

# Reply To Mr. Samuel Green's "The Seven Readings Of The Qur'ân"

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*Assalamu-alaikum wa rahamatullahi wa barakatuhu:*

## Introduction

It appears that the Christian missionaries like to bring the already refuted topics time and again as if we Muslims have a very short memory. The Christian missionary Jochen Katz's recent use of the services of Samuel Green's article [The Seven Readings of the Qur'an](#) is one such example.

The statement of the Samuel Green indicated with '>' is the older one and the one which is new does not contain '>' after he updated the article.

On 29 Oct 1998, Jochen Katz wrote:

> > The last week Dr. Saifullah was ranting incessantly about  
> > "What Bible is the right/inspired one?"

So, it is Katz turn to start a more incessant ranting about "Versions of the Qur'ân". Even this ranting does not appear to solve [the mess in which the New Testament is in](#). As we said, if you can not fix your problems, start flaunting it. Or even better go for a wag the dog scenario to shift the focus from the issues of your own text to someone else's.

It turns out that this Christian missionary was boasting about the 'versions' of the Qur'ân sometime ago, using the (below quoted) reference of Adrian Brockett concerning the Hafs and Warsh transmission of the Qur'ân. Unfortunately for him, it appears that he did not learn his lessons last time. The same issue was [refuted](#) long time ago.

Subsequently more material was added to this by us. The contents of the above document are divided as follows:

- [Revelation Of The Qur'ân In Seven Ahruf](#)
- [Difference Between Ahruf and Qirâ'ât](#)
- [Conditions For The Validity Of Different Qirâ'ât](#)
- [The Chain Of Narration Of Different Qirâ'ât](#)
- [Hafs & Warsh Qirâ'ât: Are They Different Versions Of The Qur'ân?](#)

- [Recitation of the Qur'ân in Hafs, Warsh & Other Qirâ'ât](#)
- [Printed Edition Of The Qur'ân In Various Qirâ'ât](#)

So, we have essentially dealt with **all** the important issues concerning the Qirâ'ât, its *isnad* going back to the Companions who then took it from the Prophet<sup>(ﷺ)</sup> himself. We have also dealt with the criteria of accepting the Qirâ'ât by the Islamic scholars as well as some very basic examples. *Inshallah*, some more examples would be added in due course.

It turns out that Katz is merely trying to rehash his already refuted argument by giving it a different colour, i.e., using Samuel Green's work who nevertheless quotes the same references which Katz had quoted. The principal reference used is Adrian Brockett's *The Value of Hafs and Warsh Transmissions For The Textual History of The Qur'ân*, published in *Approaches of The History of Interpretation of The Qur'ân*, 1988, Edited by Andrew Rippin, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

### **Qirâ'ât Or 'Variant' Readings?**

We would first like to define what is the actual meaning of Qirâ'a which is frequently translated as 'variant reading'. The [Hans-Wehr Dictionary Of Modern Written Arabic](#) defines **Qirâ'a** as:

**Qirâ'a** pl. -â<sup>t</sup> recitation, recital (especially of the Koran); reading (also, e.g., of measuring instruments); manner of recitation, punctuation and vocalization of the Koranic text.<sup>[1]</sup>

It is quite clear that the Qirâ'a is not a 'variant' reading or text. The Muslims in history have never considered different Qirâ'ât as different 'versions' of the Qur'ân. Furthermore, neither it is defined as 'variant' text as some Orientalists and Christian missionaries have done so. Keeping this in mind let us now go further with what is written in the article.

