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# STUDIES IN THE BIBLE AND ANTIQUITY

2014  
Volume 6  
Neal A. Maxwell Institute  
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# Biblical Allusions and Themes in the Early Renaissance: Joseph Sarfati's Use of Biblical Hebrew as an Encoded Language

*Shon D. Hopkin*

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, numerous scholars have successfully overturned the “lachrymose” view of Jewish history in the Diaspora, demonstrating that the Jews were not constantly embattled victims of heavy persecution.<sup>1</sup> Rather, throughout the long history of the Jewish Diaspora and over the wide range of lands and cultures where the Jews lived, they were typically highly acculturated, with opportunities to participate in most of the economic and cultural opportunities available to others.

As positive as the Jewish situation often was, however, the Jews were still a clearly identifiable ethnic and religious minority, at times subject to violent religious persecution. Robert Chazan has recently reviewed the situation of the Jews in medieval Europe (1000–1500). He strongly defends the overall reassessment of the Jewish situation as more positive than was often believed. In order to provide an appropriately nuanced view, however, he also describes episodes of intense persecution, violence, and challenges to Jewish identity. As he summarizes the situation,

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1. This work began with an essay by Salo Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?,” *Menorah Journal* 14 (1928): 515–26. See also David Engel, “Crisis and Lachrymosity: On Salo Baron, Neobaronianism, and the Study of Modern European Jewish History,” *Jewish History* 20 (2006): 243–64, and Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

“Jewish status in medieval Western Christendom was complex, to put it mildly. Key to this status was the traditional stance of Christianity toward Judaism and Jews, as interpreted by the Church. This stance contained multiple elements, often existing in considerable tension with one another.”<sup>2</sup>

As will be seen, the life and work of Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati (pronounced Tsarfati, d. 1527) effectively demonstrates this nuance, including evidence of both strong social acculturation and high attainments in Rome, along with the need for caution while living as a minority in the midst of the dominant Christian society. This paper will focus on Sarfati’s coded warnings to his own people not to place their trust too heavily in the benefits of full absorption into the Christian religion and society. I will show that Sarfati used both the Hebrew language and biblical symbolism to encode those messages for his people. In particular, I will propose that the biblical theme likening the allure of foreign gods to adulterous love was used by Sarfati to present a message of warning for his own people.

### The use of Hebrew and biblical imagery in the early Renaissance

In the Diaspora the Hebrew language and the Jewish sacred texts often emerged as a focal point for the Jewish identity across the Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> Hebrew was a language that united the Jewish people and gave them a unique identity.<sup>4</sup> During medieval times, Hebrew was something less than a true spoken language, but something more than simply a

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2. Robert Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133.

3. One good source for the viewpoints found in this and the next paragraph is Jacob Neusner, *In the Aftermath of Catastrophe: Founding Judaism 70–640* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009).

4. John Myhill, *Language in Jewish Society: Towards a New Understanding* (London: Cromwell, 2004), 66–68.

liturgical language.<sup>5</sup> The consistent return to and use of Hebrew meant that Hebrew and Aramaic words and phrases were shared easily and entered fluidly into common use. This vernacular, along with the high educational achievements of many communities in the area's language and culture, helped to create mixed languages such as Ladino, Yiddish, and many others.<sup>6</sup> The ability to communicate in a language unknown to the dominant culture made both written and spoken Hebrew useful not only in the synagogue, but also in nonreligious dialogue where one could encode one's message from outside ears. Although Hebrew knowledge among non-Jews was on the rise during Sarfati's day as the Renaissance encouraged a return to the study of the Bible in its original languages, most learned Christians were not highly skilled in their knowledge of Hebrew.<sup>7</sup> According to John Myhill, "Hebrew has also served as the Pan-Jewish language, the medium for use between Jews who do not share another common language and also for Jews when they do share a common language but want, for one reason or another, to use a maximally distinct Jewish language (e.g., if they want to be certain that non-Jews will not understand what is being said)."<sup>8</sup>

All these factors help explain why medieval and early Renaissance Jews regularly wrote both sacred and secular literature in Hebrew<sup>9</sup> and

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5. Myhill, *Language in Jewish Society*, 60–63. See also Naftali Loewenthal, "Hebrew and the Habad Communication Ethos," in *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile*, ed. L. Glinert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 168.

6. See Ephraim Kanarfogel, *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 9–10, 15–18.

7. Sarfati served for a time as the Hebrew teacher for the linguist Teseo Ambrogio, who subsequently became a professor of Oriental languages at the University of Bologna. See Julia Haig Gaisser, trans., *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men [De infelicitate literatorum]: A Renaissance Humanist and His World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 111. In 1539, twelve years after Sarfati's death, Ambrogio published one of the first studies in comparative Semitic linguistics—*An Introduction to Chaldean, Syriac, and Armenian, and Ten Other Languages*—a work well ahead of its time in concept if not in content. See Teseo Ambrogio, *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam, Syriacam, atque Armenicam, et decem alias linguas* (Pavia: Simoneta, 1539).

8. Myhill, *Language in Jewish Society*, 66.

9. For the particular emphasis on the use of "pure" Hebrew in both sacred and secular literature among Jews in medieval Spain (of which Sarfati was a descendant),



then expected those writings to be read and understood by their Jewish communities. Writers such as Sarfati wrote extensively in Hebrew and, as will be seen, translated other works from languages such as Spanish and Italian into Hebrew to give the Jewish Mediterranean community greater access to them. Jewish authors also wrote in the indigenous European languages of their home countries to reach a much broader audience than just their Jewish community, particularly in Spain and Italy where Jewish participation in the cultural movements of the day was the greatest.<sup>10</sup> Jewish works written in Hebrew, however, could be read across other linguistic boundaries. After the development of the printing press, works in Hebrew gained even wider dissemination, and some of Sarfati's own poetry is found among them. Books printed in Hebrew were rapidly purchased not only in Italy but across the Mediterranean and particularly in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

A writer's use of the Hebrew language was not the only sign that the Jewish community could trust that writer. Medieval and Renaissance writers made extensive use of biblical allusions, particularly in their poetry. The development of these biblical literary allusions began in medieval Spain because of the influence of Arabic literature and the Arabic view of the holiness of the Qur<sup>3</sup>anic language.<sup>12</sup> Many of the allusions would have been very clear to a biblically literate Jewish audience, who would have recognized specific biblical phrases in their original language. Biblical allusions opened up a world of additional meanings. A seemingly innocuous phrase could allow the careful reader to enter

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see Raphael Patai, *Tents of Jacob: The Diaspora Yesterday and Today* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 113–22.

10. Dan Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xi–xii.

11. For discussions on the popularity and content of early Hebrew printing, see Marvin J. Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); D. W. Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy* (New York: Greenstone, 1909); J. Bloch, "Venetian Printers of Hebrew Books," in *Hebrew Printing and Bibliography*, ed. C. Berloin (New York: KTAV, 1976), 67–70.

12. Peter Cole, *Selected Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11–13.

into an entire realm of secondary meanings. Leo Strauss has written persuasively about the existence of encoded themes in Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed* and in other Jewish works.<sup>13</sup> Although the use of Hebrew already served to encode the message, biblical allusions did not function solely for that purpose. Rather, the biblical allusions also served to identify the talent of the author. Jewish authors used allusions skillfully and frequently to provide their works with color, depth, and nuance for their Hebrew-reading audience. Sometimes the allusion was included simply for the sake of showing the poet's proficiency and did not provide additional meaning.<sup>14</sup>

### Overview of Sarfati's life

Sarfati's short life spanned the final years of the fifteenth century through the first quarter of the sixteenth century. With his early death in 1527, Sarfati's life is situated at the borders between the medieval and Renaissance periods as typically defined today.<sup>15</sup> Sarfati was one of the best-known Italian-Jewish figures of his time. He interacted closely with the elite of both the Christian and Jewish worlds, acting as personal physician (archiatere) to no less than three popes and serving as rabbi and Jewish representative in Rome. As Pope Clement VII's archiatere,<sup>16</sup> Sarfati hosted him in his home for an entire summer while Clement sought solitude from his noisy palace as he recovered from an illness; Sarfati also provided lodging for the famous Jewish messianic claimant David Hareuveni for several months.<sup>17</sup> In the early years of his adult-

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13. See, for example, Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1952), 38–42.

14. Cole, *Selected Poems*, 13.

15. The information in this paragraph is taken mostly from Mosheh David Casuto, *Hayehudim befrentze biteqfat hareneysans* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ben-Tsevi, 1967), 340–50.

16. Hermann Vogelstein and Paul Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom* (Berlin: Meyer and Müller, 1895), 2:83–86.

17. Upon entering Rome in 1524, Hareuveni mentions only three individuals, including Sarfati: "I went to the Pope's palace, riding on horseback, and my servant before

hood, Sarfati lived with his family in Florence, where he formed valuable friendships with Moses ben Joab da Rieti (who composed a beautiful elegy to Sarfati at the time of his death) and Solomon Poggibonsi, both well-known Jewish composers and poets of their time. During the same period Sarfati also established important relationships with the powerful Medici family, patrons of the arts, one of whom would later become the aforementioned Pope Clement VII.

Pierio Valeriano, an early Renaissance humanist and contemporary of Sarfati, gave him high praise for his cultural attainments:

[Joseph] had devoted the greatest effort to philosophy and mathematics, had progressed wonderfully in Hebrew literature under his father's teaching, and, not content with this learning of his ancestors, had aspired also to Greek. Moreover, he had learned Latin well enough to challenge all his contemporaries in Rome in the elegant simplicity of his verse and prose and to compete on an equal footing with all the young men. In addition to these attainments, he was endowed with the most upright character, so that you would find nothing wanting in the young man apart from the knowledge of the Christian religion.<sup>18</sup>

Sarfati's life, however, was not entirely full of fame and ease. His history includes a number of page-turning tragedies, including the theft of his inheritance in 1524 by one of his father's household servants. Sarfati pursued the servant across the Mediterranean to Constantinople, where the thief handed him over to the Turkish authorities as a papal spy. He was attacked and wounded by the police and barely managed to escape.<sup>19</sup>

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me, and the Jews also came with me, and I entered the presence of Cardinal Egidio; and all the Cardinals and Princes came to see me, and with the said Cardinal was R. Joseph Ashkenazi, who was his teacher, and the physician Rabbi, Joseph Sarphati." See David Hareuveni, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts*, trans. Elkan Nathan Adler (New York: Dover, 1987), 270–71.

18. See Gaisser, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men*, 111.

19. For this and the following account from Sarfati's life, see Gaisser, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men*, 111–14.

Three years later, another calamity, occurring at the height of his success and reputation in Rome, would lead to Sarfati's early demise. Pope Clement VII had long been engaged in efforts to weaken the power of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. After conquering the French army in Italy that had been supported by the pope, Charles did not have enough money to pay his troops. Seeing the riches of the city of Rome, the imperial army—supposedly acting mutinously against the orders of its leaders—proceeded to sack Rome on May 5, 1527.<sup>20</sup> During the conflict many Christian leaders were able to escape death only by fleeing to the Vatican. The pope did so by using a fortified passage connecting the Vatican with the Castel Sant'Angelo.

Sarfati was an unfortunate victim of these violent political and religious games, upheavals, and intrigues. His house was pillaged from top to bottom, and all his goods and wealth were completely lost. Sarfati was captured and physically tortured by members of the mutinous army. Understanding his value to the Jewish and Christian communities, four mercenaries held him captive for four days, demanding a great quantity of money as ransom. Sarfati finally escaped in the middle of the night after his guards had fallen into a drunken sleep. However, he was only able to flee barefoot, wearing nothing more than his linen undershirt. Having suffered severe deprivations on his trip to a small village outside of Rome, where he sought refuge, he contracted an infection that the village inhabitants identified as the plague, likely a form of typhus. He was driven from the village and banished to the countryside. There he died from starvation and thirst, sheltered only by a simple hut and, according to Valeriano's treatise on the ill fortunes of learned men, with no one to even bring him a drink of water. Sarfati had no known descendants. Although it would be unfair to criticize the Christian leaders for not including Sarfati in their retreat, his death, alone and outside the city walls, serves as a strong reminder that, as a Jew, Sarfati was an outsider, no matter how valuable his services to the pope and to others had been.

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20. See "The Sack of Rome (1527)," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert C. Broderick (Nashville: Nelson, 1976), 416.

## Sarfati's poetry

As mentioned above, Italian Jewish poetry was heavily influenced by the forms and features of medieval Jewish poetry from Spain, partially because of the preeminence of Spanish Jewish thought and literary forms, but also because of the persecution and extensive scattering of Sephardic Jews. In turn, the direct influence of Arabic poetry on Hebrew in the Iberian Peninsula meant the introduction of new rhyming and metrical schemes into Hebrew literature.<sup>21</sup> Some Italian authors, such as Sarfati, were of Sephardic descent, creating a natural flow of theme and form from the Iberian peninsula to Italy. At the end of the fifteenth century, however, during Sarfati's lifetime, the influence of Spanish literature began to give way to that of the Renaissance.<sup>22</sup> Sarfati's poetry shows a combination of both Spanish and Renaissance motifs and form.

Sarfati's Hebrew *diwan* (the Arabic word for a collection of poetry) contains two hundred and thirty poems.<sup>23</sup> The *diwan* is at least partly the work of one or more copyists, and it is impossible to know which, if any, of the scripts are those of Sarfati's own hand. Much of the handwriting in the *diwan* is very difficult to read, causing an additional layer of difficulty in the translation process. The only works of Sarfati that were definitely disseminated widely during his lifetime, as evidenced by extant printed books, are the introductory poems that he penned in praise of the second edition of the *Biblia Rabbinica* in his day.<sup>24</sup>

Sarfati's *diwan* reflects the nuanced situation of the Jews in Europe, demonstrating a broad expression of the literary features of his time as well as the more traditional themes emanating from Spain. He appears to have been the first poet to introduce the Italian Renaissance form of *ottava rima* into Hebrew.<sup>25</sup> Sarfati explored a wide variety of topics in

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21. Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages*, xiii–xiv.

22. Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages*, xiii–xiv.

23. Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati, "Diwan of Joseph Sarfati" (ms. Mich. 353, Neubauer 554/3, Bodleian Library, Oxford). This is the sole surviving copy of the three poems I analyze in this paper.

24. These are poems 68–70 in Sarfati's *diwan*.

25. Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages*, 62.

both his Latin and Hebrew poetry, including subjects such as wine, card playing, love, and religious devotion. Approximately twenty poems in Sarfati's diwan are overtly religious. Three of them were written in praise of God, three on Maimonides's thirteen principles, seven for specific Jewish holidays, one as a lament over Jerusalem, and another seven on mixed themes, such as his praise for the *Biblia Rabbinica*.<sup>26</sup> Poem 114 of Sarfati's diwan, along with many others, serves as an excellent example of a purely "secular" offering.<sup>27</sup> The tone of his poetry ranges from reverent, to playful, to admonishing, to sarcastic and biting.

His Hebrew poems demonstrate that his powerful relationship with high levels of Christian society at times caused friction, jealousy, and misunderstandings in his own community. At least thirty poems in his diwan—including poems 11, 13, 14, 21, 26, 30, 32, 36, 39, and others—contain Sarfati's heated responses to his critics and opponents.<sup>28</sup> In poem 168 he describes one who has sought to destroy him by catching him in a trap. Sarfati, however, proclaims that this man will fall in the net himself. Sarfati indicates that there are those who have longed for his death. His introduction to his translation of *Celestina*, which will be analyzed below, also contains a warning to those who criticize him. Through all these poems, Sarfati emerges not as a dry, historical figure, but instead as a man who lived a tumultuous life and freely expressed strong opinions and feelings in his poetry.

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26. See Dan Almagor, "Yosef ben Shmuel Sarfati: bibliografyah mu'eret," in *Italia: Studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli ebrei d'Italia*, ed. Robert Bonfil (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1996), 111.

27. For examples of Sarfati's "secular" poetry, see Jefim Schirmann, *Mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1934), 226, 228.

28. This theme was not uncommon in medieval times; see Arie Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition* (New York: Brill, 1994), 305–7. A survey of poetry provided in an anthology by Peter Cole shows numerous translated titles indicating censure or discord: "A Curse" (p. 32), "You Mock Me Now" (p. 68), "You've Stolen My Words" (p. 85), and others. Peter Cole, *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain 950–1492* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Biblical prophets regularly compared the worship of foreign gods to the sin of adultery since both involved the breaking of sacred covenants and trust.<sup>29</sup> God was frequently compared to the husband (Ezekiel 16:8; Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 3:14; 31:32), Israel to a bride, and foreign gods to the wife's adulterous lovers (Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1; Ezekiel 16:28, 41; Hosea 2:18). The biblical book of Hosea overtly makes the connection between the image of the adulterous wife and apostasy to a foreign religion.<sup>30</sup> Foreign religions promised happiness but in the end would leave Israel contaminated and destitute. Only Israel's relationship with the true God would provide her with lasting covenant blessings of protection and true prosperity. At times Israel was compared to an unfaithful husband who had chased after "strange women" (1 Kings 11:11; Proverbs 22:14; 23:33). Many of these texts served a dual purpose, both providing important wisdom regarding the dangers of sexual immorality and at the same time warning against abandoning the true God of the Israelites. As one biblical scholar clarified, "[The "foreign" or "strange" woman] symbolized either a Canaanite goddess and her cult, non-Israelite religion in general, or 'the seductions of this world' (so Saadiah Gaon); . . . Prov 6:20–35 [is, as indicated by Michael Fishbane,] an 'inner biblical midrash on the Decalogue' in which the foreign woman symbolizes 'the seduction of false wisdom.'"<sup>31</sup>

The Renaissance fascination with romantic love<sup>32</sup> made romantic imagery particularly useful as an allegory for religious devotion. The

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29. See Michael Fishbane, "Accusations of Adultery: A Study of Law and Scribal Practices in Num. 5:11–31," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 45 (1974): 44. See also Elaine Adler Goodfriend, "Adultery," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:85–86. For biblical references, see Exodus 34:15; Numbers 25:1–3; Hosea 4:14.

30. See Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, trans. Gary Stansell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974), xxvi. See also C. L. Seow, "Hosea, Book of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:195–96.

31. Goodfriend, "Adultery," 1:85.

32. See Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, rev. and aug. ed., trans. Montgomery Belgion (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Books, 1966), 3–7. See also Nandini Das, *Renaissance Romance: The Transformation of English Prose Fiction* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 1–4; Dale V. Kent, *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge:

Song of Songs (i.e., Song of Solomon), however, was of much earlier, more widespread, and more long-lasting importance in the allegorical interpretation of love to teach an abstract, religious message. Jewish texts, beginning with the Targum and the later Midrash Rabbah and continuing pervasively up to the nineteenth century, have read the sexual images of Song of Songs as referring to religious devotion.<sup>33</sup> As will be seen, Sarfati took advantage of this prevalent interpretation to point to underlying biblical themes that encouraged wisdom and religious fidelity among the Jews.

The frequent use of romantic love in the ways described above should not be taken as universal. In the poetry of medieval Spain and elsewhere, both romantic and sensual love were topics that held their own fascination and were not always indicative of some type of moral discourse.<sup>34</sup> In the same way, as mentioned earlier, even biblical allusion did not always indicate didactic intent, but was at times simply a literary flourish of the work's composer. These cautions must be kept in mind when analyzing Sarfati's poetry for secondary meaning, and of necessity require cautious conclusions, unless there is sufficient evidence to clearly demonstrate an "encoded message." Of the three poems that will be analyzed over the remainder of this paper, the first two are short enough that conclusions must remain tentative. Such is not the case for the third poem, whose length allows deeper investigation.

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Harvard University Press, 2009), 52–75; John C. Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno's Eroisi Furori* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 12–24; Albert J. Smith, *The Metaphysics of Love: Studies in Renaissance Love Poetry from Dante to Milton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For a discussion of courtly love in medieval times, see Alexander A. Parker, *The Philosophy of Love in Spanish Literature, 1480–1680* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 20–31.

33. Roland E. Murphy, "Song of Songs, Book of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:153–55. For information on the interpretation of the Song of Songs in medieval times, see G. L. Scheper, "The Spiritual Marriage: The Exegetic History and Literary Impact of the Song of Songs in the Middle Ages" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1971).

34. Pagis, *Hebrew Poetry of the Middle Ages*, 62.



*“Be careful in the ascents”*

Sarfati’s use of Hebrew biblical allusions to warn of becoming too fully enthralled or connected with the Christian religion and culture of his day can be seen in the following poem:

זמן ישפילך אם ימצאך <sup>35</sup>	במעלות זר שמור אל תעלה פן	1
ואל תכבד ויגעו נושאיה	ואל תקל מאד פן ילעגו לך	2
ואל ישבעך פן ישנאך. <sup>36</sup>	והוקר רגלך מבית עצמיהם	3

- 1 Be careful in the ascents of the stranger; do not go up;  
fate will humble you, if it finds you.
- 2 Do not make yourself light, lest they ridicule you;  
nor be heavy, for they will be tired of carrying you.
- 3 Keep your feet from their gathering places.  
Let them not be satiated with you for they will hate you.

Sarfati’s choice to write in Hebrew is already a clue that he is speaking specifically to a Jewish audience. The overt message could easily be construed as general social wisdom, teaching the audience how to successfully navigate cultural norms in order to advance socially. The specific meaning becomes more pointed when connected with its biblical allusion, below. Sarfati begins by warning his people to be careful among a foreign people or in the audience of a stranger, especially among their “ascents,” which could refer to social gatherings; however, because Sarfati used Hebrew to compose the poem, the “ascents” more likely refer to their churches or to other places of power and influence. In Rome there were many of these locations, particularly in the Vatican, which in many ways already constituted one of the highest places or ascents in the Christian world in Sarfati’s day.

35. End-rhyme *-ekha*.

36. This is poem 22 from Sarfati’s diwan. It has been published in Dan Almagor, “Al ner, ‘al gevarah, ve’al hiduq-hakhagorah: 8 shirim le-Yosef Tsarfati,” *Musaf hasifrut shel yedi’ot akhronot*, December 14, 1979, 21.

