). For him immorality should not even be named among the saints (Eph 5:3), and in one case he calls for a man's excommunication because of it (1 Cor 5:5).

²²Typical for Paul is 1 Cor 6:9: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" This is followed by a catalogue of vices. Cf. 1 Cor 15:50; Gal 5:19 ff.; 6:7-8; Eph 5:3-4; Col 3:5; 1 Tim 1:8-11. See B. Gerhardsson, *The Ethos of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 63-92.

²³1 *Clem.* 48:1: "Let us fall down before the Lord and entreat him with tears, that he may show himself merciful and be reconciled to us." Cf. 51:1; 56:1 (prayer for others to repent); 57:1: "Submit yourself to the elders and receive chastisement unto repentance, bending the knees of your heart."

²⁴The attention to this is surprising: *moichalis* (Rom 7:3); *moicheuō* (Rom 2:22; 13:9); *moichos* (1 Cor 6:9; cf. Jas 2:11; 4:4; 2 Pet 2:14; Heb 13:4); *porneia* (1 Cor 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:13; Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3); *porneuō* (1 Cor 6:18; 10:8); *pornē* (1 Cor 6:15, 16); *pornos* (1 Cor 5:9, 10, 11; 6:9; Eph 5:5; 1 Tim 1:10); cf. Heb 11:31; 12:16; 13:4.

The apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla provides a remarkable story centered on Paul's ethical teaching and its effect on a young woman named Thecla. Paul's teaching begins with a set of beatitudes chiefly devoted to sexual self-control—which leads the zealous Thecla to abandon her fiancé, risk death, follow Paul, and end up as a monk in a mountain cave in Seleucia. Clearly Thecla is offered to us as a model of Christian chastity and holiness.²⁵

The patristic fathers were unequivocal in their judgment on adultery. In the Shepherd of Hermas the husband who unwittingly remains with an adulterous wife is free of guilt. But if he knows of her sin—and she is impenitent—he shares her sin (Mandate 4:1 ff.). The early Montanist movement reflected this stress on ethical perfection. In this sect the dreams, prophecies, revelations and visions were not doctrinal but ethical. Montanus claimed that the moral laxity of the Church (meaning casual enforcement of law pertaining to sex) explained the absence of the gifts of the Spirit in the Church. The moral rigorism of Tertullian reflects Montanus' influence throughout.²⁶ In Clement of Alexandria (c. 200) and Cyprian (c. 250) we have indications of the length and severity of the penances required for readmission to the Church.²⁷ It may even have been the case that adultery (along with homicide and apostasy) was treated in some areas as irremissible. This is at least true for Tertullian (c. 200), Origen (c. 250) and Cyprian: Sexual sins were especially heinous and without forgiveness.²⁸

It is against this background that we find our pericope struggling for recognition. Jesus' refusal to condemn the woman would have stood at odds with the mainstream of Church teaching. How could even a lengthy penance be reconciled to such an immediate act of forgiveness? While the early doctrines of penance were being formulated in the early second century, our text was left out. It was not removed from the NT, but rather never gained access once it emerged. On the other hand, one wonders if its original home was in Luke (so Cadbury and Becker, cf. f¹³)—but no evidence of an elision from the third gospel here will ever be forthcoming. Some, however, might point to another story in Luke about an adulteress in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). Why was this story preserved in the tradition? Here we have elements that could be readily adapted to teaching on penance (the alabaster flask, tears, kneeling). Our story in John makes no such allowances.

²⁵For the text see E. Henneke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 2. 353-387. For a discussion see E. M. Howe, "Interpretations of Paul in the Acts of Paul and Thecla," *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce* (ed. D. H. Hagner and M. J. Harris; London: Paternoster, 1980) 33-49.

²⁶J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University Press, 1971), 1. 101-103.

²⁷See the discussion of H. Riesenfeld, "Pericope" 104-106.

²⁸J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (5th ed.; London: A&C Black, 1977) 217-219. Cyprian remarks that, while in his day sexual sins were remissible at Carthage, it had earlier been disputed. In Spain, lifelong excommunication was common.

3. *The fourth century.* It was not until the fourth century that the Church was firmly established in society through the efforts of Constantine. Its care of souls and disciplines had stabilized: Bishops were admonished to demonstrate mercy. Thus Basil of Caesarea could set the penance for an adultress at 15 years. John Chrysostom could preach about the conversion of a notoriously sinful actress in Antioch who turned from her adulterous ways to holiness through penance. She traveled to Jerusalem in men's clothes and lived as a recluse in a grotto on the Mount of Olives for the remainder of her life. In this era our text emerges as a model for the penitent adultress and is embraced by the leading fathers. On Saint Pelagia's Day (October 8) our story became the gospel text in most fifth-century lectionaries honoring a seeming variety of women martyrs who either preserved their virginity through martyrdom or repented and led a life of chastity.

III. THE PROBLEM OF TEXT AND CANON

For Roman Catholics, the canonical status of our text is quickly decided. Once Jerome admitted the passage into the Vulgate in 382 it received universal recognition. And when in 1546 the Council of Trent pronounced the Vulgate to contain the only authentic Latin text, the matter was more or less settled.²⁹ This poses an important question for Protestants: Is the tradition of the Church in any fashion authoritative in doctrinal matters? We accept the results of the earlier councils (Nicea, etc.) but imply that God had quite abandoned later medieval Catholicism.

For most of us, then, the matter is more difficult. It would be helpful to know what Athanasius was thinking in his Easter Letter of 367. What copy of John was he reading? We know at least that when North Africa discussed the canon at the Third Council of Carthage (397) Augustine appreciated the text and suspected that anxious husbands had earlier removed it (so that it could not be abused by their wives!).

If our notion of canonical authority rests in the books of the Bible themselves—that is, in those literary units called gospels and epistles penned by inspired authoritative authors (so Irenaeus)—then our passage cannot be a part of the canon. The textual evidence confirms what a literary study only suggests: The passage is an insertion.

On the other hand, scholarly criticism points to the antiquity and authenticity of the text. And a cursory study of patristic history gives a good explanation for our text's disappearance. Furthermore, the story edifies the Church and has often become a vehicle through which the Holy Spirit works. Are these the grounds of the Protestant canon? If so, the passage should remain firmly anchored in the NT. But if the more objective criterion of textual witnesses is upheld, it should slip into the margin as an edifying *agraphon* of Jesus.

²⁹Erasmus doubted the originality of the passage but included it anyway in his celebrated text of 1516 due to its Latin popularity. From there it was carried into the seventeenth-century *Textus Receptus*.