- > No other book in the world can match the Qur'an ... The
- > astonishing fact about this book of ALLAH is that it has remained
- > unchanged, even to a dot, over the last fourteen hundred years.
- > ... No variation of text can be found in it. You can check this
- > for yourself by listening to the recitation of Muslims from
- > different parts of the world. (Basic Principles of Islam, Abu
- > Dhabi, UAE: The Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan Charitable &
- > Humanitarian Foundation, 1996, p.4)

Well, firstly what is meant by the phrase 'even to a dot'? The earlier Qur'âns were written without any dotting. Gradual efforts were made in adding the dots and other markings to facilitate correct reading from the first century of Hijra. If the expression 'even to a dot' is literally taken then one can say that the Arabic script in Africa differs from that in the Middle East in dotting. If

the expression is to mean the purity of the Qur'ân as a book, then it is correct. It has been said long time ago that:

The recension of 'Uthman has been handed down to us unaltered. so carefully, indeed, has it been preserved, that there are no variations of importance, - we might almost say no variations at all, - amongst the innumerable copies of the Koran scattered throughout the vast bounds of empire of Islam. Contending and embittered factions, taking their rise in the murder of 'Uthman himself within a quarter of a century from the death of Muhammad have ever since rent the Muslim world. Yet but **ONE KORAN** has always been current amongst them.... There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text.<sup>[2]</sup>

And guess who wrote it? The famous Christian missionary from University of Oxford, Sir Willium Muir in the book [The Life of Mohammad](#).

**"There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text" [refutes](#) the status of the Bible as a pure book!**

## **Are Qirâ'ât Due To The Lack Of Vowel & Diacritical Points In The Early Qur'âns?**

Samuel Green says:

- > ... owing to the fact that the kufic script in which the Koran was
- > originally written contained no indication of vowels or
- > diacritical points, variant readings are recognized by Muslims as
- > of equal authority. (N.J. Dawood, The Koran, Middlesex, England:
- > Penguin Books, 1983, p.10, bold added)

He adds further that:

**VOWEL DIFFERENCES** - In the Arabic script of the modern Qur'an the vowels are indicated by small symbols above or below the basic printed letters. Again these were not included in Uthman's edition of the Qur'an.

It is to be made clear that the Arabic script before and during the time of ʿUthmân was written without vowel and diacritical marks. To say that the vowels and diacritical marks were not included in the ʿUthmânic Qur'ân actually shows the ignorance of the Christian missionary Samuel Green concerning the evolution of Arabic script. The need for vowel and diacritical marks arose only **after** the time of ʿUthmân to prevent the wrong recitation of the Qur'ân by ignorant Arabs and non-Arabs.

Arabic orthography at the time of ʿUthmân was not yet developed in the way we have known for centuries, particularly in two important areas. There was

no distinction between letters of the alphabet of similar shape and there were no vowel marks. This may now give the impression that such a system must have given rise to great confusion in reading. This was not actually the case because the morphological patterns of words in Arabic enable readers to read even very unfamiliar material without the short vowels being marked. More important, however, as far as the Qur'ân was concerned, was the fact that learning and reading relied above all on oral transmission. In the Islamic tradition, writing remained a secondary aid; nevertheless, to ensure correct reading of the written texts of the Qur'ân, particularly for those coming after the first generation of Muslims, steps were taken gradually to improve the orthography. This started with the two above mentioned areas by introducing dots to indicate different vowels and nûnâtion and these were put in different coloured ink from that of the text. There were also dots to distinguish between consonants of similar shape. This work was carried out chiefly by three men: Abû-l-Aswad al-Du'alî (d. 69 / 688), Naṣr Ibn ʿAṣim (d. 89 / 707) and Yaḥya Ibn Yaʿmur (d.129 /746). Understandably there was some opposition at first to adding anything to the way the Qur'ân was written. Ibn ʿUmar (73/692) disliked the dotting; others welcomed it, clearly because it was, in fact, doing no more than ensuring proper reading of the Qur'ân as received from the Prophet<sup>ﷺ</sup>, and this view was accepted by the majority of Muslims throughout the different parts of the Muslims world, from the time of the tâbiʿûn. The people of Madinah were reported to have used red dots for vowels - tanwîn, tashdîd, takhfîf, sukûn, waṣl and madd and yellow dots for the hamzas in particular. Naqt (placing dots on words in the mushaf), became a separate subject of study with many books written on it. For details please see the article [\*\*Qur'ânic Orthography: The Written Representation Of The Recited Text Of The Qur'ân.\*\*](#)

Further, the conclusions of the missionary is that there was an

... ambiguity as to which vowels should be used. This ambiguity has led to differences between the vowels in the different transmissions.