Sarfati also gives important advice regarding how the Jews speak with the dominant culture, encouraging them on the one hand not to make light of themselves or to make themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the dominant society, but on the other hand not to exalt themselves or to make themselves heavy through requests, lest those in power get tired of carrying them. Line 3 provides the biblical key in its allusion to Proverbs 25:17, in which the reader is admonished, “Withdraw your foot from your friend’s/neighbor’s house; lest he be weary of you, and so hate you.”<sup>37</sup> Sarfati’s choice to connect his words with Proverbs 25 is intentional since the general theme of Proverbs 25 closely matches that of his poem. Most of Proverbs 25 contains instruction on how to avoid censure and disgrace in the eyes of one’s enemies by taking great care with the words one speaks. According to Proverbs 25, the speaker should neither exalt nor abase himself in the presence of others (vv. 6–7), should not publicly argue with others (v. 8), and should not tell his secrets in public (vv. 9–10)—important advice for any minority group.

The accuracy of this interpretation actually hinges on the understanding of Proverbs 25. Does this chapter intend to provide only general social wisdom that is useful in the presence of a generic “stranger”? Or does it fit with other biblical advice such as that found in Proverbs 6, 8, 9, 24, 30, and 31?<sup>38</sup> A close analysis of the entire chapter by biblical scholarship provides no clear resolution.<sup>39</sup> The first two verses of Proverbs 25 appear to place the context within a court setting, in which a supplicant or visitor at a kingly court is being given advice for his visit.<sup>40</sup> If the biblical allusion points to all of Proverbs 25, this would fit Sarfati’s situation in Rome closely.

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37. Author’s translation, following the King James Version (KJV).

38. See Goodfriend, “Adultery,” 85.

39. See Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary 22 (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 188–94.

40. Murphy, *Proverbs*, 190.

*Poem to the exiles of Spain*

Another poem, apparently associated with a specific historical context, contains a stronger and more overt warning to the exiles of Spain who have gone down to Rome. A study by Anna Esposito elucidates a likely historical framework for the poem.<sup>41</sup> According to Esposito, in the first three decades of the sixteenth century (a precise overlap with Sarfati's life and work), Sephardic immigrants to Rome "were not only the most numerous, but also the most solid both economically and culturally, . . . although there were tensions and rivalries within the community" because of their arrival. The poem will be analyzed in light of this historical context.

The poem contains five lines of two hemistiches each. In true Arabic form, as is often found in Sephardic poetry and in the poetry of Sarfati, the end rhyme of each line—*qi*—is the same.<sup>42</sup> Each hemistich contains eleven syllables, and the pattern in each hemistich unfailingly places a short vowel at the third and seventh syllables. As in other poems, Sarfati plays with phonemes to connect words and concepts throughout.

## שיר אל גולת ספרד אל רומי ירד

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בֵּית יַעֲקֹב הִקָּב וְהִנָּקִי	1 הַשְׁתַּעֲשְׂעוּ וְשַׁעוּ כְּצוֹר חֲזִקוּ
וּבְכָל-גְּלִיל רוּמִי וְאִיטָלְקִי	2 גַּעְלוּ בְּעַם נִזְעַם בְּלִיעַל
אֲרָצָם תִּגְרָשְׁכֶם וְחִוֵּץ תִּקְיֵא	3 טָרֵם בְּחֶטְאֵם תִּסְפוּ טָרֵם
מִשְׁפִּיל שְׂאוּל לְרֵאוֹת וּמַעֲמִיקִי	4 טָרֵם תְּרוֹן אֶף רֵם וּמִתְנַשֵּׂא
קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמְלָקִי <sup>43</sup>	5 הַתְּנַעֲרוּ עוֹרוֹ פָּנוּ לְכֶם

41. Anna Esposito, "The Sephardic Communities in Rome in the Early Sixteenth Century," *Imago Temporis. Medium Aevum* 1 (2007): 171–79.

42. Jonathan P. Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 40–41.

43. In this line, Schirmann does not follow the manuscript, which clearly reads as rendered here. Schirmann gives instead סרו רדו מתוך עמלקי. The translation into English of Schirmann's rendering ("Turn aside! Go down from the midst of Amaleki!") does not substantially differ from the translation provided here from the text of the manuscript. Schirmann, *Mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah*, 233.

## Poem to the exiles of Spain who descended to Rome

- 1 Look in dismay, and consider; as a rock be strong,  
O house of Jacob, the small yet pure.
- 2 Loathe the villainous people, subjects of wrath  
in every region of Rome and Italy.
- 3 Ere in their sin you are destroyed; ere  
the land expels and vomits you out;
- 4 ere the wrath of the lofty and powerful One  
becomes as deep as She'ol.
- 5 Shake yourself and wake up! Turn yourselves away.  
Arise! Go forth from the midst of the Amalekites!<sup>44</sup>

The introductory title of the poem given in the diwan points to a specific group, exiles from Spain who had entered Rome. Less clear is precisely what Sarfati is advising the exiles in Rome to do. Is his warning to go forth from the midst of the Amalekites an encouragement to leave Italy, possibly because of the tensions their arrival has created? Or should it more appropriately be seen as an encouragement to be wary of the undue influence of the “villainous people, subjects of wrath”?

Numerous references appear to identify Christian society as the villainous people. Other candidates, such as the Jews already in Rome or the new arrivals themselves, do not appear to fit the context. These references are strengthened by biblical allusions, words, and phrases that highlight Sarfati's concern regarding the interaction of the immigrants with the inhabitants of Italy. If the villainous people are the Christians—and that interpretation should be accepted unless a more likely candidate is proposed—then Sarfati's decision to use Hebrew so that only the Jews would have ready access to its message was critical. Certainly, the spread of the poem to a wider audience could have been devastating for Sarfati's relationship with his Christian hosts. Sarfati therefore relied on its coding in Hebrew to prevent the Christians from accessing the message.

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44. Translation mine. Poem is number 205 from Sarfati's diwan. It is also located in Schirmann, *Mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah*, 233.

The biblical allusions in this short poem are numerous and add depth to the poem's meaning. The injunction in line 1 to look in dismay and consider (Heb. *hishta'she'u ushe'u*) could also be translated as an injunction for the Jews to cover their eyes and look away from tragedy, possibly alluding to Isaiah 29:9. Isaiah 29 expresses dismay at the pending destruction of the Jews, who did not heed the warnings of God or hearken to his counsels. As a result, Israel will be encircled by its enemies and brought down to the dust, an image similar to that Sarfati provides in line 4, although in that instance it is God's wrath that will expel the Jews from the land.

In line 2, Sarfati enjoins the Jews to loathe or despise the base or villainous inhabitants of Rome and Italy. Although the full, trilateral form of the verb is regularly attested, this form of the verb *ga'lu* ("loathe" or "despise") is found only once in the Hebrew Bible, or indeed in any of the Jewish religious texts. In Ezekiel 16:45, the Lord criticizes those Israelites who allow themselves to be surrounded by and to fall in love with non-Israelite influences on all sides. When they should have "loathed" those associations, they instead "loathed" their proper husband and the children of their covenant. Because they did not loathe the false religions of the Amorites, Hittites, and Samaritans that surrounded them, in the end they were "corrupted more than they in all [their] ways" (Ezekiel 16:47 KJV). The flow of ideas fits that of Sarfati's poem, which tells the immigrants to loathe the Christians and warns that a failure to do so will enflame God's wrath against them and cause them to be ejected from the land (much as Spain had evicted them earlier).

The description of the Christians as a base people (Heb. *beliya'al*) also alludes to similar biblical phrases. One of these is Deuteronomy 13:13 (v. 14 in the Hebrew versification), which calls some of the Israelites "children of Belial" (KJV, Heb. *'anashim beney-beliya'al*) because they go searching after other gods. As a result, these children of Beliya'al must be killed by the Lord. This is a slightly altered warning from that of Sarfati in which the Christians and not the Israelites have received the title of Beliya'al. However, the end result is the same. Those who remain under the influence of foreign gods will ultimately meet an unfortunate end.

Line 3 contains a warning to the Jews that they will be consumed or destroyed (Heb. *tisfu*). This verb appears four times in the Hebrew Bible, each instance conveying a warning of destruction to the Jews if they do not avoid the corrupting sins of the surrounding people. Numbers 16:23–27 (NIV) is an instructive example:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Say to the assembly, ‘Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.’” . . . [Moses] warned the assembly, “Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins.” So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents.

Ultimately, the Lord proved that these men were guilty of idolatry, and in the end they suffered death for their betrayal—that death coming as the earth opened up and swallowed them into its depths. Similarly, Sarfati warned that the unresponsive, recalcitrant Jews would be ejected from the land because of the sins of the people of Italy.

Sarfati’s warning that the land would expel (Heb. *tegarshkhem*) the Jews or “vomit [them] out” (Heb. *taqi*) if they did not depart willingly has multiple links with biblical texts, each of them indicating that the earth responds directly to the Israelites’ lack of righteousness. In Leviticus 18:28, the Israelites are told that if they defile the land they will be vomited out, and in Leviticus 20:22 they are enjoined to observe all the statutes of the Lord so the land does not vomit them out. In Sarfati’s poem, the Christians defile the land, but nevertheless, it is still this defiled land that will vomit out the Jews if they refuse to flee from among the “Amalekites.”

The allusion to the fierce anger of the Christians in line 4 is a direct reference to the same phrase (Heb. *kharon ’af*) in Numbers 25:3. This story is important because its connection between idolatry and illicit love demonstrates well the biblical connection between these two themes with which Sarfati and the Jews would have been very familiar:

While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them. (Numbers 25:1–3 NIV)

As can be seen, sexual immorality in this text is explicitly linked to the faithlessness of the Israelites to the Lord as they go whoring after other gods. This seduction of the Israelites by the foreign gods leads in verse 4 to the Lord's direction to kill the offenders in order to turn the fierce anger (*kharon 'af*) of the Lord away from Israel.

A final biblical allusion can be found in line 5, in which Sarfati warns the Jews with finality and clarity to turn aside or to go out from among the Amalekites (Heb. *penu lakhem . . . mitokh 'amalaqi*). Each time the Bible uses the phrase *penu lakhem*, it directly implies moving away from an incorrect or dangerous way toward a destiny. For example, in Numbers 14:25 the Lord encourages the Israelites who have left Egypt to turn away from their course (*penu lakhem*) since it will take them through the land of the Amalekites and the Canaanites. Instead they are to go toward the Red Sea, in the direction that the Lord commands.

The Amalekites would become the group perhaps most identified as the everlasting enemy of the Jews, with which the Jews were forever at physical and ideological war because of their mistreatment of the Israelites in the wilderness and their worship of false gods.<sup>45</sup> According to one scholar, the biblical injunction against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:14; Numbers 24:20; Deuteronomy 25:19) “became so deeply rooted in Jewish thought that many important enemies of Israel were identified as direct descendants of Amalek. Thus [a] tannaitic aggadah of the first century BCE identifies Amalek with Rome.”<sup>46</sup> For the new immigrants, the title Amalekite would have applied perfectly to the Christians, who had recently expelled them from Spain and forced them into a lengthy journey.

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45. Elimelech Epstein Halevy, “Amalekites,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (New York: Gale Virtual Reference Library, 2007), 2:28–31.

46. Halevy, “Amalekites,” 31.

*Sarfati's introductory poem to his translation of Celestina*

Although Sarfati's translation of *Celestina* is no longer extant, the existing introductory poem to his translation can be situated among a number of other poems he wrote as introductions to books. Those that preceded the *Biblia Rabbinica* can be found in remaining copies of that work. They can also be found in Sarfati's diwan. The presence of his introductory poem to *Celestina* in the diwan appears to indicate that Sarfati did actually complete his translation of *Celestina*.<sup>47</sup>

Literary critics almost universally view the love story *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, known as *La Celestina* (herein *Celestina*),<sup>48</sup> as a masterpiece of Spanish prose surpassed only by Cervantes's *Don Quixote*.<sup>49</sup> As with many masterpieces, it features a complexity of themes, plots, subplots, and probable subterfuges that allow it to be interpreted through multiple lenses, retaining meaning and force in various contexts even down to the present day. In 1902 Manuel Serrano y Sanz published Inquisition documents showing that Fernando de Rojas, the purported author of *Celestina*,<sup>50</sup> was a *converso*, the son of forced Jewish converts to Christianity.<sup>51</sup> Since that time literary scholars such as

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47. Dan Almagor, "Shirim 'al sefarim le-Yosef ben Shmuel Sarfati," in *Asufot Kiryat Sefer (A Supplement to Kiryat Sefer 68)*, ed. Y. Rosenberg (Jerusalem: B'nei B'rith, 1998), 21–36.

48. The title first given to the work was *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*. This title was changed in later editions to *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*. Much later, the work began to assume the name of its most prominent character, *Celestina*. This is the title by which it is most generally known today.

49. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, *Two Spanish Masterpieces: The Book of Good Love and the Celestina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 5.

50. Debate continues about whether or not Rojas, whose name is given in an acrostic located in the introductory poem to the work (as Sarfati's is given in his own introductory poem), actually authored the work. See Ruth Davis, *New Data on the Authorship of Act I of the "Comedia de Calisto y Melibea"* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1928); and F. González Ollé, "El problema de la autoría de 'La Celestina,'" *Hispanic Review* 31 (1963): 153–59, among many others.

51. Manuel Serrano y Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas, autor de *La Celestina* y del impresor Juan de Lucena," *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos* 6 (1902): 245–99. This article included the Inquisition proceedings for Rojas's father-in-law, Alvaro de Montalbán, in 1525, during which Alvaro requested to have appointed



Stephen Gilman and Otis H. Green have hotly debated how this identity may have shaped the formation of the work.<sup>52</sup>

In the story, Calisto sees Melibea in a garden setting and is immediately enflamed with passionate love for her. When she rejects his advances, Calisto sinks into despair. He only recovers when his servants introduce him to the main character of the story, Celestina, a witch who promises to procure Melibea's favor for a price. She appears to bewitch Melibea with an enchanted thread, and Calisto and Melibea later consummate their love. The story ends in tragedy when Calisto falls while descending from Melibea's garden wall. Melibea responds by throwing herself from her tower to her death. The final scene of the book, written in the form of a play, shows Melibea's father bitterly decrying the betrayals of love. Whether or not *Celestina*, with its heavy tone of disillusionment, should be read as a work portraying the converso angst under which Rojas lived and which, if any, of its main characters should also be seen as New Christians has not been resolved in any satisfactory manner to this day.

Notwithstanding the difficulty in interpreting the author's own purposes in *Celestina*'s tragic love story, a lens does exist for understanding how at least a portion of the Jewish community understood the work

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"as his lawyer the Bachiller Fernando de Rojas, his son-in-law, who is a converso." The Inquisitor denied this request and declared that the lawyer had to be someone "without suspicion." See Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 263, 69. Regarding Rojas's parents, Inquisition documents may indicate that his father was burned in an Inquisitorial auto-da-fé. See Francisco Cantera Burgos and Pilar León Tello, *Judaizantes del arzobispado de Toledo habilitados por la Inquisición en 1495 y 1497* (Madrid, 1969).

52. For those, such as Otis H. Green, who have argued against reading *Celestina* using a converso lens, see Green, "The *Celestina* and the Inquisition," *Hispanic Review* 15 (1947): 211–15; Leo Spitzer, "A New Book on the Art of *La Celestina*," *Hispanic Review* 25 (1957): 1–25, and many others. For a few examples of the many responses to these concerns, see Stephen Gilman, "A Rejoinder to Leo Spitzer," *Hispanic Review* 25 (1957): 112–21; Antonio Sánchez Serrano and María Remedios Prieto de la Yglesia, *Fernando de Rojas y La Celestina: el escritor y la literatura* (Barcelona: Impresa de Barcelona, 1991), 33–40; Peter N. Dunn, *Fernando de Rojas* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 3–8; Ya'akov Yisra'el Fink, "Haselestinah umahberah hayehudi," in *Yahadut Tsarfat* (Paris: Mahberot, 1951), 168–86.

during Rojas's lifetime. Sarfati's introductory poem to his translation of *Celestina* appears in his diwan as poem 214. He completed the translation in 1507 (as demonstrated in the final line of the poem), just eight short years after *Celestina*'s initial publication in Spain, only two years after its translation into its first foreign language (Italian in 1505), and a full thirteen years prior to its translation into another language (German in 1520).<sup>53</sup> Sarfati's full Hebrew translation would have provided significant clues for the modern scholar to understand how he read the work. Although only Sarfati's introductory poem to his translation survives, it can still provide similar hints. At least five scholars—Mosheh Cassuto,<sup>54</sup> D. W. McPheeters,<sup>55</sup> Dan Almagor,<sup>56</sup> Dwayne Carpenter,<sup>57</sup> and Michelle Hamilton<sup>58</sup>—have interpreted the meaning of Sarfati's poem previously. The Hebrew poem can be found in the publications of Cassuto, Almagor, and Carpenter, and Cassuto was the first to identify many of the biblical allusions discussed below. I believe Sarfati was

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53. Several studies give good overviews of the various editions of *Celestina* and discuss their importance and meaning in relation to the work overall. They include Keith Whinnom, "The Relationship of the Early Editions of the *Celestina*," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 82 (1966): 22–40; Clara L. Penney, *The Book Called "Celestina"* (New York: Hispanic Society, 1954); and Frederick J. Norton, *Printing in Spain: 1501–1520, with a Note on the Early Editions of the "Celestina"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 20–35.

54. Mosheh Cassuto, "Mishrey Yosef ben Shmuel Sarfati: hakomedyah harishonah be'ivrit," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of George A. Kohut*, ed. Salo W. Baron and Alexander Marx (New York: The Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1935), 121–28.

55. D. W. McPheeters, "Una traducción hebrea de *La Celestina* en el siglo XVI," in *Homenaje a Rodríguez-Moñino* (Madrid: Castalia, 1966), 399–411.

56. Dan Almagor, "Hagirsah ha'ivrit harishonah shel *lah selestinah*," *Bamah* 127 (1992): 19–28.

57. Dwayne E. Carpenter, "The Sacred in the Profane: Jewish Scriptures and the First Comedy in Hebrew," in *Fernando de Rojas and "Celestina": Approaching the Fifth Centenary*, ed. Ivy A. Corfis and Joseph T. Snow (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1993), 229–36; Carpenter, "A Converso Best-Seller: *Celestina* and Her Foreign Offspring," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 267–81.

58. Michelle M. Hamilton, "Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati's 'Tratado de Melibea y Calisto': A Sephardic Jew's Reading of the *Celestina* in Light of the Medieval Judeo-Spanish Go-Between Tradition," *Sefarad* 62 (2002): 329–47.

drawn to translate *Celestina* because he saw it in part as a coded warning to avoid corruption from Christian society; at least he seems to have used his own introductory poem to introduce that theme himself. As in the second poem analyzed above, Sarfati uses Hebrew and biblical allusions to develop the biblical theme of adultery as a metaphor for the false promises of the Christian church and society to the Jews. Although I have indicated that biblical allusions may serve as an additional layer of coding, in the case of this work, the ambiguity of Sarfati's introductory poem on the surface seems to defy easy interpretation, as in *Celestina's* own introductory poem and prologue.

שיר חברו המשורר על העתקת חברו מליביה וקליסטו

אֲשֶׁר הִמָּה בְּפֶחַח חֲשֵׁק לְכוּדִים,	1 פְּנוּ דוֹדִים לְמִלְחָמַת יְדִידִים,
בְּטוֹב מְלִים וּבְמִשְׁלִים תְּמוּדִים,	2 וּמַעֲנִיָּהֶם בְּהִנְכַח שְׁנִיָּהֶם
מְרִיבָתָם וְאֶהֱבָתָם <sup>59</sup> צְמִדִים,	3 וְעַז חַמּוֹת וְאֵימוֹת הַעֲלָמוֹת,
בְּדַבָּרָם אֶל-בְּנוֹת הַחֵן וּפִידִים,	4 וּמִמְתַּקִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁפְתַי תִּשְׁוִקִים
וּמִהֲתַלּוֹת וּתְחַבּוּלוֹת עֲבָדִים,	5 כְּלִי נִשְׁקָם בְּהֶאֱבָקָם בְּחֲשִׁקָם,
לְשׂוּם שֶׁבֶר בְּלֵב גָּבֵר וּפִידִים,	6 וּנְכַלִּיָּהֶם כְּלִי חֲמָס כְּלִיָּהֶם,
וּמְרָדִים בּוֹ כְּכֹל-עֲתוֹת מְרָדִים;	7 וּקְשָׁרָם עַל-כְּבוֹד בַּעַל לְגַבּוֹ,
וְאֵיךְ פּוֹרְשׁוֹת בְּכָל-חֲצוֹצוֹת מְצוּדִים,	8 וְשֵׁם עֲרָמוֹת וּמְרָמוֹת הַזְּקִנּוֹת,
לְהַדְלִיק אֵשׁ בְּלֵב דוֹדִים וְאוֹדִים,	9 וְשֵׁם שִׁיחוֹת תְּדַבְּרָנָה שְׁפָחוֹת
בְּהַרְבֵּתוֹן בְּקָרְבָתוֹן תִּשְׁדִּים,	10 וּתְרִינָה <sup>60</sup> גְּבִירוֹת רוֹשׁ וְלַעֲנָה
יְצוּרֵיהֶם בְּצִירֵיהֶם פְּרוּדִים;	11 וְקוֹל אֶהְיֶה בְּמִכְאוּבִים עֲצָבִים
בְּאֵף זַעַם בְּנִבְזֵי עַם גְּדוּדִים,	12 כִּי דַמְעָם נָהִי שְׁוֹעַם וְשִׁבְעָם
בְּכָל-רְגַע בְּכָל-פְּגַע תְּרָדִים,	13 וְצוֹחָתָם וְאַנְחָתָם וְאֵיךְ הֵם
בְּתַת מְלִים כְּמוֹ דְלִים מְרוּדִים,	14 וְגַם-הִבְלָם בְּצִיר הִבְלָם וְאֶבְלָם,
בְּיַד אִשָּׁה כְּלִי בּוֹשָׁה שְׂדוּדִים,	15 וְשִׁבְתָּ כָל-נְבוּנֵי עַם כְּכֹלְכֵל
וְנִדְפִים בְּכָל-פְּנוֹת וְנָדִים.	16 מְנַגְּפִים יְחַפִּים לְאֵלָפִים,

59. Here I have followed the manuscript, rather than Cassuto's and Almagor's renderings, which changed *ואהבתם ואהבתם* to *מרבתן ואהבתן*. See notes 54 and 56 for these sources.