The aim of the Christian missionary here is to show that prior to the introduction of the vowel and diacritical marks, that is, throughout the period of the Prophet<sup>ﷺ</sup> and the Companions, as well as the generation immediately following the Qur'ân was in undetermined, fluid state, a kind of limbo, and that it assumed concrete form only with the addition of diacritical marks and vocalization signs, which of course was long after the age of Revelation. In other words, for almost a century before Hijra the Qur'ân was in the fluid state and as soon as the vowels and diacritical marks were introduced, the Qur'ân started to crystallise in the form that we have now after going through many 'versions.' For such a situation there is no historical evidence. Neither, there is historical evidence that Muslims differed over the Qur'ân unlike the [\*\*Christians who differ over the extent of the canon even to this day.\*\*](#) It must be emphasized that for Muslims down through the centuries the consensus (**ijma'**) of the community has always been a decisive proof in all matters; and

as the community is agreed that man has not contributed a whit to the Qur'ân, the matter may be considered settled. This is precisely the point which has been noted in the quote of N J Dawood used by the missionary. It is quite clear that all the Qirâ'ât are given equal authority. The above quote taken from N J Dawood's translation of the Qur'ân is actually in direct contradiction of what Samuel Green had intended to show in his article, i.e., that the Muslims follow different 'sets of the Qur'ân' as if they are not all authoritative. One wonders why did he choose to quote the material which does not even serve his purpose!

Further evidence against the view in question may be drawn from the Qirâ'ât themselves. It is certainly germane to the issue at hand to note that in many instances where the unmarked ʿUthmânic canon is capable of being read in diverse ways, we find the Qurra (i.e., the Readers) agreeing on a single reading. Such agreement can most reasonably be accounted for on the basis of a firmly established oral tradition of recitation. Take for example the verbal prefixes **ta** and **ya** (or **tu** or **yu**), which in the unmarked text would be represented by the same symbol. Taking the form **turja·ûna** and **yurja·ûna** as a case point we note that all the Qirâ'ât use the first of these forms in 2:245; 10:56; 28:88; 36:22, 83; 39:44; 41:21 and 43:85; while all use the second in 6:36 and 19:40.

There are also many words in the Qur'ân which could be given different form than the one given in the readings, but in fact are not. For example, the word **mukht** in 17:106 is so read by all the readers, although there is no reason why it could not be read as **mikth** or **makth**. The verb **khatifa-yakhtafu**, which appears in 2:20; 22:31 and 37:10 could be correctly read as **khatafa-yakhtifu**, but all the Qirâ'ât keep the former form.<sup>[3]</sup> A few other examples can be shown by referring to the books on Qirâ'ât.

So, if the Qurra invented the Qirâ'ât just because the earliest manuscripts were undotted, why then we see that they had converged to one single reading many times? The Christian missionary's last resort will be to invoke two conspiracies on a massive scale from Spain to India; first, to achieve unanimity on one reading from vastly divergent readings and second, to fabricate the **ijma'** on the Qur'ân itself after that!

The emphasis is that Muslims just do not dump any readings as they all [go back to the famous Companions](#) of the Prophet<sup>(p)</sup> such as Ubayy, Ibn Mas'ud, Zaid Ibn Thabit and ʿUthmân<sup>(R)</sup>.

## **Maṣāḥif Surprises?**

According to Samuel Green:

- > Fact 2. If we now turn to an Islamic encyclopedia written by a practising
- > Muslim we can learn more about these variations:

- >
- > The predominant reading today, spread by Egyptian Koran readers,
- > is that of `Asim in the transmission (riwayah) of Hafṣ
- > (d.190/805). In Morocco, however, the reading is that of Nafi` in
- > the riwayah of Warsh (d.197/812) and Maghrebin Korans are written
- > accordingly. (Cyril Glass=C8, The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam, San
- > Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989, p.324, bold added)

Are we greatly surprised? A few examples of the printed edition of maṣāḥif of the Qur'ān in various Qirā'āt are given below:

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*Inshallah*, we will be putting some more maṣāḥif which deal with **as-Sūsi** and **Hamza**. Currently, we are trying to procure them.

[The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam](#) under the heading "Koran, Chanting" states:

**Only the canonical Arabic text, as collected and compiled under the Caliph 'Uthman with the consensus of the companions (Ijma as-Sahaabah) may be recited, in one of the seven acceptable versions of the punctuation and vocalization (al-Qira't as-Sab). These, though fixed only in the 4th century of the Hijrah, are taken to correspond to the seven Ahruf ("letters", "versions" or possibly "dialects") of the Koran which according to a hadith, the Prophet referred to as all having divine authority. In practice, only two of the seven readings have become customary: in Egypt, for example, the reading of Hafṣ according to the scholar Abu Bakr Asim; and in the rest of Africa that of Nafi.<sup>[4]</sup>**

So, we have the authority directly from the Prophet<sup>ﷺ</sup> that the Qur'ān can be recited in any of the Qirā'a. Indeed the presence of maṣāḥif of the Qur'ān in different Qirā'āt as well as the professional Muslim reciters (and common folk too!) reciting the Qur'ān in various Qirā'āt indicates their importance. There are people even in this day and age who recite in more than one Qirā'a and some of them upto ten.

- > Conclusion 2. According to this Islamic encyclopedia there are seven basic
- > texts, each of which has two transmitted versions. Thus there are a total of
- > fourteen transmitted versions of the Qur'an, and different parts of the
- > world use and print different transmissions.

Samuel Green thinks he is pretty clever. All of a sudden "Seven Basic Readings" now become "Seven Basic Texts". Further he confuses himself between 'transmission' and 'text' or probably he is deliberately cheating as Katz did sometime ago. The 'transmission' was conveniently changed into 'text' to show that Muslims have different Qur'āns.

## The Abuse of Brockett's Material On Qirâ'ât

The favourite article of the Christian missionaries when dealing with the Qirâ'ât is that of Adrian Brockett and is called **The Value of Hafs And Warsh Transmissions For The Textual History Of The Qur'ân**, published in **Approaches of The History of Interpretation of The Qur'ân**. This book has been used by the missionaries time and again to show different 'texts' of the Qur'ân to the Muslims. Adrian Brockett in **no way supports** the claim of the Christian missionaries yet they still like to quote him for some strange reason.

Samuel Green quotes Adrian Brockett's article:

- > The simple fact is that none of the differences, whether vocal or
- > graphic, between the transmission of Hafs and the transmission of
- > Warsh has any great effect on the meaning. Many are differences
- > which do not change the meaning at all, and the rest are
- > differences with an effect on meaning in the immediate context of
- > the text itself, but without any significant wider influence on
- > Muslim thought. One difference (Q. 2/184) has an effect on the
- > meaning that might conceivably be argued to have wider
- > ramifications. (Adrian Brockett, 'The Value of the Hafs and Warsh
- > transmissions for the Textual History of the Qur'an', Approaches
- > to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an, ed. Andrew
- > Rippin; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p.37, bold added)

Is that all that is said in that article or is it that Samuel Green's hand suddenly turned heavy so that he can't lift the pages of that article? His aim is to show that there is a 'corruption' in the Qur'ânic text. For that reason he has shown some [images](#) of the difference in the graphic form. And now here comes Mr. Green's audacity after he admits his poor knowledge!

The above examples show that there are differences between the basic letters of these two Qur'ans. These differences in the basic printed letters show that even the basic text of Qur'an that Uthman standardised has not been perfectly preserved for the different transmissions have small variation even in the basic text.

If one goes back to page 34 of the article, one can be read precisely the opposite:

**All this point to a remarkably unitary transmission in both its graphic form and its oral form.**<sup>[5]</sup>

This, not surprisingly, was conveniently omitted by Samuel Green.

Conclusion 3. There are real differences between the Qur'an according to the Hafs' transmission and the Qur'an according to the Warsh' transmission. There are differences in the basic letters, diacritical dots, and vowels. These differences are small, but they do have some effect on the meaning.