60. Here I have followed Cassuto and Almagor, who changed *תרונה* in the manuscript to *ותרונה*.

בְּסִבְלָם מִמַּעַם אֶלְפֵי פְּרָדִים	17 אֶחָו שִׁיחָם נְדוּד אֶרְחָם וְטָרְחָם
בְּמִשׁוּאוֹת מְאֹד מֵהֶם כְּבָדִים.	18 וְהֵעֵת יִכְשְׁלוּ יִבְלוּ וַיִּכְלוּ,
וְאִין מִכְשִׁיר וְאִין מִשִּׁיר צְעָדִים	19 וְאִין בִּינָה וְאִין עֲצָה נְכוּנָה,
וְשָׁמוּ בְּחָרֵי רִגְלָיו בְּסָדִים	20 לְגֵבֶר גְּבָרוּ עָלָיו עֲלֻמוֹת,
וְאִיפֹה יִמְצְאוּ סִמְךָ סְעָדִים?	21 וּבִמָּה יִשְׁעֲנוּ שְׁעִים בְּאַהֲבִים
וְאִין חֲמֵל וְאִין גְּמֵל תְּסָדִים.	22 וְאִין בְּאַהֲבָה מִחֶסֶד וּמִכְסָּה,
וְהִיא תִצְבֵּר בְּלֵב גְּבוּר פְּחָדִים,	23 וְהִיא תִשְׁבֵּר גְּוִיַת אִישׁ וְתִקְבֵּר,
וְהִיא תִעֲבִיר גְּאוֹן מִגְּבִיר גְּדוּדִים.	24 וְהִיא תִשְׁפִּיל גְּבַה רוּחַ וְתִפִּיל,
בְּאֶף מִהִיּוֹת בְּבֵית עֲלִיוֹן פְּקִידִים.	25 מִתִּי הַשָּׁם וְהַשְּׂכָל תִּגְרָשֶׁם
בְּעֵלָה יַעֲבֹדוּן לָהּ פְּקוּדִים.	26 וּמַעֲדָנָה וְעַד-זְקֻנָּה וְשִׁיבָה
בְּשִׁקָר עֲרֻכִים נְגִידָה וּבָדִים;	27 שְׁבַחְתִּיהָ בְּכָל-עֵת הָאֲוִילִים
וְשָׁמִי מְלֹאוֹ רוּחוֹת וְאָדִים.	28 אֲדַמָּה פְּעֻלָּה <sup>61</sup> הֶעֱדָר גִּשְׁמִי <sup>62</sup>
וְרִיק לְהַמּוֹת כְּאֻמוֹת עַל יְהוּדִים,	29 וְשׁוֹאֵן שִׁירוֹת לְפִתּוֹת הַגְּבִירוֹת
וְתַת רַעִים צְעִיפִים עִם רְדִידִים,	30 וְאֹדֶן כְּסָף לְבָב יַעֲלוֹת יֶאֱסֹף,
וַיִּצְמִיחַ בְּכָל-חַח נְרָדִים,	31 וְהִזְקֵב יִנְשֵׂא דוּד וַיִּרְהֵב,
וְהוּא יִנְעִים יְשִׁישִׁים עִם לְדִים,	32 וְהוּא נָשִׂיא וְהוּא יְשִׂיא אֲנָשִׁים,
וְרַב חֶרוֹן <sup>63</sup> עָלָי גְּרוֹן רְבִידִים.	33 וְרַב מִשְׁאוֹת יְשִׁיבוֹן לֵב צְבָאוֹת,
וְלִיפּוֹת חֲלִיפוֹת כָּל-בְּגָדִים!	34 תְּנוּ מְנוֹת וּמִתְנוֹת לְעַפְרוֹת,
וְתַת דּוֹדִים עָלָי יָדִים צְמִידִים. <sup>64</sup>	35 הֲכִי קֶצֶפִים יִרְף נִזֵּם בְּאֶפֶס,
תִּרְוֵהוּ כְּחֶפְצָהוּ מְגָדִים,	36 וַיִּכֹּן עַפְרָה בְּדוּד תִּחְשֶׁק וְתִשְׁק,
כְּתֻמָּתוֹ לְשִׁבְעָתוֹ גְּזִידִים.	37 וְלֹא תִזִּיד בְּדַרְכָּהּ עוֹד וְתִזִּיד
נְטוֹת מְנָה וְסוֹר אֵל הַצְּדָדִים!	38 אֲכַל מֵה-טוֹב וּמֵה-נְעִים צְנוּעִים,
וְדוּד הֵם שְׁנִיחָם לֹד שְׁהָדִים.	39 לְנִכְלִיחָם וּכְבִלִיחָם שְׁלֵמָה
וְשָׁעִיר עִם הַמּוֹן שְׁדוֹת וְשָׁדִים, <sup>65</sup>	40 בְּקֶרְבָּם מִלְּאֲכֵי מְוֹת יַגּוּרוֹן,

61. Here I have followed Cassuto and Almagor, who changed פעלם in the manuscript to פעלה.

62. Although difficult to read, this is most likely גשמים in the manuscript.

63. Here I have followed Cassuto and Almagor, who changed מרון וטב in the manuscript to רב חרון.

64. In this line I have provided final *mems* rather than final *nuns*, following the manuscript rather than Cassuto and Almagor in the words קצפם, באפם, דודם, and ידם. However, I have followed Cassuto's and Almagor's rendering when they changed ירב in the manuscript to ירף.

65. In lines 39 and 40 I have retained the final *mems* from the manuscript rather than following Cassuto and Almagor in these words: וכבליהם and בקרבם.

בְּכַשְׁפֵּיהֶן וְכָל-חַי מַאֲבִידִים.	41 וְאַלֶּה שְׂדָדִים יוֹם יוֹם בְּגֵי אִישׁ
כְּלֵי נְדָה בְּסוֹת חֲמֻדָּה אֲפוּדִים.	42 בָּרַח יִפְּזוּ רְאֵה דָפְזוּ הִכִּי הוּ
שְׁנוּנִים בְּדָ וְתוֹדָ לְבָדָ שְׁפוּדִים.	43 מֵאֵס צִפְזוּ הִכִּי סוֹפְזוּ צְנִינִים
מִשְׁגָּעִים אֲשֶׁר פָּרְעִים וּמוּדִים.	44 כְּסִילִים הֵם אֲשֶׁר נַעֲנִים אֲלֵיהֶם <sup>66</sup>
לְגַס אָקִים לְכָל-חַשְׁקִים וְדוּדִים.	45 וּמְלִיבְיָהּ לְכָל-רַעֲיָה וְדוּדָה
וְאִשׁוּ יִבְרָחוּ מִכָּל-יְקוּדִים,	46 וְיִטוּ מִנְתִּיב חַשְׁק לְאֲמִי,
וְשָׂרְשׁוּ יַעֲרוּ עַד יְסוּדִים.	47 וּמְלִבְזָם יִכְבוּהוּ וְקַרְבָּם,
וּבִי תִצְהַל עֲדַת וְקַהֲל שְׂרִידִים.	48 פְּנֵה אֲלֵי וְהֵט אֲזֵן לְמִלִּי,
בְּחֲרָמִי יַעֲלוֹת יִתְדוּ אֲגוּדִים,	49 הַטּוֹב תִּהְיוּ לְבוּז רַעִי וְשׁוֹעִי,
וּכְתִישִׁים בְּיַד נְשִׁים עֲקוּדִים?	50 בְּאִיו אֲזַל וְקַרְנִי עַז כְּאֵזֶל
נְשִׂיא לְמִנְתְּדִים דָּת מַעֲמִידִים,	51 אֲנִי יוֹסֵף בְּנֹו הַרְב שְׁמוּאֵל,
לְאֵהֶל יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁעוּן יְתִדִים,	52 מִקּוֹר חֲכָמָה וּמַעֲיִן כָּל מְזֻמָּה,
אֲשֶׁר שָׂרַת גְּדוֹל מִשְׁלִים וְרִדִים,	53 וְצָרְפֵּתִי יִכְנוּהוּ הֵלֵא הוּא
אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁמִים גְּאוֹן רָמִים וְזוּדִים.	54 אֲדוֹן יוֹלִיּוֹס וְכַהֵן רֹאשׁ לְאֲמִים,
עֲנִי רְשִׁים וְלֵב אִישִׁים טְרוּדִים,	55 אֲמַת הַעֲתִיק לְשׁוּנֵי זֶה לְהַמְתִּיק
פֶּאֶר שִׁיחֵי לְאַחֵי הִיהוּדִים.	56 וְרַק עֲנִינוּ אֲנִי מַעֲתִיק וְעֵרֶךְ
הֵלֵא יְהִיו <sup>67</sup> בְּמִדְתָּם מְדוּדִים,	57 עֲדַת לְצִים אֲשֶׁר נִגְדִי תְלוּצִים
אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הֵם לְתַת הַדִּי עֲתִידִים,	58 וּבַעֲרָה כֶּם לֵאֵל חֲנָם גִּיהֲנָם,
חֲסִידִים כָּל-עַדִּי חֲמֻדָּה עֲנוּדִים;	59 וְדִינוּנֵי בְזוּת לְזַכּוֹת הַמוּנֵי,
וְיִנְדְּבְכֶם אֲלֵהֵם טוֹב וְכָדִים,	60 וְחִישׁ יִזְרַח עָלַי רֹאשְׁכֶם מְאוּרְכֶם,
וְתַחֲיוּן <sup>68</sup> תוֹךְ קֶד חִילִים וְאִידִים.	61 בְּהַדְלִיק אֶת-לְבַבְכֶם יַעֲלֶת-חֵן,
פְּנֹו דוּדִים לְמִלְחָמַת דִּידִים.	62 כְּאֶחָד מִהֶרוּ עוּרוּ וְסוּרוּ,
	תֵּם נִשְׁלַם תִּל"ח

A poem composed by the poet upon the translation of the work regarding Melibea and Calisto

- 1 Observe, beloved, the war of lovers,  
trapped in the snare of desire,

66. I have retained the final *mem* from the manuscript in the word אליהם, rather than change to the renderings of Cassuto and Almagor, which offer אליהן.

67. I have here retained the renderings of Cassuto and Almagor, who provided יהיו rather than הלא יהיו in the manuscript.

68. I have here followed the versions of Cassuto and Almagor, who changed ותחיון in the manuscript to תחיון.

- 2 with their intentions to bandy  
beautiful words and charming fables,
- 3 and the powerful anger and dread of maidens,  
for whom conflict and love are intertwined,
- 4 with dulcitudes in the lovers' mouths  
when they speak artfully to beautiful women.
- 5 In the struggle against the lovers' desire,  
consider also the servants' weapons: mocking and  
scheming.
- 6 Their mischief (for their weapons are weapons of violence)  
is to plant destruction and devastation in a man's heart.
- 7 Their conspiracy is to rob their master's honor,  
and in every moment they rebel against him.
- 8 See the craftiness and deception of old ladies,  
how they cast forth snares in every street.
- 9 See the maidservants tell tales  
that light a fire and embers in the heart of lovers.
- 10 They feed their mistresses venom and bitter wormwood,  
multiplying suspicions within them.
- 11 The voices of lovers are in sorrowful pain,  
their limbs torn apart in their deep anguish,
- 12 their tearful weeping, and the lament of their imploring;  
they are filled  
with wrath among a despised, wandering people.
- 13 See their screams and their sighs and how  
in every moment, and with every pain, they tremble,
- 14 as well as their injury, the anguish of their foolishness,  
and their sorrow,  
spouting complaints like the completely destitute.
- 15 See how all the wise leaders of the people, like Calcol,  
sit ashamed, robbed by the hand of a woman.
- 16 Destitute and barefoot they go by the thousands;  
scattered on every corner, they wander to and fro.
- 17 I will tell their tales, their vagabond ways, and their travails  
as they suffer a heavy load, like that of thousands of mules
- 18 who stumble, wither, and perish  
with burdens too heavy for them.

- 19 There is no wisdom, and there is no correct counsel,  
and no one fit to guide, and no one to straighten the step
- 20 of a man conquered by maidens  
who spitefully place his feet in the stocks.
- 21 Upon what may lovers depend?  
Where will they find support or assistance?
- 22 There is no shelter or shade in love;  
there is no one to have pity, nor any who grants favor.
- 23 She<sup>69</sup> will break and bury the body of a man;  
she will fill the heart of the valiant with fear;
- 24 she will humble and knock down the haughty;  
she will remove the great pride from a strong man;
- 25 she will cast out men of renown and wisdom,  
in anger, from their position in high places.
- 26 From the youth to the white-haired ancient,  
men who serve her are bound by her yoke.
- 27 The foolish constantly praise her,  
and in vain they deceitfully pose for her.
- 28 See how their deeds fail to deliver rain,  
although the sky is full of wind and clouds.
- 29 Songs to seduce maidens are in vain,  
like speeches of boasting mothers about their children.
- 30 Silver will gather the hearts of gazelles,<sup>70</sup>  
as will the gifts of veils and scarves.
- 31 Gold will lift up the lover in glory  
and will convert every thorn into spikenard.
- 32 It rules as a prince, elevating men  
and bringing much joy to the elderly and to children.
- 33 Great gifts will soften the heart of armies,  
as necklaces will placate great wrath.
- 34 Give gifts and offerings to the gazelles,  
and clothing and dresses to beautiful women!

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69. "She" refers to love, a feminine noun in Hebrew, but also reminds of the aforementioned "maiden."

70. Gazelles almost certainly refer to maidens, a common construction proceeding from the Arabic influence on the literature of medieval Spain.

- 35 Truly a nose ring softens their malice,  
as do arm bracelets given by their lovers.
- 36 Thus the beauty will desire her lover and will kiss him;  
she will satisfy him with sweets as he desires.
- 37 She will not brew mischief, as before, but will cook  
pottage to satisfy his desire.
- 38 O chaste ones! How good and excellent it is  
to turn away from her and to move aside.
- 39 Of their tricks and their chains, Solomon  
and David both are witnesses.
- 40 Within them dwell the angels of death;  
they swarm with demons and she-devils
- 41 who daily plunder the sons of men  
by their enchantments and cause all to perish.
- 42 Flee from their beauty; beware their defects, for they are  
menstruous vessels robed in glorious attire.
- 43 Despise their nectar, for they will become thorns  
sharp within you, with skewers that pierce your heart.
- 44 Only fools respond to them;  
only mad men prostrate themselves and worship.
- 45 And Melibea, with her friends and her lover,  
I will lift up as a sign for all those that love and desire
- 46 so that my people will turn from the path of desire—  
flee from its burning fire!
- 47 Extinguish it from your hearts,  
and destroy it entirely from within them.
- 48 Turn to me, and pay attention to my words,  
and you will rejoice in me, gathering and company of  
survivors.
- 49 Is it seemly for you, my friends and princes, to be shamed,  
bundled together in the nets of gazelles
- 50 like a ram without strength or horns of power  
or male goats bound by the hand of women?
- 51 I am Joseph, son of Rabbi Samuel, prince  
of the faithful, a pillar of the faith,
- 52 a source of wisdom and a wellspring of all subtlety,  
the support of the stakes of Jacob's tent,



- 53 whose name is Sarfati; is it not he  
     who has served great rulers and princes
- 54 such as Pope Julius, priest, head of the nations,  
     who has brought low the greatness of the prideful and  
     the wicked?
- 55 My tongue has translated truth to sweeten  
     the affliction of the impoverished and the heart of a  
     burdened people.
- 56 My only concern is as a translator; I arrange  
     the beauty of my conversation for my brethren the Jews.
- 57 The group of mockers that strive against me,  
     who will be measured according to their own  
     measurement—
- 58 not in vain will hell burn in them  
     who are condemned there to the future judgments.
- 59 Judge me favorably in this, my people,  
     faithful, adorned with every adornment of precious  
     things.
- 60 Your glory will soon shine over you,  
     and God will grant you the best of gifts
- 61 when a graceful gazelle lights your hearts,  
     although you remain in the midst of a burning  
     conflagration.
- 62 All as one make haste! Awake and turn aside!  
     Observe, beloved, the war of lovers.
- Ending complete in 1507

The introductory poem—in which Sarfati provides his name (lines 51, 53), just as Rojas had done in an acrostic in his own introductory poem to *Celestina*—opens with a line encouraging the listener to pay attention to the war of lovers. The line connects neatly with Rojas’s opening line to his prologue to *Celestina*, which indicates that “all is conflict.” Indeed, just as the poet warns the reader, the entire poem speaks of the conflict of love. Lines 2–10 discuss the woes of lovers who are entangled in the webs of love and indicate that evil people—wily servants and plotting old women—desire to ensnare the young and foolish by inciting their passions. These destructive characters use the power

of language to tease the thoughts of the young and to lead them into illicit relationships. These lines hearken directly to *Celestina*, in which a conniving procuress, servants, and maidservants all seek to profit by stoking the flames of love within the young couple.

The powerful results of these entrapments are catalogued in lines 11–21, making the lovers' plight sound pitiful to the extreme: "The voices of lovers are in sorrowful pain, their limbs torn apart in their deep anguish, their tearful weeping, and the lament of their imploring; . . . See their screams and their sighs and how in every moment, and with every pain, they tremble, as well as their injury, the anguish of their foolishness, and their sorrow" (lines 11–14). Sarfati describes love as having a real, overarching power that can create deep misery. These lines no longer correspond directly to the story of *Celestina*. Melibea's life does end in misery when Calisto dies at the wall. Sarfati's descriptions, however, seem to pass well beyond the psychological effects of love found in the story. In other words, Sarfati has a view of love and a possible didactic intent in translating *Celestina* and in writing this poem that perhaps extend further than simply providing the Jewish community with the story.

In lines 22–28, Sarfati turns his attention to "love" in general and claims, "There is no shelter or shade in love. . . . She will break and bury the body of a man; she will fill the heart of the valiant with fear; she will humble and knock down the haughty; she will remove the great pride from a strong man; she will cast out men of renown and wisdom" (lines 22–25). The theme shifts again in lines 29–37 and teaches the audience how to assuage the power of love and how to obtain the favor of maidens; rather than damaging the lover, "the maidens" will instead favor him. Sarfati teaches the audience that "silver will gather the hearts of gazelles, as will the gifts of veils and scarves. Gold will lift up the lover in glory" (lines 30–31). He even issues a command or direction: "Give gifts and offerings to the gazelles, and clothing and dresses to beautiful women! Truly a nose ring softens their malice, as do arm bracelets given by their lovers" (lines 34–35). He then describes the positive benefits of this type of offering: "Thus the beauty will desire her lover and will kiss

him” (line 36). This is a surprising shift in theme. Up until this point, the poet has been unwavering in his condemnations of and warnings against the dangers of love. Here Sarfati encourages a certain relationship with love based on monetary bribes. Again this theme does not seem to directly match the story line of *Celestina*.

In lines 38–50, Sarfati suddenly returns to his former encouragements, imploring his audience to have nothing to do with women and love. He makes the only overt reference in the entire poem to the subject of his translation, *Celestina*, when he gives the name of Melibea in line 45 and states that she will be “as a sign” (Heb. *lenes*). In these lines the poem becomes more and more focused on Sarfati’s audience, with Sarfati speaking directly to them in multiple lines: “O chaste ones! How good and excellent it is to turn away from her and to move aside. . . . Flee from their beauty; beware their defects. . . . Despise their nectar. . . . Flee . . . extinguish . . . destroy” (lines 38, 42–43, 46–47).

Sarfati begins to employ more regular and overt Jewish symbols and references in line 39. Besides referring in that line to David, Solomon, and the angel of death from the first Passover in Egypt, in line 42 he uses a Hebrew word replete with Jewish connotations when he refers to seductive women as *keley nidah* (Eng. “menstruous vessels” or “impure vessels”), eliciting a host of implications surrounding the law of Moses that required strict separation for women during their monthly cycle. In line 46 he refers explicitly to the needs of “my people,” emphasizing that these warnings are specifically intended for the Jews. In line 48 he calls his audience a “gathering and company of survivors,” again referring directly to the Jews. Also in line 48, he asks for his audience’s attention and their trust: “Turn to me, and pay attention to my words.” When compared with the first line—“Observe (literally “turn to”), beloved, the war of lovers”—we can clearly see the shift in focus.

In the conclusion of the poem, lines 51–62, Sarfati gives his credentials and explains why the Jewish people should trust him as a guide. “I am Joseph, son of Rabbi Samuel, prince of the faithful, a pillar of the faith, a source of wisdom and a wellspring of all subtlety, the support of the stakes of Jacob’s tent, whose name is Sarfati; is it not he who has

served great rulers and princes, such as Pope Julius, priest, head of the nations?” (lines 51–54). As has been mentioned, Sarfati was able to interact successfully with a powerful non-Israelite group and its chief leader, much like Joseph of Egypt did. Joseph’s unique position, comparable to that of Sarfati, allowed him to serve as a protector for his people and to further their cause.

Sarfati places four commands upon his audience in quick succession in the last line of his poem—“Make haste!” “Awake!” “Turn aside!” and “Observe!” He seems intent on retaining the attention of his audience and of helping them to turn aside from disastrous consequences. The hints and allusions in this poem point to a subtler message hidden within the connections to *Celestina* and indicate how Sarfati read that work and at least some of the reasons he was interested in it.

The first clue that Sarfati is providing a message within a message to his audience is the realization that his words do not perfectly describe *Celestina*. As Hamilton describes: “Of the 62 lines of Sarfati’s poem, only about 10 contain explicit references to the plot and characters of the *Celestina*. The other 50 or so lines—roughly 85% of the poem—treat in a very general way some of the themes found in *Celestina*, such as the pangs of love, the suffering of lovers and the deception of speech. Yet Sarfati also introduces a series of motifs that seem somewhat alien to *Celestina*.”<sup>71</sup>

Other hints demonstrate that Sarfati was trying to call his readers’ attention to an alternate message. He constantly urges his readers to “pay attention,” “be alert,” and “awake” to the message of his poem. On multiple occasions he uses words that the Jewish people would have understood as specifically applying to them, although in the poem Sarfati is overtly speaking only of men being destroyed by love. For example, in line 12 he speaks of the “tearful weeping, and the lament of their imploring; they are filled with wrath among a despised, wandering people.” On closer inspection, the careful reader must explore the identity of this despised, wandering people, filled with wrath. This reference is

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71. Hamilton, “Sarfati’s ‘Tratado de Melibea y Calisto,’” 331.

descriptive of the Jews expelled from Spain, those filled with the wrath of Spanish Christianity. Sarfati pointedly addressed that group in the second of the poems analyzed above.

Once this relationship becomes clear, other references to the plight of the lost lovers begin to sound more like the situation of the Sephardic Jews ejected from Spain or the forced Jewish converts to Christianity, plagued by the insistent and punishing gaze of the Inquisition. According to line 16, “Destitute and barefoot they go by the thousands; scattered on every corner, they wander to and fro”; the line here describes the situation for some of the Sephardic Jews who had remained faithful and made their way to Italy.<sup>72</sup> Immediately after employing this description, Sarfati states that he will be the one to tell their story, “I will tell their tales, their vagabond ways, and their travails as they suffer a heavy load, like that of thousands of mules who stumble, wither, and perish with burdens too heavy for them” (lines 17–18). These lines could refer to the burdens of lovers, but can a large number of lonely, rejected men ever appropriately be called a community? Thus the reader may ask who this community of lovers that Sarfati has chosen to represent in his tale telling might be, if it is not an allusion to his own Jewish community.

Later, Sarfati again refers directly to the Jewish people, stating that he gives these warnings “so that my people will turn from the path of desire—flee from its burning fire” (line 46). The fact that Sarfati here speaks overtly of the Jewish people, “my people,” emphasizes that the message to avoid lust or desire is particularly important for them and that this message is offered not to protect a general audience but to guide a specifically Jewish audience. Although Carpenter’s choice of translation is too liberal, he hit at the substance of line 46 with his

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72. See Esposito, “Sephardic Communities in Rome,” 161–69. See also Hayyim Beninart, “Edim yehudim mita’am hatevi’ah beveyt din ha’inqvizitzyah,” in *Pirqey Sefarad* (Jerusalem: Hotsa’at Me’agnes, 1997), 1:486–88; Amador de los Ríos, *Historia Social, Política y Religiosa de los Judíos de España* (Madrid: Impresa de Madrid, 1960), 689; Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 55–63, 416–18; Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 55–63.

rendering: “Veer from the path of Gentile lust; above all, flee its fiery end.”<sup>73</sup> The second half of this line indicates that the Jewish reader needs to “flee from its burning fire.” Written at a time when the fires at the stakes of the Inquisition in Portugal and Spain were at their height, this reference to flight from fire would likely have hit a responsive chord within that audience and would again have called their attention to a deeper message. Indeed, in the line immediately preceding this one, Sarfati had indicated that he would hold up Melibea and the love of Melibea “as a sign,” indicating that the figure of Melibea stands as a symbol for something else. Under this interpretation Melibea would become a sign of the dominant culture, and the love of Melibea would represent the Jews’ “adulterous” yearnings after the benefits promised by the religion of Christianity.

Sarfati’s poem is replete with biblical allusions that warn of the dangers of being drawn away to serve other gods. Although difficult to recognize in English, they include Hebrew terms that exactly match the description of Simeon’s violence in response to Dinah’s rape by a Gentile in Genesis 49:5–6, another Hebrew allusion to Proverbs 25:14 with its advice on how to act appropriately when in conversation with enemies (line 28), a reference to Esau selling his birthright for pottage (line 37), and the mention of David and Solomon, who were destroyed by relying too much on the love of Gentiles (line 39). In line 42, Sarfati teaches that although the lovers (or the Christian society they represent) appear clean and glorious on the outside, too much association with them will produce the same kind of impurities that the Christians have:

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73. Carpenter, “A Converso Best-Seller,” 278. Carpenter’s translation depends on how the manuscript is interpreted. The copier for the manuscript often removed the final *mem* of plural words ending in *-im*. Here this would mean that the word I have translated as “my people” (Heb. *le’umi*) could be understood “nations” (Heb. *le’umim*) and that the translation “Gentile lust” (Heb. *khesheq le’umim*) would be correct. Although the mark that the copier typically placed in the manuscript when removing a *mem* is not visible in this phrase, there may be other locations where a *mem* was removed without the designating mark. Whether or not Carpenter’s translation is accepted or not, it appears to me that Sarfati’s intent was to warn of this type of attraction, as Carpenter’s translation indicates.

“Flee from their beauty; beware their defects, for they are menstruous vessels robed in glorious attire.”

Sarfati instructs his audience how to gain favor with “their lovers” in lines 29–38. “Silver will gather the hearts of gazelles. . . . Gold will lift up the lover in glory” (lines 30–31). In the next lines the focus shifts to an avoidance of persecution: “Great gifts will soften the heart of armies” (line 33). This mention of armies connects the object of love with those who hold weapons of power on behalf of the state. In Rome this would refer to the power of a papacy that also controlled its own armies. Only if the Jewish audience has gold and gifts—in other words only if the Jewish community is economically useful to the Christian hierarchy—will the beauty “desire her lover and will kiss him” (line 36).

Affirming that his only concern is his role as translator, Sarfati returns to his role as a mediator between the Jews and Christians in lines 55–56. He “arranges” his conversation—with the Jews and with the Christians?—for the benefit of his “brethren the Jews.” He encourages others not to fight against him in his role. These words hint that there were those in the Jewish community who did not trust him in representing the Jews before the Christians.

Sarfati—himself a Sephardic Jew—makes one more pointed reference to the situation of the Jews in Spain and Portugal in line 61, reminding them that “you remain in the midst of a burning conflagration.” The image of burning fires would again remind the Jews at that time of the fires of the Inquisition. With that reminder, Sarfati encourages his Jewish audience, “All as one make haste! Awake and turn aside! Observe, beloved, the war of lovers” (line 62). This poem is not a warning to individual lovers. Sarfati is speaking to a community and urges that community to act as one and with urgency. The Jewish community, according to Sarfati, needs to awake rapidly in order to turn aside from the influence, allure, and promises that the Christian community is offering them. They need to pay close attention to the reality that their existence is a war between two sets of religious promises and ideals and that they are living in the “war of lovers.” Thus Sarfati demonstrates his understanding of *Celestina* as a work warning a converso audience

against overt reliance on their newfound status as Christians, or, at the very least, he uses his introduction of that work as a coded message of caution to his own people.

## Conclusion

Although Sarfati took advantage of the great opportunities around him and chose to equip himself with all of the social, literary, scientific, and medical skills that would make him useful to the Christian society within which he lived, some of his Hebrew poetry appears to demonstrate a concern that the Jews would be unduly influenced by those opportunities. Using the coded language of Hebrew and biblical allusion, Sarfati sought to warn them against trusting too completely in the promises and proffered protection of the dominant culture that could seduce them away from their true faith. In the end, if the Jews chose to abandon their traditional faith, they would be destitute and despised. Written at a time when the theme of romantic love permeated the pages of Renaissance literature, allusions to the biblical theme of adulterous love as a symbol for betraying one's religious beliefs were especially useful. Not only did Sarfati employ that motif in much of his poetry, but the theme apparently also motivated—at least partially—his translation of the famous Spanish work *Celestina*. Throughout Sarfati's works, the continued power and relevance of the Hebrew language and of biblical themes can be seen still functioning in early Renaissance times as a force connecting the Jewish people across the borders of the various lands of the Diaspora.

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# Vicarious Baptism for the Dead: 1 Corinthians 15:29

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HANS CONZELMANN CALLED 1 Corinthians 15:29<sup>1</sup> “one of the most hotly disputed passages in the epistle [of 1 Corinthians].”<sup>2</sup> This verse, which mentions being baptized on behalf of the dead, has puzzled biblical commentators for centuries. Conzelmann affirms that exegetes of this verse have “run riot” and notes that there are at least two hundred different interpretations of this passage.<sup>3</sup> According to Gordon Fee, at least forty different explanations exist; he also maintains that “no one knows in fact what is going on.”<sup>4</sup> Commenting on this passage, Michael F. Hull notes that “the vast majority of exegetes and commentators hold that 15:29 is a reference to some form of vicarious baptism.”<sup>5</sup> In recent years, however,

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1. One of the most interesting things about 1 Corinthians 15:29, given the disputed nature of the passage, is the agreement in the textual tradition about how the passage reads in the Greek. The Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed.; Westcott and Hort’s *The New Testament in the Original Greek*; and Tischendorf’s *Novum Testamentum Graece* all give the same reading for this passage. Thus, for this paper, 1 Corinthians 15:29 refers to the Greek text as follows: Ἐπεὶ τί ποιήσουσιν οἱ βαπτίζομενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν; εἰ ὅλως νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται, τί καὶ βαπτίζονται ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν.

2. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 275.

3. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 276.

4. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 762–63.

5. Michael F. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 10–11; see 11n14 for a long list of examples of this kind of interpretation.

many scholars have attempted to understand 1 Corinthians 15:29 as something other than vicarious baptism, with Hull himself contributing the most thorough examination of the topic.<sup>6</sup> One reviewer of Hull's work wrote, "[Hull's] careful examination of the historical background, in particular, should lay to rest any notion that the passage concerns vicarious baptism."<sup>7</sup> Another reviewer declared, "The major contribution of [Hull's] study is to confute any view that Paul refers to some anomalous or aberrant practice of vicarious baptism."<sup>8</sup> In this paper I will review four recent attempts to understand 1 Corinthians 15:29 as something other than vicarious baptism and determine if the vicarious baptism interpretation has really been laid to rest.<sup>9</sup>

I will begin by reviewing the unique approach of William O. Walker, who agrees that vicarious baptism is the most obvious reading of 1 Corinthians 15:29 but claims the entire passage is a non-Pauline interpolation.<sup>10</sup> I will then examine the paper of Joel R. White, who assigns a symbolic meaning to the phrase "on behalf of the dead," thereby

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6. See, for example, Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 10–11; James E. Patrick, "Living Rewards for Dead Apostles: 'Baptised for the Dead' in 1 Corinthians 15.29," *New Testament Studies* 52 (2006): 71–85; John D. Reaume, "Another Look at 1 Corinthians 15:29, 'Baptized for the Dead,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152, no. 608 (1995): 457–75; William O. Walker, "1 Corinthians 15:29–34 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 84–103; and Joel R. White, "'Baptized on Account of the Dead': The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in Its Context," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116 (1997): 487–99.

7. Ronald D. Witherup, review of *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, by Michael F. Hull, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 150–51.

8. David E. Garland, review of *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, by Michael F. Hull, *Review of Biblical Literature* 3 (2006); see [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4900\\_5113.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4900_5113.pdf).

9. For a more complete analysis of the history of the interpretation of this verse, see Bernard M. Foschini, *Those Who Are Baptized for the Dead, 1 Cor. 15:29: An Exegetical Historical Dissertation* (Worcester, MA: Heffernan, 1951); Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*; and Mathias Rissi, *Die Taufe für die Toten: Ein Beitrag zur paulinischen Tauflehre* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1962).

10. Walker, "Non-Pauline Interpolation."

interpreting this passage as something other than vicarious baptism.<sup>11</sup> I will briefly examine some of the assumptions that James Patrick accepts, particularly focusing on his notion that “the dead” referred to in verse 15 are dead Christians. He thus concludes that vicarious baptism is not a viable interpretation. I will close with a detailed examination of Hull’s work.<sup>12</sup>

### William O. Walker: A non-Pauline interpolation

Walker’s thesis is simply stated in the title of his paper, “1 Corinthians 15:29–34 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation.” He believes that the passage in question does not originate with Paul and was a later insertion into the text. He bases his thesis on the following arguments:

1. Context: 1 Corinthians 15:29–34 is out of place in its current location in the letter. He argues that it breaks up the logic of Paul’s argument.<sup>13</sup>
2. Vocabulary: Walker argues that the vocabulary in this section is non-Pauline and points to another author.<sup>14</sup>
3. Content: Here Walker’s argument rests on the assumption that although the text is clearly speaking about vicarious baptism, Paul would not have approved of such a practice and therefore it must be non-Pauline.<sup>15</sup>
4. Self-contained unity of the verses: He states that the text holds up as an independent unit and is not dependent on the rest of the text.<sup>16</sup>
5. Textual variants: Walker recognizes that no textual evidence supports his claim that this is an interpolation but argues

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11. White, “Baptized on Account of the Dead.”

12. Patrick, “Living Rewards”; Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*.

13. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 88.

14. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 92.

15. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 94–95.

16. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 100.

that the lack of textual evidence does not invalidate his assertion.<sup>17</sup>

6. Walker argues that, taken together, these five points bolster his conclusion that this section is an interpolation.<sup>18</sup>

Walker is correct that his cumulative evidence helps support an interpolation argument, but his evidence is insufficient to reject the Pauline origin of 1 Corinthians 15:29.

Walker admits that the cohesiveness of 1 Corinthians 15:29–34 “does not prove the passage is an interpolation.”<sup>19</sup> This fourth point can only reinforce an already established argument. Likewise, the lack of textual evidence (point 5)—while not necessarily disproving his thesis—does not tip the scales in its favor. One cannot claim that one’s theory is true because there is no evidence for it! Thus arguments 4 and 5 are helpful only as confirming evidence if points 1, 2, and 3 establish a compelling case that 1 Corinthians 15:29–34 is a non-Pauline interpolation. If they do not, then points 4 and 5 are irrelevant.

Walker’s line of reasoning about vocabulary (point 2) is potentially compelling. If Walker could establish a significant percentage of unique words, that might strengthen his case. Walker finds that 38.46 percent of the vocabulary in this passage “appears to be not typically Pauline.”<sup>20</sup> Relevant to verse 29, however, Walker notes that *ὄλως* is the only atypical word, but even that is not unattested since it appears two other times in the Pauline epistles.<sup>21</sup> Substantially weakening his case, however, is the fact that both of these uses of *ὄλως* occur in 1 Corinthians (5:1 and 6:7). In sum, while Walker may present a compelling case that the vocabulary of verses 30–34 is not typically Pauline, he does not establish any reason to consider 1 Corinthians 15:29 as non-Pauline.

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17. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 101–2.

18. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 102.

19. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 100.

20. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 89.

21. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 89.

Thus, given that the textual evidence, the logical coherence, and the vocabulary arguments have little bearing on 1 Corinthians 15:29, Walker's thesis rests on content and context, two ideas that are closely related.

Regarding content, Walker writes, "Two items in the content of 1 Cor 15:29–34 are both surprising and perplexing and appear to constitute strong arguments against Pauline authorship."<sup>22</sup> One of these items, fighting with wild beasts in Ephesus, is outside the scope of this paper. The other, however, is baptism for the dead. Walker agrees that the "normal" rendering of this text is to understand it in reference to vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead. He also recognizes that those who have struggled against this interpretation have done so in vain and under the following logic:

1. The text appears to speak, without disapproval, of vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead.
2. It is highly unlikely, however, that Paul would have approved of such a practice. Therefore,
3. The text must be speaking of something other than vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead.<sup>23</sup>

Walker agrees with the assessment that such interpretations are little more than "examples of exegetical distress and caprice."<sup>24</sup> He then offers this alternative syllogism:

1. The text appears to speak, without disapproval, of vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead.
2. It is highly unlikely, however, that Paul would have approved of such a practice.
3. Therefore, the text is most likely non-Pauline in origin.<sup>25</sup>

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22. Walker, "Non-Pauline Interpolation," 92.

23. Walker, "Non-Pauline Interpolation," 94.

24. Walker, "Non-Pauline Interpolation," 94.

25. Walker, "Non-Pauline Interpolation," 95.

Walker, however, fails to establish that this is any less capricious. Both arguments assume the validity of the second premise: that Paul is unlikely to have approved of vicarious baptism. But why not? Walker quotes Fee's emphasis on Paul's teaching of "'justification by grace through faith' and of 'baptism as personal response to grace received.'"<sup>26</sup> He also cites J. Paul Sampley, who expresses disbelief in the idea of vicarious baptism within 1 Corinthians 15:29 because it "seems to suppose either that grace is transferable or that one can be a surrogate believer for another."<sup>27</sup> This, then, is the essence of Walker's argument against Paul's acceptance of vicarious baptism: grace cannot be transferred, and one has to accept Christ through faith to receive grace and then be baptized as a response to that faith.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the relationship between justification, faith, works, and sanctification within the theology of Paul. For simplicity's sake I will focus on one issue at hand: is there any evidence in the writings of Paul that grace or holiness is something that can be transferred from a believer to an unbeliever? If there is, then Walker's understanding of justification by faith is incomplete and flawed, and thus his assumption that Paul would object to the practice of vicarious baptism may not be accurate.

One argument in favor of transferable grace within Pauline theology is in 1 Corinthians 7:14, which explains that "the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy" (1 Corinthians 7:14 NRSV). The larger context of this passage is about marriage within the church; the issue concerns whether a Christian should remain married to a non-Christian—someone who has not responded to Christ. Paul's answer to the question is that they should remain married for the reason given in verse 14 cited above.

Commenting on this verse, Conzelmann avers, "It looks as if holiness is crassly regarded as a thing; it is transferable, without faith (and

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26. Walker, "Non-Pauline Interpolation," 93.

27. Walker, "Non-Pauline Interpolation," 93.

even baptism) being necessary.”<sup>28</sup> Stated in other words, Paul teaches that the sanctified state of believers in this life—that which removes them from the evil powers of the world—can be vicariously transferred to the nonbelievers of their household. According to Albert Schweitzer, “the unbelieving partner, through bodily connection with the believing, has a share in the latter’s being-in-Christ and thereby becomes with him a member of the Community of the Sanctified.”<sup>29</sup>

Obviously this transference is not the same as vicarious baptism, nor does it show that Paul would have approved of vicarious baptism. What it does establish is that Walker’s assumption that Paul does not see grace as something transferable is not a full picture of grace within 1 Corinthians: one who has not responded with faith to Christ can be sanctified and a partaker of Christ’s community through the faith of one’s spouse. While this does not prove that Paul would have accepted vicarious baptism, it is sufficient to show that Walker has not established his second assumption—“it is highly unlikely . . . that Paul would have approved of such a practice.”<sup>30</sup>

Walker attempts to demonstrate that 1 Corinthians 15:29–34 is a non-Pauline interpolation. I have already shown how his arguments about textual evidence, logical coherence, and vocabulary<sup>31</sup> do not strengthen his thesis; his argument rests on content and context. Though his argument about content is based on the assumption that Paul would not have supported vicarious baptism, I have shown that he has not established that claim.<sup>32</sup> I do not need to prove that Paul would have accepted vicarious baptism. It is enough to show that Walker’s reason for why Paul would have rejected it—that grace cannot be transferred—is contradicted by Paul’s own teaching elsewhere in this epistle. Therefore, lacking any reason to

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28. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 121.

29. Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (London: Black, 1931), 128.

30. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 95.

31. At least as it pertains to 1 Corinthians 15:29.

32. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 95.

assume that Paul would have rejected vicarious baptism, Walker's second assumption is not reliable. Therefore his argument based on content fails.

Thus Walker's only remaining argument that 1 Corinthians 15:29–34 is a non-Pauline interpolation regards context. He claims that 1 Corinthians 15:29–34 is an insertion that breaks up the logical flow of 1 Corinthians 15 as a whole.<sup>33</sup> The problem with this claim is simple: Walker admits that he does not understand what the practice of baptism for the dead was or what it could possibly mean.<sup>34</sup> Since he does not profess to understand the logic of or reasoning for the practice, how can he claim that the passage does not rationally follow 1 Corinthians 15:28? Schweitzer, in his book *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, gives a convincing argument about the logic of 1 Corinthians 15:29 and how it fits into the eschatological nature of the preceding verses.<sup>35</sup> In fact he calls it “the test case for the right understanding” of all the Pauline sacraments and how they function in the eschatology of Paul.<sup>36</sup> White, in his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29, claims, “Far from being the weakest link in the argument of chapter 15, v. 29 becomes an important pivot upon which the argument of the chapter turns.”<sup>37</sup> Whether Schweitzer or White is correct in describing the logic of 1 Corinthians 15 is not the point; the critical issue is that Walker argues that 1 Corinthians 15:29–34 is a non-Pauline interpolation because it does not flow logically within the context of the chapter. In order for Walker to build his argument on context, he needs to prove that this passage cannot make sense. He has not proven that. Many interpreters have seen a logical flow within the passage, but Walker has not shown why they are incorrect or why their reasoning is unsound.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, Walker's assertion that 1 Corinthians 15:29–34 is an interpolation, particularly as it pertains to verse 29, rests chiefly on his

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33. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 88.

34. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 93–95.

35. Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul*, 283–87.

36. Schweitzer, *Mysticism of Paul*, 283.

37. White, “Baptized on Account of the Dead,” 499.

38. In my conclusion, I will argue for a logical flow in 1 Corinthians 15 that makes sense of vicarious baptism.



understanding of content and context, since I have shown that his other arguments having to do with a lack of textual evidence and some coherence within verses 29–33 are not valid. Because the issues raised by non-Pauline vocabulary do not exist in verse 29, this argument also does not strengthen his case. Pertaining to content, I have shown that Walker did not establish his second presupposition—that surely Paul would have disapproved of vicarious baptism—but took this as a given. Regarding context, I have argued that where Walker sees no logical flow others have seen a logic that he has not refuted. Thus Walker’s attempt to explain 1 Corinthians 15:29 as a non-Pauline interpolation remains unconvincing and is clearly motivated by his unproven assumption that Paul would have disapproved of vicarious baptism for the dead.

### Joel R. White: The figuratively dead

Turning my attention to White’s article, I review his claim for the following “correct interpretation”<sup>39</sup> of the verse under discussion:

Otherwise what will those do who are being baptized on account of the dead (that is, the dead, figuratively speaking; that is, the apostles)? For if truly dead persons are not raised, why at all are people being baptized on account of them (that is, the apostles)?<sup>40</sup>

To establish this interpretation, White, relying heavily on Scott J. Hafemann, argues convincingly that Paul sees suffering as a central characteristic of his apostleship.<sup>41</sup> The four passages he cites also discuss death (1 Corinthians 4:9; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 4:7–12; 6:1–10). Therefore, White asserts that “being given over to death” is a “metonymy for suffering.”<sup>42</sup> He then concludes that since suffering is what it means to be an apostle and since being “given over to death” is the same as suffering,

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39. White, “Baptized on Account of the Dead,” 494.

40. White, “Baptized on Account of the Dead,” 494.

41. White, “Baptized on Account of the Dead,” 495–96.

42. White, “Baptized on Account of the Dead,” 495.

therefore “the dead” (οἱ νεκροὶ) can be a metonymy for the apostles. Thus his parenthetical addition to 1 Corinthians 15:29: “what will those do who are being baptized on account of the dead (that is, the dead, figuratively speaking; that is, the apostles)?”<sup>43</sup>

The problem with White’s analysis lies in his final step: being given over to death is not the same as being dead. The descriptions that Paul uses, whether of a person sentenced to death (1 Corinthians 4:9) or of a prisoner being marched in a Roman triumphal procession (2 Corinthians 2:14), include images of people who are facing certain death but are yet alive. They are not metaphorically dead but are metaphorically dying. In one of the passages White cites, Paul specifically uses the participle οἱ ζῶντες (the living ones) to identify himself (2 Corinthians 4:11). In another, 2 Corinthians 6:9, Paul is dying but identifies himself as being alive, ὡς ἀποθνήσκοντες καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶμεν. Paul never uses “the dead” to refer to himself or the apostles. On the contrary he calls them “the living.” The apostles, then, are living and suffering for Christ, even dying for Christ, but they are not “the dead.”<sup>44</sup>

White expects the reader of 1 Corinthians to understand that τῶν νεκρῶν in 1 Corinthians 15:29a refers to the apostles in a metaphorical way although the word has not held that meaning at any previous point in the epistle. As stated above, White uses four scriptures to establish this argument, but three of them are from 2 Corinthians and would have been inaccessible to the original audience of 1 Corinthians.<sup>45</sup> Thus

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43. White, “Baptized on Account of the Dead,” 494.