Further, in the section **The Extent To Which The Differences Affect The Sense**, Adrian Brockett states:

The simple fact is that none of the differences, whether vocal or graphic, between the transmission of Hafs and the transmission of Warsh has any great effect on the meaning. Many are the differences which do not change the meaning at all, and the rest are differences with an effect on the meaning in the immediate context of the text itself, but without any significant wider influence on Muslim thought.<sup>[6]</sup>

And interestingly enough the author went on to say:

**The limits of their variation clearly establish that they are a single text.**<sup>[7]</sup>

That is something which Samuel Green would not let us know unless, of course, we point out.

We read further:

Thus, if the Qur'an had been transmitted only orally for the first century, sizeable variations between texts such as are seen in the hadith and pre-Islamic poetry would be found, and if it had been transmitted only in writing, sizeable variations such as in the different transmissions of the original document of the constitution of Medina would be found. **But neither is the case with the Qur'an. There must have been a parallel written transmission limiting variation in the oral transmission to the graphic form, side by side with a parallel oral transmission preserving the written transmission from corruption.**<sup>[8]</sup>

This leads the author to state:

**The transmission of the Qur'an after the death of Muhammad was essentially static, rather than organic. There was a single text, and nothing significant, not even allegedly abrogated material, could be taken out nor could anything be put in.**<sup>[9]</sup>

This leads anyone to the conclusion that there is no tampering of the Qur'ân by humans. In the end:

**There can be no denying that some of the formal characteristics of the Qur'an point to the oral side and others to the written side, but neither was as a whole, primary. There is therefore no need to make different**

categories for vocal and graphic differences between transmissions. Muslims have not. The letter is not a dead skeleton to be refleshed, but is a manifestation of the spirit alive from beginning. The transmission of the Qur'an has always been oral, just as it has been written.<sup>[10]</sup>

The rest of the article which Mr. Green surprisingly omitted says that the Qur'ân is one and same text after the death of Muḥammad<sup>(p)</sup>. So, this essentially refutes the whole 'corruption' argument of Mr. Green.

### **No Books On Mutawâtir Readings Available?**

- > MAIN CONCLUSION. There are seven authorised readings of the Qur'an with
- > fourteen transmissions. These have small but real differences between them
- > and different parts of the world use and print different transmissions.

Mr. Green's admission is pretty much honest that there are seven authorised readings of the Qur'ân. Not many missionaries are brave enough to admit it. We have to admit that his confession has taken a rather torturous route.

Further we read:

- > it is not superior to other Holy Books. We request that Muslim leaders make
- > all fourteen transmissions available.

As far as the fourteen Qirâ'ât not being available, as suggested above, shows utter ignorance of the author. If he had bother to check some of the Arabic literature on the issue of the Qirâ'ât, we would not be hearing this nonsense.

We have already shown above some of the printed edition of the maṣâḥif of the Qur'ân in different Qirâ'ât.

Below are the examples of the books which deals with ten [mutawâtir](#) readings.

This book [al-Nashr fi-l-Qirâ'ât al-Ashr](#) by Ibn al-Jazrî who died in 833 AH. This is a standard book used by students of the science of Qirâ'ât. This is the edition from Dâr al-Kutub 'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon. Not surprisingly, this book is also used by Adrian Brockett, in his article [The Value of Hafs And Warsh Transmissions For The Textual History Of The Qur'ân](#) (e.g., on p. 35, see footnote 14). One really wonders how Samuel Green could simply 'miss' it.

The below one a very recent book.

This book is a third print published in 1414AH/1994 CE. This book claims as a

...unique and first work of this kind in the field of Science of the ten **Mutawâtir** readings from the ways of ash-Shatbiyyah and ad-Durrah **in the margin of the Holy Qur'ân** is now achieved, edited, and printed.<sup>[11]</sup>

The 10 readers/transmitters of the **Mutawâtir** readings are [listed here](#). What is more interesting is that there are reciters even to this day who have memorised the Qur'ân in all the 10 **Mutawâtir** readings!

In the end, I address Shaykh Kurayyim Râjih the Head of the Readers in the Syrian lands with my gratitude for carrying out that work and supervising its course and supplementing it with valuable guidelines that hardly come from anyone except an expert like him.