44. There are thirty-five references to the word *dead* (νεκρός) in the undisputed Pauline epistles. Thirteen of these are in 1 Corinthians 15. While in the wider Pauline corpus, especially in Romans, *dead* can have a metaphorical meaning, specifically about being dead to sin as opposed to being alive in Christ (Romans 8:10, for example), these metaphorical references never take the word *dead* to mean the apostles. Additionally, all occurrences of the word νεκρός in 1 Corinthians 15 refer to the literal dead.

45. Paul possibly could have explained this metaphorical use of “the dead” to mean an apostle during his personal ministry to the Corinthians or in some earlier, now lost letter. If that were the case, however, it does not explain why Paul has to explain the metaphorical connection between suffering and apostleship in 2 Corinthians. The fact that Paul goes to such lengths to explain the relationship between suffering and

the original reader of this epistle would have been able to use only 1 Corinthians 4:9 to establish that connection:

δοκῶ γάρ, ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀποστόλους ἐσχάτους ἀπέδειξεν ὡς ἐπιθανατίους, ὅτι θέατρον ἐγενήθημεν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ ἀγγέλοις καὶ ἀνθρώποις.

For I think God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. (1 Corinthians 4:9 NRSV)

White does not establish why ἐπιθανάτιος (“as though sentenced to death”) should be synonymous with νεκρός (“the dead”). As Hull puts it, “Whereas White spends pages explaining how Paul is identified as an apostle . . . he does not explain . . . how the dead of 15:29a are to be identified with the apostles.”<sup>46</sup> To further complicate White’s argument, νεκρός is used twice in 1 Corinthians 15:29, and he assigns a different meaning to each usage: one metaphorical and one literal.

According to White, the contextual clue for the dual meanings of “the dead” arises from the use of ὄλωσ. White wants ὄλωσ to modify νεκροί—to give it the sense of “the actually dead.” This then serves to indicate that the reference to the dead earlier in the verse is not to the actual dead but to the metaphorical dead. The reader is then to deduce from the reference in verse 31, “I die daily,” that Paul specifically and the apostles generally are the metaphorically dead.<sup>47</sup>

The problem with this reasoning is that this chapter is about the *actual* resurrection, the *real* raising of the dead. By having ὄλωσ modify νεκροί rather than ἐγείρονται, the verse loses the force of this argument. Paul is not teaching that the *actual dead people* will rise, but rather that the dead people will *actually rise*. Once one understands that ὄλωσ modifies *rise*, there is no longer any reason to believe that the dead refer

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apostleship in 2 Corinthians points to the fact that the Corinthians did not understand this principle.

46. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 47.

47. White, “Baptized on Account of the Dead,” 493–94.

to anything other than the actual dead (as it does every other time in this epistle).

One scholar noted:

White contends that the same word is used in the same sentence to mean entirely different things. . . . White has reached beyond the pale. On account of this distressing lacuna, White's reading seems less than credible. . . . Ultimately, White's reading, jerry-built around a not-so-subtle ellipsis, which identifies some νεκροί with living apostles and some with dead believers, is also untenable.<sup>48</sup>

I agree with this assessment. While White does show a connection between suffering and even metaphorical dying and apostleship, he fails to demonstrate how the metaphorical dying come to be called the dead. His attempt to use ὄλως as the contextual indicator is unsatisfying because it undermines the force of Paul's larger argument throughout 1 Corinthians 15 that the dead people will actually arise. White's proposed interpretation should be rejected.

### James E. Patrick: Resurrection of believers

Patrick argues that the practice described in 1 Corinthians 15:29 was "an expression of allegiance to honour not only Christ but also the 'patron' apostle in whose testimony the convert believed."<sup>49</sup> What he means is that some apostles who had been known to the Corinthians had died. Their teachings, however, lived on and continued to attract believers, and people would get baptized to honor these dead apostles. According to Patrick's theory, the apostles could not receive that honor unless they were resurrected someday. Therefore, the practice of being baptized on account of the testimonies of the dead apostles in order to honor them makes sense only if the dead are raised. Knowing this

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48. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 47.

49. Patrick, "Living Rewards," 71.

background, Paul uses this as a compelling argument in favor of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:29.<sup>50</sup>

To support this interpretation, Patrick relies on ten criteria developed by earlier exegetes. Particularly relevant to this study are four of them: criterion number three dealing with the identity of “the dead,”<sup>51</sup> and criteria numbers four, six, and seven, which discuss the meaning of *for*.<sup>52</sup> Patrick principally rejects an interpretation of vicarious baptism for the dead based upon these criteria.

The third criterion is really just the argument of Joachim Jeremias that identifies the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29a as dead Christians and not pagans.<sup>53</sup> Jeremias’s work has been accepted by a number of scholars and deserves consideration here.<sup>54</sup> He notes:

In the whole chapter the Apostle is carefully distinguishing between νεκροί and οἱ νεκροί, νεκροί without an article denoting the dead in general (vv. 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, 29b, 32), οἱ νεκροί denoting the deceased Christians (vv. 29a, 35, 42, 52).<sup>55</sup>

He bases his assessment on the work of Maria Raeder, who argues that the dead must refer to dead believers because the context indicates that as the only possibility.<sup>56</sup> I disagree, however, with this conclusion.

John D. Reaume builds on the works of Jeremias and Raeder and notes, “Grammar suggests that the articular construction τῶν νεκρῶν refers to a specific group of dead individuals (with the anarthrous noun

50. Patrick, “Living Rewards,” 71, 79–80, 82, 85.

51. Patrick, “Living Rewards,” 74.

52. Patrick, “Living Rewards,” 75–78.

53. Patrick, “Living Rewards,” 74.

54. J. K. Howard, “Baptism for the Dead: A Study of 1 Corinthians 15:29,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 37/3 (1965): 141; Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 30, 104; Patrick, “Living Rewards,” 74; and Reaume, “Another Look,” 462–63. For the source of Jeremias’s ideas, see also Maria Raeder, “Vikariatstaufe in 1 Cor 15:29,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 46/3–4 (1955): 258–60.

55. Joachim Jeremias, “Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. XV:50),” *New Testament Studies* 2/3 (1956): 155.

56. Raeder, “Vikariatstaufe,” 260.

νεκροί referring to the dead in general).<sup>57</sup> This varies from the explanation of Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, who say that the article often distinguishes between the concept of the dead and the collective dead.<sup>58</sup> Reaume, however, states that “Paul seems to have been distinguishing between the dead in general (vv. 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, 21 and 29b) and Christians who have died (vv. 29a, 35, 42, and 52).”<sup>59</sup>

Raeder, to support her interpretation that the specific dead must refer to dead Christians, cites verses 18 and 23.<sup>60</sup> She claims these verses are relevant because they provide the immediate context of verse 29. For Reaume, the evidence that the dead are Christians comes from later passages in which the word νεκροί, coupled with the article, describes a “heavenly body,” “a spiritual body,” and a body “raised in power.” These phrases must describe what the resurrection of the believers will be like and thus indicate that, within 1 Corinthians 15, the use of νεκροί with the article indicates believers.<sup>61</sup>

What Reaume fails to take into account are the doubts and questions about the resurrection in Corinth: David Garland points out that the Corinthians “failed to comprehend how an earthly body that is physical and perishable can be made suitable for a heavenly realm that is spiritual and imperishable.”<sup>62</sup> The Corinthians were operating under a duality of the physical and the spiritual realm that made the idea of a physical resurrection seem impossible.<sup>63</sup> First Corinthians 15:35–58 contains Paul’s response to this confusion. His answer is that this earthly, or terrestrial, body will be replaced by a celestial, or heavenly, body (1 Corinthians 15:40). Just as the body of the seed that goes into the ground is different from the body of the wheat that comes out of

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57. Reaume, “Another Look,” 470.

58. Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 133.

59. Reaume, “Another Look,” 470.

60. Raeder, “Vikariatstaufe,” 260.

61. Reaume, “Another Look,” 470–71.

62. Garland, review of *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 3.

63. Garland, review of *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 3.

the ground, so shall the bodies buried in the ground be different from the type of body that resurrects (1 Corinthians 15:37–38). That body was corruptible, and the new body will be incorruptible. That body was natural, and the new body will be spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:42–44). This transformation is performed by the power of God.

The point is that the “heavenly,” “spiritual” body “raised in power” that Reaume describes is Paul’s description of all resurrected bodies. It is not the dichotomy between the resurrected Christian and the non-believer that is being discussed but the dichotomy between earthly and resurrected bodies. To assume that the resurrection applies only to those who died in Christ is to assume a theology that directly contradicts the teachings of Paul.

In 1 Corinthians 15:22 Paul states, ὡςπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν, οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζῶσοιθηθήσονται. I translate this scripture the same way as the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV): “for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.” One commentary notes about this verse:

The argument, that πάντες must have the same meaning in both clauses; πάντες in the first clause must mean the whole human race; therefore πάντες in the second clause must mean the whole human race, is somewhat precarious. The meaning may be, “As it is in Adam that all who die die, so it is in Christ that all who are made alive are made alive.” It is still more precarious to argue that “in Christ shall all be made alive” implies that all mankind will at last be saved. The meaning may be that all will be raised, will be quickened, which is not the same as saying that all will be saved.<sup>64</sup>

I find the initial interpretation of πάντες difficult. There is no reason (other than preconceived theological ones) to restrict the meaning of the word *all*. The structure is clear: all people die through Adam; all people will be made alive in Christ. I do, however, agree that saying all will be made alive is not the same as saying all will be saved. Paul

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64. Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Clark, 1911), 353.

promises a universal resurrection but not a universal salvation. This teaching is not unique to 1 Corinthians; the same teaching can be found in Romans.

In Romans 5:11–17 Paul outlines two effects on humanity brought about by Adam and overcome by Christ: death and sin. He then concludes with this statement:

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18–19 NRSV)

“Justification and life” (δικαίωσιν ζωῆς) in verse 18 is literally the “justification of life”—“life” (ζωῆς) being a genitive of purpose.<sup>65</sup> Adam brought the condemnation of death to all; Christ justifies all to life. This represents a universal escape from the power of death. Although disobedience has brought sin to many, many will be made righteous through Christ, thus indicating that Christ's salvation is not universal. These verses in Romans parallel Paul's teachings of a universal resurrection but a limited salvation.<sup>66</sup>

Logically, when Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15 that in Christ all are made alive, that is exactly what he means—everybody. Paul then clearly teaches that this universal resurrection does not occur all at once: “Ἐκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι” (“but each in their own order,” 1 Corinthians 15:23). This universal resurrection is ordered. Jesus will come forth first followed by those who belong to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:23). Paul further explains how Christ will hand the kingdom over to his

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65. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, in *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 421, argues that genitive of purpose is one possible interpretation.

66. Although not necessarily evidence of what Paul actually believed, the book of Acts does attribute to Paul the teaching of universal resurrection, though not universal salvation; see Acts 24:15, which speaks of a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. John 5:29 also teaches that a universal resurrection for the just and the unjust was part of early Christian theology.



Father after the last enemy—namely death—has been conquered. Then God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24–28).

This discussion about universal resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 is the *immediate* context of 1 Corinthians 15:29. Raeder has argued that “the dead” of 15:29 should be understood as Christians, based on the immediate context of verses 18 and 23.<sup>67</sup> Jeremias, J. K. Howard, Reaume, and Patrick have accepted her conclusions. I have shown, however, that the verses immediately preceding verse 29 discuss universal resurrection. The arthrous and anarthrous constructions of νεκροί within 1 Corinthians 15 distinguish between the concept of the dead and the collective dead, not between the Christian believer and the rest of the dead. This usage is exactly what one should expect from the grammar itself.<sup>68</sup>

In his third criterion, Patrick rejects a reading of vicarious baptism, in part because he has accepted Jeremias’s argument that the dead being referred to are dead Christians. He does not present any new arguments for this but relies on Jeremias, Raeder, and Reaume. Based on this evidence, he concludes that “thus the context . . . undermines interpretations such as . . . the practice of [being] . . . baptized vicariously for dead ancestors.”<sup>69</sup> Since, however, 1 Corinthians 15 deals with universal resurrection and is not limited to the resurrection of believers, Patrick’s conclusions therefore do not follow.

Based on additional criteria, Patrick further disagrees with a reading of vicarious baptism because he rejects the meaning of ὑπέρ as “on behalf of.”<sup>70</sup> He presents two reasons for rejecting this interpretation: first, Patrick assumes that Paul would not have approved of such a practice. He then claims, “If Paul were to cite a practice which he did not agree with to support his argument for the resurrection, his opponents could justly accuse him of theological inconsistency. Therefore interpretations involving vicarious baptism ‘on behalf of’ the dead . . . do

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67. Raeder, “Vikariatstaufe,” 260.

68. Blass, Debrunner, and Funk, *Greek Grammar*, 133. See specifically entry 254, column 2, point (2).

69. Patrick, “Living Rewards,” 74.

70. Patrick, “Living Rewards,” 76.

not fit.”<sup>71</sup> Because Patrick gives virtually no justification as to why Paul would reject such a practice, I find it difficult to argue against such a claim. I will allow my response to the similar assumption made by Walker to stand here.

Second, Patrick rejects a meaning of ὑπέρ as “on behalf of” because he finds no evidence for the practice of vicarious baptism:

It would be expected that a baptismal practice existing in Corinth in the mid-first century CE would have parallels or precedents of some sort which may be cited as evidence for this type of baptism, whether Jewish, pagan, orthodox Christian or heretical religious practice.<sup>72</sup>

Since this argument is very similar to Hull’s, I will respond to it below.

### Michael F. Hull: The dearth of evidence

In recent years the major work dedicated to the topic of 1 Corinthians 15:29 is Michael F. Hull’s *Baptism on Account of the Dead*.<sup>73</sup> In this volume Hull examines the history of interpreting this text.<sup>74</sup> He also does a close reading of the meaning of the verse itself and concludes:

We cannot say, solely from the literary context, what 15:29 means. On the one hand, 15:29 could read as a reference to vicarious baptism. On the other hand, 15:29 could read as a reference to ordinary baptism. Yet, we do know that 15:29 must mean one or the other. It cannot mean both.<sup>75</sup>

Hull explores the historical context of Corinth for evidence of vicarious baptism and deduces that “something like vicarious baptism was nowhere to be found. We concluded that without any historical

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71. Patrick, “Living Rewards,” 77–78.

72. Patrick, “Living Rewards,” 78.

73. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*.

74. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 7–50.

75. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 112.

foundation whatsoever, vicarious baptism was not a viable interpretation of 15:29.”<sup>76</sup> One reviewer wrote, “[Hull’s] careful examination of the historical background, in particular, should lay to rest any notion that the passage concerns vicarious baptism.”<sup>77</sup> Given this “dearth of an exterior or interior historical parallel,”<sup>78</sup> Hull proceeds to create his own interpretation for the text based on an understanding of ordinary baptism and not on vicarious baptism.

Hull acknowledges that his reading contradicts the majority interpretation of this text. Most scholars have come to the conclusion—which Conzelmann labels the “normal” understanding of the text—that this verse speaks of vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead. While this practice may sound strange to us today, it is not without its ancient precedents.

Richard E. DeMaris writes:

Both ancient Greek and Roman societies devoted considerable resources to the dead, in part for fear of them but primarily because the living were thought to be obligated to help the deceased become integrated into the realm of the dead. . . . Many of these practices appear to reflect a belief that the dead could benefit directly from actions performed on their behalf, particularly at the grave.<sup>79</sup>

One of the earliest examples of the living doing something to benefit the dead can be found in Plato’s *Republic*:

Begging priests and soothsayers go to rich men’s doors and make them believe that they by means of sacrifices and incantations have accumulated a treasure of power from the gods that can expiate and cure with pleasurable festivals any misdeed of a man or his ancestors.<sup>80</sup>

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76. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 256.

77. Witherup, review of *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 150–51.

78. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 37.

79. Richard E. DeMaris, “Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:29): Insights from Archaeology and Anthropology,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995): 663.

80. Plato, *Republic* II 364B–C, ed. and trans. Paul Shorey, Loeb Classical Library 237 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 133.

Here Plato betrays knowledge of a practice among some groups that performing sacrifices and certain festivals could expiate not only for their sins but also for the sins of their ancestors, which practice is more relevant to this study. Thus the idea that the sacrifice of one could have an atoning effect on the life of a dead ancestor is an ancient belief that dates back to at least Plato. Plato goes on to explain that the books of Musaeus and Orpheus teach that this vicarious work has an effect on people beyond the grave.<sup>81</sup> Erwin Rohde explains:

Participation in the Orphic ceremonial enables the descendant to obtain from the gods “pardon and purification” for his departed ancestors who may be paying the penalty in the next world for misdeeds of the past.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to these Orphic rights, Karl Barth informs us that “the Greek world was also acquainted with vicarious Dionysian orgies for the uninitiated dead.”<sup>83</sup> Conzelmann associates Ovid’s *Fasti* with these Dionysian rituals.<sup>84</sup> Thus one can see that the concept of performing a ritual on behalf of the dead was not unheard of in the Hellenistic world.

Nor was this practice unheard of in the Jewish world. According to 2 Maccabees 12:43–44 (NRSV),

He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. In doing this he acted very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead [ὕπὲρ νεκρῶν]. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.

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81. Plato, *Republic* II 364E–365A.

82. Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, trans. W. B. Hillis (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), 344.

83. Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H. J. Stenning (New York: Revell, 1933), 174.

84. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 275.

Jeffrey A. Trumbower, in his work *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity*, comments on this quotation from 2 Maccabees:

From this one learns nothing about the historical Judas's views in 164 BCE. Rather, one gains access either to the views of Jason of Cyrene (modern Libya) . . . or to the author who epitomized his work. Jason's five volumes, now lost, were condensed into one volume (now known as 2 Maccabees) by an anonymous epitomizer at some time in the late second century or early first century BCE. Jason, the anonymous epitomizer, or both, thought that Judas's collection for the sacrifice was for the posthumous salvation of the individual sinners.<sup>85</sup>

Most relevant to our current discussion is the view expressed by either Jason or the epitomizer about the resurrection. The writer uses this story to prove the reality of the resurrection: these people do something “for the dead,” ὑπὲρ νεκρῶν. However, if the dead were not to rise again, it would be foolish to pray for them. Paul applies this same logic and language in 1 Corinthians 15.<sup>86</sup> This demonstrates that at least some Jews from the first century BCE believed in doing vicarious works for the dead. This answers both Patrick's and Hull's claim that there should be some type of historical precedent—there is, within both the Hellenistic and the Jewish background of Paul's world.

Hull is not unaware of these references, but he denies that they provide any evidence for vicarious baptism. He acknowledges, “That is not to say, however, that there are no general parallels in terms of some form of posthumous salvation for the dead, even dead Pagans, in Paul, the NT, or the early Church, . . . but it is to say that there is nothing quite like vicarious baptism.”<sup>87</sup>

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85. Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 27.

86. The correlations between the logic and language of 1 Corinthians 15:29 and 2 Maccabees 12:43–44 are currently noted by the NA28.

87. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 37.

Hull wishes to draw a line between vicarious baptism and other vicarious works, offerings, or prayers for the dead. He bases his conclusions on that distinction, although it appears to be arbitrary. Clearly Paul's Jewish and Hellenistic background provides precedents for the idea of vicarious acts on behalf of the dead. Why would a pagan converting to Paul's Christianity not bring with him the Orphic ritual of performing sacrifices and incarnations on behalf of the dead and transfer that onto the Christian ordinance of baptism? Why would a Jewish follower of Paul not adapt the temple practice of sacrificing on behalf of the dead to the ritual of baptism? Once the practice of vicarious acts on behalf of the dead has been established in the time and culture of Paul, which Hull accepts, on what historical evidence does one rule out baptism for the dead? Although Hull argues that "something like vicarious baptism" is nowhere to be found in Paul's culture, his thesis requires a very narrow definition of the phrase "something like" in order to be true.<sup>88</sup> Hull defines vicarious baptism as "living persons . . . [being] baptized in the place of dead unbaptized persons . . . to secure the (presumed) benefits of baptism for those who die without baptism."<sup>89</sup> This is strikingly similar to the practice described in 2 Maccabees: A living person provides a sin offering on behalf of a dead person unable to perform that offering, the purpose of which is to secure for the dead person the (presumed) benefits of that offering. True, this is not vicarious *baptism*, but it is certainly "something like" vicarious baptism.

To review, Hull argues that the text of 1 Corinthians 15:29 could support a reading of vicarious baptism.<sup>90</sup> He then rejects such a reading because he "made a concerted effort to find some semblance of a custom to ground a reading of vicarious baptism."<sup>91</sup> But Hull's assertion that "something like vicarious baptism was nowhere to be found" in Paul's world must be rejected.<sup>92</sup> I have shown pagan and Jewish practices, as

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88. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 256.

89. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 10.

90. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 256.

91. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 256.

92. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 256.

well as early Christian practices and beliefs, in which the custom of vicarious baptism may be grounded.

The question of what is to become of those who died before Christ's appearance is one that engaged early Christian writers, many of whom gave various speculative answers within their texts. One idea was that Christ himself, after his death and before the resurrection, taught and baptized some of the dead. This view is found in the *Epistle of the Apostles*, an early Christian text from around "the third quarter of the second century."<sup>93</sup> In this text Jesus descends into the underworld and visits Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He invites them to travel from the underworld into heaven, but before they can make that journey he gives them "the right hand of the baptism of life and forgiveness and pardon for all wickedness."<sup>94</sup> Trumbower explains, "Here, the righteous of the Old Testament were not perfect, but needed forgiveness and pardon as well as baptism."<sup>95</sup> This text testifies of a concept within Christianity that the dead needed to be baptized in order to reach heaven.

In the *Shepherd of Hermas*, it is not Jesus who baptizes the dead but rather the dead apostles who perform that function. In that text a man has seen a vision of a tower, and an angelic messenger interprets the vision for him. As a part of this vision, the man has seen forty stones coming up out of the water and asks what they mean:

The apostles and teachers, who preached the name of the Son of God, continued preaching, only now to those who had fallen asleep before them, and it was they who gave them the seal through preaching. This is why they descended into the water and rose up with them again.<sup>96</sup>

Earlier the text explains that the "seal" is baptism.<sup>97</sup>

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93. J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 556.

94. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 573.

95. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead*, 48.

96. *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Similitude* 9.16.5.

97. *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Similitude* 9.16.2–4; Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead*, 48.

These Christian texts highlight a belief in the necessity of baptism and that even those righteous fathers who had died without Christ's baptism would require that ordinance. Granted, these texts do not seem to refer to vicarious ordinances; the living are not doing anything to benefit the dead. Other texts, however, do support the idea of vicarious works for the dead. Trumbower documents several of these and emphasizes how the righteous pray for or petition God on behalf of the dead and in so doing move them from torment to a happy state.<sup>98</sup> These texts document a belief in the posthumous salvation of the pagan through prayers or other actions of the believers.

The *Pistis Sophia* is one example from early Christianity of a text that supports a belief in vicarious work by a believer for a nonbeliever. This text specifically states that the Christian must perform a vicarious ordinance on behalf of the sinner. In the passage in question Mary asks Jesus a question about what can be done by someone who has performed all the "mysteries" for themselves but has a kinsman who has not and has died. Mary specifically wants to know how to help that dead kinsman inherit the (Gnostic) light kingdom. Jesus responds by telling her that in order to save a dead kinsman a person must repeat the same mystery that saved him or her but this time must think of the person who is dead.<sup>99</sup> Here the text clearly teaches that vicarious ordinances must be performed by the living for the dead.

In addition to these primary texts, early Christian literature gives secondary accounts of baptism for the dead. These are chiefly reported by church fathers as the heretical works of the gnostics or other "unorthodox" groups. Hull notes that Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Epiphanius, and Ambrosiaster all discuss vicarious work on behalf of the dead as a continuing practice among some (albeit heretical) Christians but then accepts Jeremias's claim that "the gnostic vicarious baptisms, which are mentioned in the patristic literature, are of no help for the understanding of our verse [1 Corinthians 15:29] because they

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98. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead*, 49–52, 56–90.

99. *Pistis Sophia* 3.325–27.



evidently have their origin in a misinterpretation of our verse itself.”<sup>100</sup> The truth is that we simply do not know the relationship between these Gnostic practices and this verse. They may have derived from a “misinterpretation” of this verse, but the only evidence we have of that is the writings of the church fathers, which are clearly not objective voices.

These patristic sources support the reality that a concern for the dead specifically and vicarious baptism in particular are not unique to Corinth and did not disappear from history. Whether one practice derived from the other or whether they arose independently is not historically established. Hull argues that if one accepted vicarious baptism in Corinth one would have to explain why the practice disappeared almost as soon as it was invented.<sup>101</sup> This, however, is not an accurate picture of the ancient world—vicarious baptism did not suddenly disappear in ancient Christianity. The patristic evidence Hull himself cites proves that the practice continued on for centuries. Jeffrey Trumbower and David L. Paulsen (with several assistants) have investigated this subject and have catalogued vicarious baptism and work for the dead in early Christianity.<sup>102</sup>

Hull wishes to ignore all this evidence because it stems from so-called heretical groups, but as scholars have argued, “The modern methodology of historical research requires us to examine the historicity of the practices without prejudice inherent in labels from one’s enemies.”<sup>103</sup> These patristic citations demonstrate that the practice of baptism for the dead did not disappear from sight almost immediately. The claim

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100. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 42.

101. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 223.

102. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead*; David L. Paulsen, Roger D. Cook, and Kendel Christensen, “The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19/1 (2010): 56–77; David L. Paulsen and Brock M. Mason, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19/2 (2010): 22–49; David L. Paulsen, Kendel J. Christensen, and Martin Pulido, “Redeeming the Dead: Tender Mercies, Turning of Hearts, and Restoration of Authority,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20/1 (2011): 28–51; and David L. Paulsen, Judson Burton, Kendel J. Christensen, and Martin Pulido, “Redemption of the Dead: Continuing Revelation after Joseph Smith,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20/2 (2011): 52–69.

103. Paulsen and Mason, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity,” 43.

that these writings are a “misinterpretation” of 1 Corinthians 15:29 has more to do with the controversies of orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity than with the practices in Corinth during the time of Paul.

In sum, Hull admits that the wording of 1 Corinthians 15:29 could support vicarious baptism, but he rejects such a reading for three main reasons:

1. “There is a dearth of an exterior or interior historical parallel. Except for the rare patristic secondary references, . . . nowhere in the history of early Christianity do we find anyone baptizing in such a fashion or writing thereof. Nowhere in intertestamental Judaism or the pagan religions of late antiquity is there anything comparable to vicarious baptism.”
2. “There is a complete lack of biblical parallel. Such a custom is nowhere alluded to in the Bible.”
3. “Such a reading is a complete rupture within the context of 1 Corinthians 15:29–34.”<sup>104</sup>

To answer his first point I have argued that some practices are *comparable* to vicarious baptism. A member of a faith tradition performing a ritual for a dead person in order to improve his or her standing in the afterlife is exactly *comparable* to vicarious baptism. Only the ritual is different—the primary ritual of Judaism (temple sacrifice) or the rituals of the various mystery religions are substituted by the ritual of Christian baptism. With this direct comparison, the underlying theology is the same.

Hull is too dismissive of what he calls “rare patristic secondary references.” He simply dismisses the numerous historical examples of people being baptized for the dead because he deems the evidence “heretical.” The modern equivalent of Hull’s argument would be to discuss baptism for the dead today. If one were to assert the claim that no Christian group practices baptism for the dead today, this would be a polemical argument. Millions of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints both consider themselves Christians and believe

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104. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 37–38.

in baptism for the dead. Millions of other Christians, however, do not consider the Latter-day Saints to be Christians and do not believe in baptism for the dead. So do Christians practice baptism for the dead? If a historian were to look at the practice today one would be amiss to claim that “nowhere in the history of [present] Christianity do we find anyone baptizing in such fashion.” Indeed, a group that considers themselves Christians and baptizes in behalf of the dead provides evidence for the modern-day practice. Likewise, in ancient Christianity evidence points to groups of people (not just one) who considered themselves Christians and practiced baptism for the dead. Hull is incorrect when he maintains a lack of evidence for the practice of baptism for the dead. He knows he is wrong, but he dismisses the evidence because he rejects the practitioners.

In addition, Hull downplays these sources because they are “rare,” but as Tobias Nicklas notes in his review of Hull’s work, the counter-argument to this claim is that our picture of early Christianity is by no means complete.<sup>105</sup> To dismiss something as rare assumes that one has all the pieces of the puzzle. We simply do not have that much information about early Christianity.

Hull’s second claim is biased toward canon. We have seen evidence in the *Pistis Sophia* for vicarious works and for similar practices in the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Epistle of the Apostles*. Why should these books be given any less historical weight than the Bible, especially since the determination of canon was made by the same group that decided vicarious baptism was heretical and argued against the Marcionites and other groups?

The modern equivalent of our earlier example would be to examine only the literature of non-LDS Christians and to conclude that no scripture supports baptism for the dead. If one were to examine the canon of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, one would find scriptural support for the practice. Canon is defined by a given group,

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105. Tobias Nicklas, review of *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection*, by Michael F. Hull, *Review of Biblical Literature* 3 (2006); see [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4900\\_5114.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4900_5114.pdf).

and thus to limit one's authoritative texts to the Bible is to reflect only one view of early Christianity and ignore other ancient evidence.

Hull's first two arguments fail because they do not account for comparable rituals to vicarious baptism, because they fail to give weight to the historical evidence of so-called heretical groups, and because Hull gives bias to the Bible. His third argument fails for the same reason that Walker's did before him: many exegetes have been able to make sense of 1 Corinthians 15:29 without seeing any logical rupture.<sup>106</sup>

## Conclusion

Having spent much time examining this issue, I have determined that the majority of modern exegetes who reject a reading of vicarious baptism in 1 Corinthians 15:29 do so for the following reasons:

First, they accept the argument of Raeder and Jeremias that "the dead" in 1 Corinthians 15:29a refers to dead Christians. I have argued that a closer reading of 1 Corinthians 15 shows that Paul is arguing for a universal resurrection and that Jeremias and Raeder are mistaken.

Second, many reject this reading because they claim a lack of evidence that such a practice ever existed. Borrowing on the work of Trumbower, Paulsen, and others, I have shown that several early Christian groups practiced baptism for the dead and that Jewish and pagan groups performed comparable ordinances on behalf of the dead within their tradition.

Third, and probably most important—although often unstated—most modern exegetes who deny that 1 Corinthians 15:29 is about vicarious baptism do so because they assume that the practice contradicts the theology of Paul.

Paul emphasizes that an individual must have faith in Christ in order to be justified. Howard, Walker, Patrick, and others have a difficult time understanding that Paul could accept vicarious baptism for the

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106. I will argue for my own interpretation of the logical flow of 1 Corinthians 15 below.

dead because they assume that the practice requires no response on the part of the dead. They understand vicarious baptism to be a magical action that saves the dead because the dead (being dead) cannot exercise faith.<sup>107</sup> Howard wrote, “A practice of vicarious baptism involves the interpretation of baptism as a purely passive act . . . baptism throughout the New Testament is viewed as an act of faith-obedience.”<sup>108</sup> The reason the dead cannot respond, Howard explains, is because “after death, the judgment[comes].”<sup>109</sup>

I have shown that many of the Christian texts examined above refute the view that the dead are dormant and incapable of responding to Christ. The texts of early Christians demonstrate their belief that the dead could be taught. If the dead can be taught, either by Christ (as in the *Epistle of the Apostles*) or by dead apostles (as in the *Shepherd of Hermas*), then an objection to vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead because it denies that people must have faith in Christ would be invalid. Christian texts show that the dead can exercise faith in Christ.

Fourth, Walker and Hull have argued that a reading of vicarious baptism in 1 Corinthians 15:29 disrupts the logical flow of the chapter.<sup>110</sup> I have argued, however, that the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 15 is a discussion of the resurrection—more specifically the universal resurrection. Paul is attempting to demonstrate to the Corinthians a proof of the literal resurrection of all people (1 Corinthians 15:22) and therefore connects vicarious baptism and resurrection. A vicarious baptism for the dead would be useful only if they were to be resurrected.

Hull, in his close examination of the role of baptism in the theology of Paul, concludes that baptism is the moment when Christ puts his seal upon an individual.<sup>111</sup> Baptism for Paul is a symbol of death and resurrection (Romans 6:3–5), the act that allows one to be sealed

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107. See, for example, Howard, “Baptism for the Dead,” 139.

108. Howard, “Baptism for the Dead,” 139–40.

109. Howard, “Baptism for the Dead,” 139.

110. Walker, “Non-Pauline Interpolation,” 88; Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 39.

111. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead*, 240–50.

Christ's at his coming. If one is "planted" with Christ in death through baptism, one will then resurrect with Christ in the future (Romans 6:5). To claim that baptism is simply a demonstration of faith in Christ,<sup>112</sup> or that one gets baptized to honor a dead apostle,<sup>113</sup> does not grant accurate attention to the relationship between baptism and resurrection within the epistles of Paul. Paul sees a relationship between being baptized and being raised with Christ. Baptism, along with faith, can be understood as the act that moves someone from the resurrection of the unjust to the resurrection of the just.

An interpretation of vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29 assumes the following historical context and logic: within Corinth some of the Corinthian saints were being baptized on behalf of dead people who had not accepted Christ in their lifetime. This was done because they understood that the dead could respond to Christ.<sup>114</sup> They also understood that baptism was the ritual that sealed one as Christ's at the resurrection—moving a person from the resurrection of the unjust to the resurrection of the just.<sup>115</sup> This practice is logical only if all people are resurrected and if there is a difference in the type of resurrection people will receive. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, argues for the reality of the bodily resurrection. He begins by providing evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3–10) and then contends that those who have died in Christ will be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:18–20). He continues by claiming that as in Adam all die so in Christ all will be made alive. This is the only way that death can be destroyed and that Christ will become victor over all (1 Corinthians 15:21–27). Building on this belief in a universal resurrection and the practice that grows from it—vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead—Paul shows further evidence in support of the universal resurrection. How foolish the practice would

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112. Walker, "Non-Pauline Interpolation," 93.

113. Patrick, "Living Rewards," 71.

114. That this is not a unique belief or a peculiar belief is evidenced by the early Christian writings about work for the dead cited above.

115. The early Christians believed in the universal resurrection as evidenced by Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:21–27; Acts 24:15; John 5:28–29.

be if all were not resurrected. He continues with that line of reasoning to show how foolish his own sacrifices would be if there was no resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:30–34). Paul’s argument then transitions into the nature of resurrected bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35–58).

I believe that the preceding logic makes sense of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in context and shows that the practice of vicarious baptism on behalf of the dead would not break up the logical flow of the epistle. I conclude, like Karl Barth, that Paul is “here in fact alluding to the custom of vicarious baptism”;<sup>116</sup> grammatically and textually this is the most honest reading, and it certainly makes sense within the context of 1 Corinthians 15.

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116. Barth, *Resurrection of the Dead*, 174.

# Roundtable: The BYU New Testament Commentary

## The BYU New Testament Commentary: “It Doth Not Yet Appear What It Shall Be”<sup>1</sup>

*Philip L. Barlow*

DESPITE HARBORING AN ANTI-INTELLECTUAL STRAND, the Mormon people have fashioned a rich intellectual heritage for a movement so young and religiously lay oriented. Latter-day Saints are also a “People of the Book” if ever there was one—devoted to not one, but four collections of scripture. Remarkably, this vibrant culture has yet to produce an estimable commentary on the Bible, which Apostle James Talmage characterized, in a treatise of quasi-canonical influence for most of the twentieth century, as “the foremost of her standard works, first among the books which have been proclaimed as her written guides in faith and doctrine.”<sup>2</sup> Various LDS authors have offered devotional contributions and doctrinal declarations, but no deeply informed and comprehensive

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1. See 1 John 3:2. While the judgments and questions that follow are strictly my responsibility, I am grateful to diverse biblical scholars over the years who have, sometimes inadvertently, stimulated my thinking about the Bible and the prospects of a professional-quality Mormon commentary. Examples include Grant Adamson, Clifton Black, David Cassel, Kent Jackson, Mike Pope, and Chad Quaintance.

2. James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, rev. ed. (1984; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 214. Under the initiating influence of President Ezra Taft Benson, the church has since the 1980s elevated the place of the Book of Mormon in its canon.



treatment from within the movement has emerged comparable to the best that exists in older traditions. This is a cavernous absence.

Glad tidings, then, that scholars centered at Brigham Young University seek to address this lack by initiating the multivolume BYU New Testament Commentary. The series aspires in the coming years to “combine the best of ancient linguistic and historical scholarship with Latter-day Saint doctrinal perspectives.” It will examine each New Testament book “almost word by word, exploring relationships between the New Testament and the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.”<sup>3</sup> The project has been under development for more than a decade. Two volumes have now appeared in electronic form, with plans for hardcover editions: Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Revelation of John the Apostle*, and S. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*. Other contributions slated to appear are John W. Welch on Matthew; Julie M. Smith, Mark; Eric Huntsman, John; Andrew Skinner and John Welch, Acts; Richard Draper and Michael Rhodes, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Hebrews; and John Welch and Brent J. Schmidt, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude. Assignments for the remaining canonical books remain to be finalized. The project’s steering committee intends not to impose a uniform framework on authors of the respective books, so we may anticipate a variety of approaches. Indeed, the organizers reserve the option of sponsoring more than one scholarly volume on individual New Testament books, following a precedent set by the well-regarded Anchor Bible Series, so we may plausibly consider an explicit range of judgments on shared topics as well. The preliminary volumes do interact somewhat with the up-to-date critical edition of the Greek text and mainstream biblical scholarship. The commentary will expose more Latter-day Saints than heretofore to modern scholarship beyond the confines of LDS tradition, thereby helping them better understand that to which they are devoted.

In addition to thinking about the forthcoming series as a whole, this essay calls occasionally upon Kent Brown’s treatment of Luke. Brown

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3. See the commentary website: <http://www.byunewtestamentcommentary.com/welcome/>.

is a Mormon neo-pioneer, trained as a New Testament scholar with a PhD from Brown University, followed by a respected career at BYU. His commentary's organization makes his work approachable. His prose is lucid, lean, and readable—not virtues one takes for granted among sophisticated scholars. The author's arguments are readily followed. His volume will prove user-friendly to a general audience and offers fresh angles of vision and multiple insights. Experts will provide the full review and credit that Brown's work warrants. In what follows I will merely call upon it incidentally to illustrate debatable issues that may prove relevant to the series as a whole.

It is possible that the forthcoming commentary presages a historic season when Mormon writers might contribute informed and distinctive perspectives to the wider world of biblical scholarship, as they have done in history, business, science, and other spheres. The commentary may also elevate the culture of Latter-day Saints who take prophetic utterance seriously, for “the past is a foreign country”; the New Testament does not interpret itself. Its construal profoundly, often unconsciously, colors how other scriptures and the messages of modern leaders are formed and heard. Do-it-yourself readings of scripture have a long tradition, especially in America's egalitarian culture where citizens treasure the right to understand and worship—or not—according to the dictates of their own conscience. But neither faith nor skepticism nor citizenship is well served by garbling the rights of conscience and democracy to mean that “my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> And the best scholarship is not, as it is commonly misunderstood to be, an exercise in esoteric minutiae. It has the capacity to illuminate the very nature of scripture and what can be known of the documents, events, and orientation of those who shaped the thought, faith, and practice of Christianity as it formed. The prospect of a competent, first-rate commentary that opens up the revolutionary, first-century Christian world and that utilizes and adds to the most persuasive, evidence-based scholarship, while respecting Mormon faith, is welcome, overdue, and potentially consequential.

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4. Isaac Asimov, “A Cult of Ignorance,” *Newsweek*, January 21, 1980, p. 19.

How to accomplish this is less obvious. Faith and scholarship, mind and spirit, head and heart, revelation and reason, intellectuals and church leaders, freedom and loyalty—these pairings harbor natural tensions, like justice and mercy, both inside and outside of Mormonism. Their ends, essence, and methods are not identical. Yet while tension is not always comfortable, it need not imply irremediable conflict or contradiction. We attempt to minimize friction when lubricating our cars' engines but to employ it when steering and braking. Tension between opposing forces is what holds effective systems in place, as with the centripetal and centrifugal forces at play in an atom, our solar system, and our galaxy. How, then, shall we make inevitable tension our ally?

The task the commentators have set for themselves is formidable, the stakes for Mormon consciousness are high, the moment for making a constructive difference is opportune, and the volumes remain pliable (in that few of them are published and none yet is cast in hard copy). Given all this, what follows is an act of sympathetic reconnaissance. Were I to imagine myself a consultant to the steering committee of the incipient commentary, what crucial questions ought I pose to myself and to the committee to encourage the enterprise to succeed? We should welcome and address the hardest and most important questions we can conjure before the books take final form. If we don't get this right, the will and resources to try anew might not be gathered for a very long time. Advisors to the Willie and Martin handcart companies, like those to all faithful migrants about to launch an essential but dangerous journey by land or by sea, would be culpable if they did not probe as rigorously as possible in planning and execution.

It happens that this imagined consultant is a believing, practicing Latter-day Saint. As such, I gauge that our reconnaissance will be more secure if we seek the additional input of respected and respectful scholars who are not Latter-day Saints. We are poorly served if our thinking is too inbred or if we hear only what we want to be told by people who defer to us, think like us, and share our assumptions. Our very faith and hopes betray us if they numb us to relevant evidence and challenge.

## Questions I would pose to myself

### *What is the primary purpose of the commentary?*

People use the Bible variously. Primary emphases among Protestants include doctrinalism (urging intellectual assent to certain tenets); pietism (devotion, personal solace, or spirituality); moralism (the Bible as sourcebook for personal ethics); and culturalism (stimulus and guidance for cultural transformation or for interpreting culture).<sup>5</sup> Additional inclinations include seeing the Bible as literature, as predictive prophecy, as inspired history, or as a collection of primary sources depicting the historical evolution of ancient peoples and the eventual formation, along with the influence of classic Greece and Rome, of Western society. Had we space, we could consider scripture's regulatory role, its hortatory or oracular functions, its use as a weapon against religious rivals or, in Judaic tradition, as the simpler basis for more sophisticated layers of commentary comprising the Talmud.

Shall the forthcoming BYU commentary incline in one or more of these directions? Or in other directions yet, such as arguing for the seamless links of the New Testament, except where mistranslated, to the conceptions, organization, and authority of the Book of Mormon and the modern church?

The aims of the series might be explained more thoroughly than in the preliminary volumes, especially concerning scholarly methods pursued and the intended audience. Are the volumes to be (1) historical-critical studies, (2) histories of how the scriptures have been received by others, or (3) theologically and devotionally centered? Each requires distinct rules of engagement well established in biblical and related scholarship. The first of these might preclude use of modern LDS scripture, for instance, while the latter two may not. If the commentary aspires to contribute in all these spheres, this entails challenges lest the work devolve into a

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5. Richard Mouw, "The Bible in Twentieth-Century Protestantism: A Preliminary Taxonomy," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 139–62.

methodological jumble. A change in the present format might facilitate prevention of that, as we will see below.

A more developed rationale for the volumes might prove helpful. Are the volumes intended to raise the profile of LDS biblical scholarship or to make a contribution in the field of biblical studies? If the latter, the books will need to hew to the same standards that scholars of other persuasions are held to and might be accomplished by Mormon scholars contributing to already established commentaries outside the Mormon world.

Does the series intend to increase the familiarity of church members with critical study of the New Testament? Many excellent introductions to the New Testament and to the Bible already exist. The express needs of a Mormon audience requiring their own commentary might helpfully spell out the commentary's intent, while keeping in mind problems noted in this essay associated with simply "harmonizing" ancient and modern revelations.

If the need is construed as more uniquely pastoral—for example, to help church members understand and address issues raised by biblical scholarship—such issues might better be laid out not by adopting a posture in loco parentis but by conveying the information readers need to weigh the options.