May God reward his kind student and reader Muhammad Fahd Khârûf who masters the ten Mutawâtir readings from the ways of ash-Shatbiyyah and ad-Durrah and at-Tibah for participating to this noble task making it, with the divine help, a beneficial work for the holders of God's Almighty Book and his readers.<sup>[12]</sup>

In any case, one more issue concerning the 'lack of availability' of the Qirâ'ât is down.

We also present the manuscript evidence which marks different Qirâ'ât which is dated probably 3rd century AH. This is sufficient evidence to show that Qirâ'ât were given utmost importance even in the past.

Probably 3rd cent. A.H. no diacritical marks but advanced system of vocalization. **Moreover, this Mushaf marks the different canonical readings of the text (Qirâ'ât)**. The process of restoring a masterpiece like this provides the unique opportunity of display the beauty and philological precision of one Mushaf by showing more than just two pages.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Conclusions

It is clear from our discussion about that the 'variant' readings of the Qur'ân which are actually called Qirâ'ât do not give the impression as 'variant' or something different than the Qur'ân. Muslims in the past as well as in the present have treated them with utmost respect as they were all recited by the Prophet<sup>(P)</sup> and his Companions<sup>(R)</sup>. They Qirâ'ât are just not considered as something different from the Qur'ân.

One of the important conclusions of the Christian missionary is also that:

- > the evidence is considered. Since the Qur'an has variation within its text
- > it is not superior to other Holy Books.

It will be good to study the variant readings (they are truly variant!) in the New Testament, their origins and impact in the next section. It will be clear who exactly should be worried about the variant readings and why should the Bible be considered as the last candidate to be the 'inerrant' word of God.

## **Variant Readings Of The New Testament: Their Origin & Significance**

Since this topic of variant readings is brought forth and Mr. Green's conclusion that since the Qur'ân has 'variation' within its text and hence it is not superior to other Holy Books, which presumably is the Bible. [The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible](#), Under **Text**, NT informs us that:

**THE PROBLEM.** The NT is now known, whole or in part, in nearly five thousand Greek MSS alone. Every one of these handwritten copies differ from every other one. In addition to these Greek MSS, the NT has been preserved in more than ten thousand MSS of the early versions and in thousands of quotations of the Church Fathers. These MSS of the versions and quotations of the Church Fathers differ from one another just as widely as do the Greek MSS. Only a fraction of this great mass of material has been fully collated and carefully studied. Until this task is completed, the uncertainty regarding the text of the NT will remain.

It has been estimated that these MSS and quotations differ among themselves between 150,000 and 250,000 times. The actual figure is, perhaps, much higher. A study of 150 Greek MSS of the Gospel of Luke has revealed more than 30,000 different readings. It is true, of course, that the addition of the readings from another 150 MSS of Luke would not add another 30,000 readings to the list. But each MS studied does add substantially to the list of variants. **It is safe to say that there is not one sentence in the NT in which the MS tradition is wholly uniform.**<sup>[14]</sup>

After reading this and applying the conclusion of Mr. Green it would be quite clear that the Bible is not worth even considering a scripture as it is clear that it is riddled with variant readings and **not a single sentence in the NT is uniform**. Also we do not know which one is the authorized reading. Some New Testament scholars put the total number of readings or differences in the Bible at least 3,00,000 for 20th century. Hard to believe, is it not?

Within this context, what NT textual materials have come down to us? As early as 1707, John Mill claimed that the (relatively few) NT mss examined by him contained about 30,000 variant readings (Vincent 1903: 6); 200 years

later B. B. Warfield (1907: 13) indicated that some 180,000 or 200,000 various readings had been 'counted' in the then existing NT mss, and in more recent times M. M. Parvis reported that examination of only 150 Greek mss of Luke revealed about 30,000 readings there alone, and he suggested that the actual quantity of variant readings among all NT manuscripts was likely to be much higher than the 150,000 to 250,000 that had been estimated in modern times (Parvis IDB 4: 594-95). **Perhaps 300,000 differing readings is a fair figure for the 20th century (K. W. Clark 1962: 669). The textual critic must devise methods by which to sort through these myriad readings and to analyze the many mss that contain them.**<sup>[15]</sup>

Further [The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible](#) informs us:

**Many thousands of the variants which are found in the MSS of the NT were put there deliberately. They are not merely the result of error or of careless handling of the text. Many were created for theological or dogmatic reasons (even though they may not affect the substance of Christian dogma). It is because the books of the NT are religious books, sacred books, canonical books, that they were changed to conform to what the copyist believed to be the true reading. His interest was not in the "original reading but in the "true reading." This is precisely the attitude toward the NT which prevailed from the earliest times to the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the invention of printing. The thousands of Greek MSS, MSS of the versions, and quotations of the Church Fathers provide the source for our knowledge of the earliest or original text of the NT and of the history of the transmission of that text before the invention of printing.**<sup>[16]</sup>

So, the tampering of the Bible was done deliberately by the scribes themselves. It is pretty clear that Muslims have a point when the tampering of the Bible is mentioned.

Let us examine the reasons for the corruption of the New Testament text. Bruce Metzger categorizes them as Unintentional Errors and Intentional Changes.<sup>[17]</sup>

#### 1. Unintentional errors

- a. Errors arising from faulty eyesight
- b. Errors arising from faulty hearing
- c. Errors of the mind
- d. Errors of judgement

## 2. Intentional changes

- a. Changes involving spelling and grammar
- b. Harmonistic corruptions
- c. Addition of natural complements and similar adjuncts
- d. Clearing up historical and geographical difficulties
- e. Conflation of readings
- f. Alterations made because of doctrinal considerations
- g. Addition of miscellaneous details

So, if the Bible is really the word of God then why did the scribes make intentional changes? Further do we have the original copies of the Bible to verify what the original reading is from the corrupted one?

**Since - like virtually all ancient literature - no autographs are extant for the NT, its most likely original text must be reconstructed from these imperfect, often widely divergent, later copies.<sup>[18]</sup>**

The interesting bit is not the absence of original manuscripts but the presence of widely divergent and imperfect readings. This is further exacerbated by the problem that we do not have the original document to verify the original reading; therefore, we can only make a guess of what the original reading could be. This means, we cannot be sure whether Jesus<sup>(p)</sup> or Apostles said such a such thing in the Bible. Hence it becomes a problem in evaluation of the Bible as a scripture. Indeed the Acts of Apostles has earned the notoriety for the variant readings.

**In fact no book of the NT gives evidence of so much verbal variation as does the Acts of Apostles. Besides the text represented in the oldest uncial Greek MSS, begin with the Codex Vaticanus, often called the Neutral Text and dating back to the second century AD, there is evidence either of a consistent alternative text equally old, or of a series of early miscellaneous variants, to which the name Western text is traditionally applied. The ancient authorities of the Western Text of Acts include only one Greek (or rather bilingual Greek and Latin) uncial MS, Codex Bezae of the fifth or sixth century. But the variants often have striking content and strong early support from Latin writers and Latin NT MSS. It now appears that while both the Neutral and Western texts were in circulation, the former is the more likely of the two to represent the original.<sup>[19]</sup>**

Apart from the notorious variation we also have the problem of which text is the original text. Since we do not know which one is original, the guess work

in pressed into service. The above problem is one such example of guess work. And how come guess work leads to truth?

## **Critical Editions & The Methodologies**

The argument would now be closed by considering the issue of critical text which represents the variant readings of the New Testament from the manuscripts as well as the quotes of the Church Fathers. The widely used critical edition of New Testament is by Nestle and Aland called [Novum Testamentum Graece Cum Apparatu Critico Curavit](#). This is a working text or committee text which was agreed upon by a committee.

**This text was agreed by a committee. When they disagreed on the best reading to print, they voted. Evidently, they agreed either by a majority or unanimously that their text was the best available. But it does not follow that they believed their text to be 'original'. On the whole, the textual critics have always been reluctant to claim so much. Other users of the Greek New Testament accord them too much honour in treating the text as definitive.**<sup>[20]</sup>

So, as far as the [Novum Testamentum Graece](#) (edited by Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland) is concerned, one can say that the committee itself does not make a claim that it restored the 'original' text of the Bible! So, where is the original Bible then?