*Can we assemble the right team of scholars for the large task of combining "the best of ancient linguistic and historical scholarship with Latter-day Saint doctrinal perspectives"?*

The ultimate answer to this query will be the quality of the finished products. Yet the question, while sensitive, is essential to pose while the project remains malleable. Before responding, I should disclose that I know and admire a number of the contributors to the series who are already on board: capable people in multiple domains who have taught me significant things. More than one is intellectually exceptional. Other reviewers, more distant from the authors, should and inevitably will add their assessments in the future.

The series website points out that the scholars designated to produce the commentary have backgrounds, collectively, in “early Christian history, prophetic and apocalyptic literature, Greek and Latin languages and literatures, Roman religion and history, Jewish religion and history, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, and ancient law.”<sup>6</sup> This impressive array of the scholars’ fields of expertise is sure to strengthen the commentary.

The website, however, does not list a board of reviewers to critique the volumes before publication. Perhaps review is presently accomplished ad hoc by individual authors or pursued internally by the steering committee or by some other means. Yet despite their various strengths, scarcely any of the steering committee members and the scholars so far identified are trained at the doctoral level as New Testament specialists. With few exceptions, the writings each author lists on the commentary’s website do not appear in peer-reviewed journals and presses esteemed in the field of New Testament studies. Instead, the listed scholarship is published predominantly in popular, devotional, or scholarly venues ultimately owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The site’s separate and more general bibliography (labeled both as “full” and “selected”) lists well over 500 items, but virtually all are published in similar venues, including devotional pieces by church members and leaders. This by no means precludes the scholarship in any given case from being accurate and valuable. But paucity of publications in external journals and presses does put the enterprise at risk of being or seeming intellectually and theologically too cozy, too remote from the give-and-take rigors encouraged by peer review and participation in the wider conversation among recognized specialists.

The question, then, is whether the participating scholars and steering committee already involved in the BYU commentary should consider pooling their talents and efforts with those of additional people who contribute to the wider professional field. Some of the external reviewers, at least, might well include scholars outside of LDS circles. Even if additional contributors were limited to scholars with LDS affiliation, perhaps the commentators would enjoy broader vision if more were

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6. <http://www.byunewtestamentcommentary.com>.

solicited from outside BYU to complement the considerable resources there. Laudably, the commentary's officials informally indicate that other interested scholars are welcome to inquire about getting involved.

A related question presents itself: Among the participating scholars who demonstrably *are* trained in New Testament studies at a professional level, to what degree will they engage the up-to-date work of the most influential authorities? The bibliography of the electronic version of the commentary on Luke by the very capable Kent Brown, for instance, lists more than fifteen books and commentaries on Luke (all in English). These are cited hundreds of times in the course of Brown's commentary, demonstrating a welcome and ample involvement with reputable scholars. What is lacking is any mention, even in disagreement, of some of the most important contemporary scholarship on Luke, including what is broadly considered the preeminent current authority: François Bovon's three-volume *Hermeneia* commentary (2002–12), along with Bovon's indispensable 600-page review of Lukan scholarship during the past half century. Might Professor Brown consider using Bovon as a central interlocutor in a hard-copy version of his commentary?

#### *Have we got the right name for the series?*

The impulse to adopt BYU's name in the commentary's working title is understandable. Most of the participating authors for scheduled volumes are or have been employed at BYU, and the university has supported their work on the volumes. To what extent, however, will using the university's name in the series suggest to readers its imprimatur, despite the disclaimer on the title page? A number of faculty at BYU with training in biblical studies are not part of the project for various reasons, and the public may wrongly infer their endorsement from the title. Similarly, one wonders if this title intends to signal the approval and sponsorship of its publisher, BYU Studies, in a sense analogous to Oxford University Press issuing the *Oxford Companion to the Bible*. There is a difference between the endorsement implied by a series called

BYU New Testament Commentary and one labeled BYU *Studies* New Testament Commentary.

*What will the project's philosophy of interpretation be?*

Joseph Smith Jr.'s statement in an 1842 letter is now taken as scripture among Latter-day Saints: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (Article of Faith 8). This embrace of biblical as well as of modern revelation has been reflected in Mormon tradition ever since. But what does Smith's statement actually mean when his followers engage scripture?

The faith's founding prophet spoke often of things that had been taken from or added to the original texts that would come to form the Bible. Hence, in his understanding, the texts were corrupted not merely by periodic errors of translation, but also by imperfect *transmission*. Our required hermeneutic in construing Smith's words, as well as in construing the scriptures themselves, is at once rendered more complex than first appears.

Other questions quickly accrue. Did Joseph Smith mean to suggest that the correctly transmitted and translated portions of the Bible represent the very *words* of God, so that we properly lift each word or verse or passage to assemble correct doctrine? Or did he mean something else—perhaps that the canonized collection as a whole conveys the *word* of God: God's message, intent, thrust?

In an effort to honor God's word, is one required to embrace the accuracy of biblical explanations of various place-names that linguistic experts find to be folk etymologies? Can we be sure that God was the power that prompted two bears to emerge from the woods to tear up forty-two young people who had mocked Elisha's bald head (2 Kings 2:23–25)? Or that God slew Uzzah on the spot for trying to steady the sacred ark that he found precariously shaking on oxen's backs in transport (2 Samuel 6:6–7)? Or that God's will and words are well conveyed in many Proverbs that seem vengeful and self-concerned? That the author of 1 John 2:18 was correct in proclaiming the world's end times to be upon his contemporaries? These are small and simple quandaries,



but they are of the sort that require an explicit hermeneutic in our prospective commentary.

*On what version of the Bible should the commentary be based?*

The theological and cultural contexts of modern Mormonism and of BYU condition the project's paradigm on this basic front as well as others. For example, the project's steering committee, in the interest of accuracy and clarity, might have chosen to produce a fresh translation, in twenty-first-century prose, based on the current critical edition of the Greek manuscripts, leaving the venerable and antique King James Version to history or to devotional settings. Understandably and presumably, the committee felt obligated to use the KJV because of the church's commitment to this version, which has deepened in the past half century. Despite other attempts at explanation over the years, the core of this commitment is perhaps the style of the Book of Mormon's narrative.<sup>7</sup> This style resulted from Joseph Smith's then-appropriate nineteenth-century approximation of seventeenth-century Jacobean English while translating the thought of first-millennium Hebrews (BC and AD) who had adopted an evolved version of ancient Egyptian script. Successor prophets have been reluctant to recast into contemporary English Smith's original translation of the gold plates, and loath as well to strain the tether between this Shakespearean-era prose and the church's current English Bible of choice. Many of Smith's concepts in the minds of his followers attach deeply to King James phrasings with which he was working (for example, "dispensation of the fulness of times," as though this is a defined and consummating epoch among other divinely foreseen epochs rather than "when the times reach their fulfillment"; Ephesians 1:10 NIV). Hence the modern church's retention of the KJV.

Conversely, the BYU commentators might have spared themselves the enormous labor of a fresh translation of the Greek, retaining only

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7. The evolution of the King James Version from the common but by no means exclusive version in early Mormonism to the official version of recent decades is treated in chapter 5 and on pages xlv–xlvii in the updated edition of Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

the official LDS English Bible as the text on which they comment. This would have constrained the credibility of the commentary as a serious contemporary product in the eyes of the wider guild of New Testament scholars, making the commentary seem a somewhat parochial, sectarian affair rather than a rigorous contribution to contemporary biblical scholarship with an LDS inflection.

Addressing this implicit dilemma, the BYU scholars opted to include both the KJV *and* a fresh translation, a promising solution offering a bridge between LDS tradition and modern scholarship. Even granted this decision, however, the force of tradition or of perceived ecclesiastical sway may color the result. Kent Brown includes the expected new translation of Luke's Greek (accomplished by Eric Huntsman and based on the 2012 critical edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*) but then submerges it to secondary status: "This commentary rests on the language of the King James Translation of the Bible. This text is the standard for English-speaking members of the Latter-day Saint faith. All discussions begin with this translation." The new translation was prepared "to illustrate how a Greek text can be understood a little differently and how it can be rendered into modern English. . . . The elegance of the latter translation does not rise to the level of the KJV—no English translation does—but it serves as a guide to readers when passages seem difficult to grasp."

This substantively understates the significance of four centuries of advances in establishing a Greek text more nearly approximating what was originally written. This approach also implies that elegance trumps accuracy as a criterion for the Bible we should study, an argument that many earlier Latter-day Saints disdained for fear of gilding the lily of "the simple language of the fishermen of Galilee." (Luke, we should note, was likely not a fisherman, and he wrote good Greek. Mark's Greek, by contrast, is primitive, and modern ears hear distortion to the extent that they take it as elegant when cast in the King James style.) As a whole, the submersion of the new translation leaves us to wonder which would be better: to have a commentary on the Greek text of Luke as best reconstructed in the current critical edition or, instead, a commentary on a

400-year-old English translation of Luke based on Greek texts that are much further removed from the originals than those that comprise the critical edition.

A related example of the distinctive religious currents to be navigated is embedded in the terminology the commentary employs. The series offers us not a new “translation,” but a fresh “rendition.” This label intends to signal a loose English paraphrasing of the original language in passages where it encourages understanding by modern readers. Participating scholars also “render” rather than “translate” to preempt any impression that their work presents itself as an “inspired translation” after the order of Joseph Smith. Moreover, “rendition” permits adoption of phrases and nuances favored by the Prophet but not necessarily extant in the Greek.<sup>8</sup> In some respects, then, the new volumes may be less strictly a commentary on the New Testament than a commentary on the Mormon emendation of the New Testament.

The character of the rendition produced by these uniquely Mormon confluences will prove subtle in many instances, striking in others. How potentially striking is suggested by the work of one scholar originally associated with the series. John Hall’s provisional translation of John 1:1, which, he argues, the Greek allows, reflects Smith’s cosmology, which is at variance with that of historic Christianity. Hall recasts the usual translation (something close to “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”) as: “In the ruling council was a spokesman, and the spokesman was among the gods and the spokesman was himself a God.”<sup>9</sup> This contrasts not only with most renditions, but also with Smith’s own translation (or experimental/inspired reworking) of the passage, which reads: “In the beginning was the gospel preached

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8. John W. Welch provided the explanation for the choice of “rendition”; correspondence with author, September 22, 2014.

9. John Hall, lecture on the new LDS/BYU translation, February 26, 2006; recorded in notes by Bonoboi, “The LDS New Translation of the New Testament,” *One Dude’s Mormon Studies* (blog), March 6, 2006, <http://onedudesms.wordpress.com/2006/03/06/the-lds-new-translation-of-the-new-testament/>, May 14, 2012. Translation previously confirmed by author’s correspondence, July 16, 2010, with Professor John Hall, who is no longer associated with the commentary project.

through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.” Given Dr. Hall’s radical departure from translation precedent, on the one hand, and Kent Brown’s marginalizing of the new translation in favor of the KJV on the other, it will be interesting to study in what patterned ways future volumes will link with or depart from widely accepted translations of the Greek, as well as Smith’s alterations and augmentations of the King James Bible.

Whether scholars cast their new translation in ways that reflect Mormon theology such as John Hall did, or instead incorporate alterations from Joseph Smith’s translation or other modern LDS scriptures, their inclinations, and their readers’ inclinations, may be prompted by the understanding that, because the Prophet’s labors enacted a “restoration” in diverse ways, his work with the Bible is consistently a recovery of the way the text read in its original form. And indeed, Smith’s language often leads us in that direction, prompting recent generations of Saints to surmise that the Joseph Smith Translation consistently outranks the critically received Greek text in approximating what was originally written.

This is problematic territory, however, and presents anomalies if one is to be faithful to evidence and modern methods concerning the historical New Testament—evidence expanded and methods revolutionized since Mormonism’s founding. Moreover, to think solely in this conventional way constricts apprehension of the scope and character of Smith’s restoration. His enactment of the restoration concept was not so simple as “recovery of that which once historically existed,” just as his relation with the Bible is vastly more complex than his statement that the Bible is God’s word insofar as it is correctly translated. If we think only in this way, confident that first-century Christians thought much like twenty-first-century Latter-day Saints, it is understandable that the new commentary on Luke would find a Mormon-like emphasis on the nuclear family in Luke’s awareness and in Jesus’s words that other scholars would not find. “For example,” writes Brown, “the Latter-day Saint emphasis on families brings a new approach both to Jesus’ purpose in providing the miraculous draught of fish that the soon-to-be-called

disciples lift out of the waters of the Sea of Galilee (see Luke 5:1–11), and to Jesus’ sayings about his struggle against ‘the chief of the devils,’ Beelzebub (see Luke 11:14–26).”

Now it might be instructive to inquire into what Luke has to say about families; that would entail historical-critical methods, and the results may or may not overlap with contemporary LDS emphases. It might also be interesting to examine how LDS discussions of the family have called on Luke; that would incline toward a reception history of Luke. It could further be worthwhile to analyze other theological uses to which Latter-day Saints put Luke’s gospel. Any such approaches could be accomplished with rigor and yield insight. But we introduce methodological problems when we apply material that belongs in a reception history, a theological study, or a homily to marshal claims about what the historical author of Luke intended or the historical Jesus did. From an academic vantage, our access to what Luke meant or Luke’s Jesus did derives from historical-critical study.

It would help, I think, to appreciate the rich multivalence of Joseph Smith’s restoration beyond “the recovery of corrupted historical truths and authority.” Additional dimensions of his restoration include “repairing that which is fractured,” “completing that which is partial,” fusing familiar elements with others both “new” yet “everlasting,” bringing forth things not formerly existing in history, but “kept hidden from the foundations of the earth.” His translation of the Bible included the recovery of strands of original texts, he said, but he also harmonized contradictions, fixed grammar, offered (what he taught was inspired) commentary, experimented with phrasings, and added long and provocative sections without biblical parallel. All this may have included the (inspired) impulse not simply to recover the biblical text as it once was, but more broadly to recast the Bible *as it ought to have been*, so as to comport with the revelations given him. This may even be suggested in a revelation directed to Sidney Rigdon in December 1830, when Smith was engaged almost daily in translating the Bible: “And a commandment I give unto thee—that thou shalt write for him; and the scriptures shall be given, *even as they are in mine own bosom*, to

the salvation of mine own elect” (Doctrine and Covenants 35:20).<sup>10</sup> This thrust differs from generic *targumic* tradition in Judaism and Christianity to the extent that Smith proceeded by revelation.

This is startling only in relation to our assumptions. It need be no more unsettling than coming to terms with evidence that Smith did not translate the gold plates primarily by looking at the tangible plates themselves. Or that today’s hundreds of Native American tribes are not primarily descendants of Hebrews as Smith and his generation believed. Or that, as the church’s recent online statement rightly notes, we do not know exactly what relationship the Book of Abraham bears to history and historical documents, though church members have faith in the scripture’s inspired source and nature.<sup>11</sup>

All this raises for the New Testament commentary a fundamental question of structure. On the one hand, we can scarcely produce a faithful Mormon-inflected commentary while ignoring relevant modern Mormon revelation. On the other hand, interspersing such revelation

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10. See Philip Barlow, “To Mend a Fractured Reality: Joseph Smith’s Project,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38/3 (2012): 28–50.

11. <https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>: “Evidence of ancient origins, substantial though it may be, cannot prove the truthfulness of the book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt or the Resurrection of the Son of God. The book of Abraham’s status as scripture ultimately rests on faith in the saving truths found within the book itself as witnessed by the Holy Ghost. . . . Moreover, documents initially composed for one context can be repackaged for another context or purpose. Illustrations once connected with Abraham could have either drifted or been dislodged from their original context and reinterpreted hundreds of years later in terms of burial practices in a later period of Egyptian history. The opposite could also be true: illustrations with no clear connection to Abraham anciently could, by revelation, shed light on the life and teachings of this prophetic figure. . . . [Among possible explanations of the Book of Abraham is that] Joseph’s study of the papyri may have led to a revelation about key events and teachings in the life of Abraham, much as he had earlier received a revelation about the life of Moses while studying the Bible. This view assumes a broader definition of the words *translator* and *translation*. According to this view, Joseph’s translation was not a literal rendering of the papyri as a conventional translation would be. Rather, the physical artifacts provided an occasion for meditation, reflection, and revelation. They catalyzed a process whereby God gave to Joseph Smith a revelation about the life of Abraham, even if that revelation did not directly correlate to the characters on the papyri.”

promiscuously with the historically received New Testament, in the context of a commentary informed by the flood tide of persuasive modern scholarship, is a shotgun marriage of different kinds of insight. The offspring of such a marriage may not be an integrated Rembrandt-like portrait of Christ and emergent Christianity in the first century, but a clashing, inadvertent cubism à la Picasso. Intentional cubism, to be sure, has jarred many a viewer toward new perspectives. But is this the result our commentators seek?

### A modest proposal

After the well-intentioned second-century Christian convert Tatian put together his *Diatessaron*, this synthesis, or “harmony,” of the four Gospels, the most prominent of its kind in early Christianity, became within a century the primary Gospel text in Syria. Not until the fifth century did church authorities there deem it wise to return to the four separate Gospels as they were handed down and given authoritative status elsewhere in Christendom. Attempting to homogenize the four Gospel accounts into a single narrative was a natural urge, but it prompted Tatian, sometimes arbitrarily, to choose one gospel’s account of an episode or a saying over others where they conflicted, to omit certain contradictory material in his sources, to conflate others, and to manufacture his own narrative sequence that differed from those of both John and the synoptic Gospels. The result was not a secure improvement in viewing the historical Jesus. It was more analogous to a modern person attempting to harmonize, perhaps by computer, four photographs of four different artists’ sculptures of the Madonna and presuming the resulting composite to be superior to any of them. Methinks I hear a turning in Michelangelo’s grave.

Sobered by that thought, might the forthcoming commentary adopt a format echoing the venerable *Interpreter’s Bible* and its “New”

iteration? This commentary's format divides each page into three parts:<sup>12</sup> the top consists of parallel columns of two translations of the Greek text; the middle is scholarly analysis and commentary explaining those texts; the bottom consists of devotional reflection and practical applications. Might the BYU commentary be similarly sectioned: the top with its two translations of each New Testament pericope; the middle consisting of exegesis, commentary, and context *as determined by scholarly tools available to any trained scholar*; the bottom treating amendments and augmentations from the Joseph Smith Translation, connections to additional Latter-day Saint scripture and applications by church leaders, and perhaps devotional material in that or a fourth section? This layout would (1) allow the historical New Testament its independent integrity; (2) embrace the best critical research, evidence, and thought interpreting and contextualizing it; and (3) without conflating the separable insights of modern revelation and that which is established through historical and literary tools, still respect the faith perspectives of Latter-day Saints as independent revelations, while putting them in conversation with the received historical New Testament and its informed interpreters.

### What should be the relationship of scholarship and faith?

Among a hundred colorful quips of popular evangelist Billy Sunday from a century ago is this answer to our question: "When the word of God says one thing and scholarship says another, scholarship can go to hell!" As a believer, I might be more sympathetic to Sunday's fervor if we could be more certain than we can be that everything purporting to be God's word *is* God's word. Scholars and those who regard scholarship, however, including scholars of faith, are doomed to have to account also for the sort of verifiable evidence and argument available to everyone, including those outside their faith. If there be revelation from the divine,

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12. Instances where too much commentary follows a given pericope preclude each page from beginning with a new scriptural passage.



it seems to come “through a glass, darkly,” conveyed to human beings in human contexts and filtered through human capacities “after the manner of their own languages” and thought.<sup>13</sup> If there is a God behind the biblical portrayals of God, as we believers hold, we ought not forget what I call “Job’s friends’ syndrome”: one can displease the God of truth, as they did, by defending God on illicit grounds.

Shall all respectable scholarship be secular, then? “By no means!” as Paul was fond of saying.

A quarter of a century ago, the esteemed historian David Brion Davis reviewed the three-volume, 2,000-page, state-of-the-art *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*. Though appreciating the landmark collection, he was vexed that believers among the one hundred contributors had, for fear of partisanship, so cloaked their private commitments that religion in the *Encyclopedia* seemed anesthetized and neutered. The disjunction between erudition and the phenomenon it so coolly assessed prompted Davis to contemplate the volumes’ most likely readers. The image that occurred to him was of “countless numbers of married couples consulting one hundred celibate monks and nuns for their wisdom on the American sexual experience.”<sup>14</sup> I agree with the author of Job that we can err in attempting to defend God by being insufficiently informed, religiously presumptuous, or wrongly motivated. I agree also with David Brion Davis that there is no need for religionists (or secularists for that matter) to keep their authentic selves antiseptically separated from their writing. What *is* required of all camps who respect evidence and thoughtfulness and who write and read under the banner of authentic scholarship, however, is that the evidence and best thinking available to all must be accounted for. There is nothing intellectually inferior about possessing faith, but scholars qua scholars cannot responsibly fail to account for available evidence simply by asserting their faith (whether that faith be Mormon, Muslim, Catholic, Baptist, or Humanist).

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13. We can see this at work, for example, in the several first-person accounts of Joseph Smith’s first vision.

14. David Brion Davis, “Review Essay,” *Religion and American Culture* 1 (Winter 1991): 119–27.

As with many religions in the twenty-first century, there is abroad in Mormondom a crisis of faith among a growing number, spread especially by the Internet and word of mouth. Among the seeds of this discontent is a sense of betrayal when people encounter aspects of the church's history that crack their perceptions and the faith that entwines with them: "Why was I never taught this? What else has been kept from me?" In recent years, the church has responded variously, increasingly recognizing the importance of a probing history and a membership that has access to it, as evidenced by the broadened and elevated caliber of well-educated historians it has hired in its historical department, incipient changes coming in its curricula and manuals for classes, candid and competent publications it has sponsored on once-forbidden topics, and more informed and candid statements it now posts on its websites on controversial questions of history and theology. This represents an admirable and necessary step forward, enabling the faith of its interested constituents to be more deeply rooted and organically flexible, rather than brittle and easily withered under each new challenge that may arise in the twenty-first century.

Before damage to faith broadens exponentially, the times may be nigh when a parallel competence, candor, and thoughtfulness will need to thrive among Latter-day Saints in understanding the Bible. The coming commentary on the New Testament could provide a scaffolding. Done well, such a work would allow for both spiritual and scholarly spheres, not just their outward forms. Done exceedingly well, the volumes may militate against scholarship becoming inert and faith naïve.