In fact, the Kurt and Barbara Aland, the editors of the recent edition of Nestle-Aland's [Novum Testamentum Graece Cum Apparatu Critico Curavit](#) **compare** the total number of variant free verses in Nestle-Aland edition with the other critical editions such as that of Tischendorf, Westcott-Hort, von Soden, Vogels, Merk, and Bover. **It is seen that nearly two-thirds of New Testament text in the seven editions of the Greek New Testament reviewed by Aland and Aland is in agreement with no differences other than in orthographic details.**<sup>[21]</sup>

Since Nestle-Aland's critical edition is very complicated to be used in the translation of the New Testament in other languages, there was a growing need for new edition of Greek New Testament which would serve this purpose. This need was materialised in the form of [The Greek New Testament](#), GNT<sup>2</sup>, (of course, based on Nestle-Aland's critical text) which has the following features:

1. **A critical apparatus restricted for the most part to variant readings significant for translators or necessary for establishing the text;**
2. **An indication of the relative degree of certainty for each variant adopted as text;**

3. A full citation of the representative evidence for each variant selected;
4. A second apparatus giving meaningful differences of punctuation. Much new evidence from Greek manuscripts and early versions has been cited. A supplementary volume, providing a summary of the Committee's reasons for adopting one or another variant reading, will also be published.<sup>[22]</sup>

This edition is [similar to the Nestle-Aland's critical edition](#) except that it has more details on the textual variants and their relative degree of certainty.

By means of the letters A, B, C, and D, enclosed within "braces" { } at the beginning of each set of textual variants the Committee has sought to indicate the relative degree of certainty, arrived at the basis of internal considerations as well as of external evidence, for the reading adopted as the text. The letter A signifies that the text is virtually certain, while B indicates that there is some degree of doubt. The letter C means that there is a considerable degree of doubt whether the text or the apparatus contains the superior reading, while D shows that there is a very high degree of doubt concerning the reading selected for the text.<sup>[23]</sup>

The relative degree of certainty of the textual variants is again based on Committee discussions which involved either a unanimous agreement or voting when they disagreed on a particular reading. Also note that the textual variants are cited with their relative degree of certainty. **Certainly, if the New Testament's original text/literal text is available then why their relative degree of certainty?** This clearly shows that the New Testament that we have in our hands today is the work of human beings rather than the word of God.

## Conclusions

So, by applying the standards of the Christian missionary Samuel Green, we should reject the New Testament as a 'superior Holy Book' because there is not a single sentence in it that is uniform. Oh! we also forgot to mention that according to the great Church tradition, we have the Bibles of the [Protestant Church](#), [Roman Catholic Church](#), [Anglican Church](#), [Greek Orthodox Church](#), [Coptic Church](#), [Ethiopic Church](#) and [Syriac Church](#). They contain different number of books and God knows best how many variants one is expected to see in them. So, our question now is which variants and the books in the Bible are inspired by God? And what the evidence for it?

And lastly we will let a non-Muslim speak on the issue of the Islamic and the Christian scholarship dealing with the 'variants':

From an early date Muslim scholars recognized the danger of false testimony and hence false doctrine, and developed an elaborate science for criticizing tradition. "Traditional science", as it was called, differed in many respects from modern historical source criticism, and modern scholarship has always disagreed with evaluations of traditional scientists about the authenticity and accuracy of ancient narratives. **But their careful scrutiny of the chains of transmission and their meticulous collection and preservation of variants in the transmitted narratives give to medieval Arabic historiography a professionalism and sophistication without precedent in antiquity and without parallel in the contemporary medieval West. By comparison, the historiography of Latin Christendom seems poor and meagre, and even the more advanced and complex historiography of Greek Christendom still falls short of the historical literature of Islam in volume, variety and analytical depth.**<sup>[24]</sup>

And Allah knows best!

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