A generation ago, Truman Madsen invited a cluster of prominent religious scholars to Provo to reflect on Mormonism and Judeo-Christian parallels. Among them was the great New Testament scholar and dean of the Harvard Divinity School, Krister Stendahl, who spoke on the Sermon on the Mount and 3 Nephi. I encountered him shortly after his return to Cambridge and asked him about his experience. He stared at the ground for a long ten seconds, then replied softly, "I haven't processed it fully. It was as potent as being among the Jews in Jerusalem." Stendahl was a friend to the Mormons, receiving international press in defending

them when later he became the presiding Lutheran authority in Sweden. His concluding words at the Provo conference are worth considering as Mormons contemplate Davis's scholars and Job's friends, Athens and Jerusalem:

As I look at the whole spectrum of God's menagerie of humankind and its history, including its religious history, I think it is important to reflect on the limits as well as the glories of the hunger for and joy in additional information. . . . [As] I studied the Sermon on the Mount, . . . Luke reads, "Blessed are you that hunger" (Luke 6:21). Matthew reads, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst *for righteousness*" (Matthew 5:6). In the Book of Mormon the saying has moved away from both the hunger of the stomach and the thirst for justice to the religious realm of the Spirit (3 Nephi 12:6). And there is nothing wrong in that; it is our common Christian tradition and experience to widen and deepen the meaning of holy words. But let us never forget that quotation from Micah which reads, "For what else does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly before your God" (Micah 6:8). For there is sometimes too much glitter in the Christmas tree.<sup>15</sup>

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15. Krister Stendahl, "The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 153–54.

# Between Exegesis and Homiletics: Examining the Genres at Play in an LDS Commentary

*D. Jill Kirby*

Review of Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes. *The Revelation of John the Apostle*. Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2013.

THE AIM OF THE BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY New Testament Commentary (BYUNTC) series is ambitious: to “offer a responsible, carefully researched, multi-volume commentary” that “will combine the best of ancient linguistic and historical scholarship with Latter-day Saint doctrinal perspectives” while remaining accessible to the general reader.<sup>1</sup> With respect to this particular volume, Richard Draper and Michael Rhodes have indicated a number of objectives, methods, and perspectives intended to fulfill these more general goals. Overall, they intend “to bring John’s writing into its fullest light.” To do this they will (1) “for the first time . . . bring together everything relevant to the book of Revelation that can be found in the Mormon tradition”;<sup>2</sup> (2) take “a hard look at the Greek texts and their variants and render a new and careful translation”; and (3) place Revelation “in its historical context using information from John’s world,” which, they say, will produce “a

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1. See <http://www.byunewtestamentcommentary.com/about-us/the-project/>.

2. Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Revelation of John the Apostle*, BYU New Testament Commentary Series (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2013), Kindle location 721. All citations to Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, are to Kindle locations as this work is not yet in print. All emphasis is added unless otherwise noted.

complete examination of every verse in Revelation within its historical setting.”<sup>3</sup> These goals are generally typical of modern commentaries, and their achievement would be a welcome addition to Latter-day Saint biblical scholarship. Unfortunately, the present volume falls short of accomplishing these aims.

In this review I intend to organize my comments around considerations of commentary genres. Although Draper and Rhodes do not specifically identify the type of commentary they intended to create, the goals listed above shed some light on the matter. Generally speaking, biblical commentaries fall into four categories: reception history, exegetical, homiletic, and finally, personal reflection or meditation. Draper and Rhodes appear to have intended to produce a mixed-genre commentary. Thus, their assertion that they have presented all the relevant information in the LDS tradition is consistent with reception history approaches. Their interest in describing what John meant, their work with translation, and their claim to read Revelation verse by verse in its historical context indicate an exegetical commentary. Finally, the authors’ overt faith commitment in the early pages alerts the reader that there will be homiletic content as well as a presentation of more personal reflections and confessional interests. Since this work is produced from within the academic community, under the BYU series title, I will also evaluate it according to the standards for modern scholarly work. I have made no attempt, however, to provide an analysis of coherence with LDS doctrine.

## Reception history

Reception histories tend to be reference works from the academic world; their focus is on showing how the biblical text has been understood during various later periods, not on how the author or earliest audiences might have understood it. They are organized around the content and flow of the text so that readers can see how others have used

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3. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 758.

the text for their purposes. The challenge reception histories inevitably face is twofold. First, the sheer volume of information available must be carefully considered in order to provide appropriate representation; this requires selectivity. Second, reception histories must provide some historical context for readers to appreciate the circumstances that led to a particular appropriation. Although the present commentary is not strictly a reception history, the standards above provide some guidance by which readers may judge the way Draper and Rhodes have documented the reception of Revelation in the LDS community.

The most prominent claim made regarding reception by Draper and Rhodes is that they have brought “together everything relevant to the book of Revelation that can be found in the Mormon tradition.”<sup>4</sup> With respect to the contributions of male elites from within the LDS tradition, this may well be correct—and such a collection is a fine addition to LDS biblical studies. However, the omissions are also striking. For example, no LDS women are quoted or alluded to by name.<sup>5</sup> This cannot be because the authors equated *relevant* with *authoritative* since the male voices cited are not uniformly quoted from sources considered binding on the LDS community. Nor is it because women’s insights are all that difficult to find or that they played no role in LDS life.<sup>6</sup> Whatever

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4. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 720.

5. The only insight offered from an LDS woman comes from Professor Gaye Strathearn, a colleague of the authors. However, her name, and thus her gender, appears only in the documentation of the appropriate chapter and not in either the text itself or the select bibliography. This lack of by-name citation follows an unusual convention adopted by Draper and Rhodes of refraining from mentioning academic sources by name, although they are very dependent on the scholarly work of many others. Hopefully, future volumes will adopt academic conventions and acknowledge their indebtedness with more grace.

6. For example, no mention is made of historical figures such as Eliza R. Snow or of Joseph Smith’s intention to make of the Relief Society “a kingdom of priests.” Likewise, modern women who have served in LDS leadership roles are not quoted. Finally, a cursory search of the *Women’s Exponent*, accessed online through the Harold B. Lee Library, yields numerous opportunities for understanding how early LDS women understood themselves and their relationships in the light of some of John’s ideas as they were interpreted by Joseph Smith.

the reason for their exclusion, the absence of women's voices indicates that the LDS tradition presented in this commentary is neither complete nor even fairly represented by the authors.

A second omission is the lack of historical context provided for those voices that are cited from within the LDS tradition. Far too often, quotations and insights are given without dates, let alone any information about the circumstances that led to the expressed insight. LDS historians may be able to fill in these details, but the general LDS reader, as well as those who might consult this work from outside the LDS community, will be left without the context needed to evaluate what is being said. This lack of historical context becomes critical when readers engage ideas within the LDS tradition such as what Draper and Rhodes call the "election in the flesh." This nineteenth-century LDS concept suggests, among other things, that those who enjoy the LDS priesthood are the biological descendants of early Christians who possessed a similar priestly privilege.<sup>7</sup> The idea of superior bloodlines is fraught with difficulties, and in the present climate of racial and ethnic sensitivities it should have been presented with the historical and cultural context from which it emerged. Pastoral sensitivity might also have indicated that speculation regarding bloodlines is not often raised by modern LDS leaders or mentioned in LDS discourse outside of historical interests.<sup>8</sup>

## Exegetical commentary

Exegetical commentaries, which are the foundation of modern biblical study, tend to focus on illuminating the meaning of a biblical text for its earliest audiences with correspondingly less attention to strictly modern interests. They usually contain a translation, a lengthy introductory section, and detailed exegesis. Good exegetical commentaries are

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7. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 11358.

8. Because the rigorous study of LDS history is itself rather recent, adequate information on the historical context of early LDS ideas may not yet be available. In these cases, prudence might dictate a more selective approach, focused, perhaps, on presenting the most insightful instances of LDS reception.

academic reference works: they should be up-to-date, reliable, delivered in a measured and deliberative tone, attentive to calling the reader's attention to areas of consensus and disagreement, complete in the sense that they provide access to a broad range of interpretive options and relevant secondary literature, and respectful of opinions or positions with which they disagree.<sup>9</sup> I will evaluate the exegetical work of this commentary under three broad areas: the translation, the introductory material, and the exegesis.

### *Translation—the BYU rendition*

Unlike earlier LDS work with scripture, this volume provides a fresh English version of John's narrative that is a fine addition to LDS biblical scholarship.<sup>10</sup> The word *rendition* rather than *translation* is used to describe this work because at points the authors have elected to insert textually unsupported emendations or interpretive glosses. Supporting the rendition is a set of translation notes. These notes convey information about translation choices and alert the reader to the presence of emendations or glosses. As a means of helping Latter-day Saints who lack experience with the issues of translation understand just how difficult it is to render a reasonably faithful translation, they are very worthwhile. The rendition itself is less useful because of irregular shifts from a modern translation to emendations such as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST). A better approach would have been to confine the rendition to a translation, as is the common practice in academic commentaries, and to put the JST and other emendations in the notes or endnotes.

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9. For example, one form of disrespectful discourse is the assertion by Draper and Rhodes that those who take a different approach "do not accept any revelatory power behind John's work" (Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 16614). In academic discourse, ideas are evaluated on their merits and not on the faith commitments of their proponents. Hopefully, this sort of ad hominem argument can be avoided in future volumes. Draper and Rhodes also refer to "the self-proclaimed orthodox community including such sects as the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic" traditions (Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 810). The point they wish to make should have been made professionally using neutral language.

10. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 752.



Most of the emendations in the rendition come from the JST. Thus, the “angel of the church” associated with each of the seven cities in Asia Minor is rendered as the “leader of the church.” John’s work undoubtedly read “angel,” but the change follows the footnoted entries in the LDS edition of the King James Version (KJV) and is of minor interpretive import.<sup>11</sup> However, the JST is not uniformly included in the rendition—that is, some of its readings are included while others are not. If there is an explanation for decisions about inclusion, I did not find it. In addition, Draper and Rhodes do not tell the reader how they understand the relationship between the autograph and the JST.<sup>12</sup> This is a missed opportunity to explore an interesting aspect of the relationship between the LDS tradition and early Christianity—exactly the sort of thing readers might expect from a commentary series associated with BYU.

Unfortunately, the rendition also demonstrates some distortion of John’s narrative under the interpretive assumptions employed by Draper and Rhodes. At Revelation 14:4 John provides a description of the 144,000 who stand with the Lamb on Mt. Zion.<sup>13</sup> According to John, this group are those “who have not defiled themselves with women for they are *male virgins*.” Draper and Rhodes elect to insert an interpretive gloss in the text of the rendition, writing “these are they who have not defiled themselves with women for they are *morally clean*.”<sup>14</sup> Two reasons for this gloss are given. First, they assert that the English word *virgin* applies exclusively to females. Actually, *Merriam-Webster* includes the denotation “a person who has not had sexual intercourse,”

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11. What has usually bothered readers of Revelation about the idea of John writing instructions to angels is that they assume a hierarchy in which angels “outrank” humans. In this case, however, it is quite possible to read John as a prophetic voice to the angels of the seven churches; the authority is not his but Christ’s.

12. The autograph of a biblical text is the original. The idea of an original text for biblical books as modern readers understand the expression is not uniformly accepted, but the term remains somewhat useful in the present context for describing the temporal distinction between the JST and very early manuscripts.

13. The translation notes and comments for Revelation 14:4 are disordered; this may be a technical error arising from the Kindle format.

14. Ironically, the title of the section is “The Virgins (14:1–5).”

without mention of gender.<sup>15</sup> Second, the authors indicate that they wish “to counter the idea that this verse commends celibacy.”<sup>16</sup> On its face, it is hard to read what John wrote without concluding that the text *does* commend celibacy. However, Draper and Rhodes defend their choice by pointing out instances in biblical literature outside of Revelation and from within the wider LDS tradition in which marriage is commended and sexual sin is condemned. This demonstrates how the assumption of unity of scripture distorts interpretation. Draper and Rhodes have *assumed* that John’s ideas about marriage and celibacy are identical with that of other biblical authors and the LDS tradition and thus forced the rendition to follow suit. In fact, John wrote *male virgin*; the expression is rare but present in other literature; moral purity is only one of at least four possible interpretations, and of the four, probably the most unlikely.<sup>17</sup> One interpretation that would cohere with both John’s language and a high view of marriage is temporary celibacy, an idea found in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In the end, the best way to handle this sort of divergence from the LDS tradition is the conventional one in academic works: list the options and argue their suitability. Moreover, the appropriate way to avoid distorting the text while also asserting that John himself is not a misogynist and does not commend literal, permanent celibacy is to argue first from textual evidence within Revelation, such as the fact that the cosmic woman of chapter 12 is a mother and the New Jerusalem is symbolized as a virgin about to become the wife of the Lamb.<sup>18</sup>

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15. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “virgin.”

16. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 13752.

17. The four possibilities are moral purity; literal and permanent celibacy; figuratively, as a metaphor for refusing to worship the beast; and as a reference to the temporary abstinence required of priests and soldiers in the Hebrew Bible.

18. A second instance of this same distortion in favor of the LDS tradition is in the rendition of Revelation 13:8. Here Draper and Rhodes have followed Moses 7:47 rather than Revelation 17:8 in suggesting that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world rather than that selected names were included in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

A final suggestion for future volumes is the use of inclusive language. As the rendition already facilitates interpretive goals beyond translation, this seems like an opportunity to explicitly acknowledge the presence of women in early Christianity. For example, Revelation 6:11 might be rendered as it is in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV): “they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their *brothers and sisters*, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.” Given that the KJV, currently the “official” version of the Bible among English-speaking Latter-day Saints, contains readings that have been changed to marginalize the contributions of early Christian women, the rendition might serve to sensitize LDS readers to the gender biases that are rarely acknowledged in the LDS tradition.<sup>19</sup>

### *Introductory material*

The introductory section of a commentary gives readers their first insight into the work of a commentary’s author. A typical introduction in an exegetical commentary includes information on the historical context, genre, structure, and theology. Depending on the text and audience, sometimes issues such rhetorical strategy, narrative analysis, textual criticism, style, or reception history are also discussed. To an extent, the selection of topics for an introductory section is up to an author; however, some topics are considered necessary in major academic works. Additionally, readers may expect an up-to-date, complete presentation of the topics selected as well as citations of recent and more detailed studies.

Ideally, careful attention to the introductory section by a commentary’s author and its readers rewards both because thoughtful, well-written essays establish something of a shared understanding upon which more

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19. For example, since English-speaking Latter-day Saints use the KJV, they tend to be unaware that Romans 16:7 probably shows Paul identifying a woman named Junia as “prominent among the apostles” or that the author of Colossians wishes to greet “Nympha and the church in her house” (Colossians 4:15 NRSV) rather than “Nymphas, and the church which is in his house” (Colossians 4:15 KJV).

detailed work may rest. For the purposes of this particular commentary, the first in a series intended for Latter-day Saints who have had almost no exposure to critical thinking about biblical texts, let alone familiarity with historical-critical methods, this section presented a great opportunity to produce an academic-quality introduction to modern biblical scholarship while setting the stage for a close reading of Revelation.<sup>20</sup> Regrettably, there are some deficiencies.

Very little of the introductory section dealing with Revelation itself is original or new work by Draper and Rhodes. In addition to reusing text from Draper's earlier work, *Opening the Seven Seals*, Draper and Rhodes use close paraphrases of authors such as G. K. Beale, Robert H. Mounce, and I. T. Beckwith. Their section on "Dating and Interpretive Approaches" is a paraphrase and summary of Beale's work.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, their interpretive options are incomplete because Beale is not explicit about his own work. They list the preterist, historicist, futurist, and idealist schools but fail to report that most modern commentaries are eclectic—that is, they involve two or more of the traditional approaches.<sup>22</sup> In particular, modern academic readings tend to be preterist-idealist but usually allow that John intended his work to portray what was to happen at the end of time (futurist) without aiming to provide a detailed countdown.

The presentation of the literary features of Revelation—that is, genre, style, and structure—is both incomplete and dated. Draper and Rhodes describe the genre of Revelation as that of an apocalypse and write that

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20. One of my colleagues made a suggestion: this series should have been opened with a volume that explained the methods used in modern biblical studies, provided some historical insight into the reception of critical study of the Bible among other Christian faiths, and delineated and then analyzed the options for integrating Restoration insights with those of the rest of the academy.

21. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 4–27, 44–49. The citation to Beale in this section of Draper and Rhodes is erroneously given as p. 58.

22. Ironically, Draper and Rhodes work within the eclectic approach themselves. Although they explain their approach as modified futurist with some idealist, in reality they use all four approaches. In particular, their dispensational reading of the seal septet is an example of the historicist approach.

“very few scholars disagree that Revelation is an apocalypse.”<sup>23</sup> This is true but incomplete: one of the few things upon which almost every interpreter agrees is that Revelation’s genre is mixed—that is, it is best described as containing generic elements from the apocalyptic, epistolary, and prophetic genres.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the salutations associated with letter writing are clear (e.g., 1:4; 22:21), and Revelation identifies itself as prophecy (e.g., 1:3; 22:19). The significance of this is debated, but at least one important point arises from it: While most apocalypses are pseudonymous, Revelation is not. This may be, as Delbert Burkett writes, because Revelation is also prophecy and prophets usually spoke in their own voices rather than as ancient figures from the past.<sup>25</sup>

The sections in this commentary on style and theology are likewise lacking in comparison with modern works. Draper and Rhodes present their remarks on style through a very close paraphrase of Beckwith’s 1919 commentary on Revelation,<sup>26</sup> which includes only selected elements of repetition, expansions, interruptions, prefaces, and nonrealism. Given the age of this treatment, its selectivity and brevity, and the amount of work that has been done with literary criticism in the last ninety-five years, it is unfortunate that the authors did not update this section. The only attention given to a systematic presentation of theology is a close paraphrase of Mounce’s thirty-five-year-old description of the apocalyptic genre covering dualism, futuristic eschatology, and rigid determinism. In academic commentaries one typically finds some mix of Christology, theology (doctrine of God), eschatology, and perhaps pneumatology. Theological topics of special interest to readers of

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23. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 2141n40.

24. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 37; and in introductory textbooks such as Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 512. Johnson’s chapter on Revelation contains a particularly insightful discussion of the ways in which John’s experience of the risen Christ transformed the apocalyptic genre into a powerful witness of Christian hopes.

25. Delbert Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (New York: Cambridge, 2002), 503.

26. Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 241–48.

Revelation might include a coherent theodicy, liturgical insights, and the virtues required of the saints. As these topics are well covered in the sources used by Draper and Rhodes, it is unfortunate that they did not also elect to paraphrase enough of them to give their readers a sample of these insights.

Although the sections on genre, style, and theology are dated and incomplete, Draper and Rhodes have completely failed to provide a coherent account of the literary structure. In commentaries a literary structure usually looks like an outline, supported by analysis. The value of such a feature is that readers can see how an author understands the logical organization of the biblical text. John's narrative logic is complicated by his extraordinary use of repetition, particularly in a form known as recapitulation.<sup>27</sup> A text that repeatedly narrates the same experience is said to recapitulate that particular event. Thus, recapitulation helps define the relationship between the events of an experience and the text that narrates that experience. In Revelation, the most basic issue of recapitulation is the relationship of the seal, trumpet, and bowl septets. Are readers to understand that there will be twenty-one messianic trials? Or will there be seven, each narrated three times by John? What about the so-called unnumbered visions in chapters 12–14? Do they somehow recapitulate the septets, or are they distinct? Decisions about recapitulation simply cannot be avoided.<sup>28</sup> And to be sure, Draper and Rhodes do talk about repetition at the level of plot, without calling it recapitulation, but their remarks are piecemeal, scattered throughout the body of the commentary rather than in the introduction, and do not add up to a coherent explanation, let alone a presentation that would signal the importance of the topic to an unfamiliar reader. An adequate

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27. In fact, Revelation is so complicated that no single presentation of the structure can capture its intricacies, but that makes an explanation and presentation of the issue all the more important.

28. For example, G. K. Beale's 2005 commentary is organized around a reading that finds five recapitulated sections, mirroring Daniel's five synonymously parallel visions (Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9, 10–12).

academic commentary on Revelation requires a presentation of structure and an explanation of how the author understands recapitulation.

Perhaps the most surprising element of the introductory section, however, is the discussion of authorship. Draper and Rhodes are adamant that the author of Revelation was the disciple of Jesus identified in the synoptic Gospels as John. Like most of the discussion about authorship in the New Testament, arguments may be made in either direction. Their argument, however, is deeply flawed and, in addition, unnecessarily complicated by fragments of three separate arguments twisted together somewhat randomly: (1) the traditional one using internal and external evidence, (2) an argument created by comparing Revelation to the Fourth Gospel, and (3) a discussion probably intended to defend Revelation's place in the canon.<sup>29</sup>

In good academic commentaries, the evidence regarding authorship is traditionally split into internal and external evidence. Internal evidence reports what the text itself has to say about the author: his name was John, he was on Patmos, he was a Christian prophet (22:9), he never identifies himself as an apostle or eyewitness of Jesus, and he writes about the Twelve as if they were honored figures of the past rather than a group in which he counts himself (21:14).<sup>30</sup> External evidence comes from sources outside of Revelation, usually from the writings of the church fathers. Many of these sources, though not all, do indicate that John of Patmos was the named disciple of Jesus. How do Draper and Rhodes handle this argument? They simply fail to mention most of the evidence, internal or external, that does not support their case for John the apostle as the author of Revelation. This is not some esoteric point from biblical studies but a straightforward violation of the basics

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29. To see how good arguments regarding authorship are made, consult any introductory New Testament textbook. For reasonable arguments in favor of traditional authorship, see introductory textbooks from the evangelical publishing houses.

30. If, as Draper and Rhodes indicate, the language, forms, and images of Revelation are those dictated by God, it is especially telling that no mention is made of any special apostolic status for John.

of good, logical argumentation. When making an argument, credible writers acknowledge and deal with contrary evidence.

Questions regarding the authorship of Revelation are somewhat complicated by its association with other New Testament works attributed to John. Typically, commentaries consider this issue by pointing out the ways in which the ideas, language, and grammar of Revelation cohere with, or diverge from, those of the settled Johannine corpus. Draper and Rhodes attempt to establish that John the apostle wrote Revelation by pointing out similarities between Revelation and the Fourth Gospel.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, they neglect to first establish that John the apostle wrote the Fourth Gospel, so this approach is futile.<sup>32</sup> In addition, their presentation of the evidence is once again incomplete. For example, they remark on certain limited elements of christological similarity but omit mention of soteriology and eschatology—and it is eschatology that tends to present the strongest case against common authorship.

A third argument woven into this section seems to be aimed at defending the place of Revelation in the canon. Discussing canonicity is common in commentaries on Revelation because its inclusion was secured later than that of other works. The matter was settled quite a number of centuries ago, however, so no *argument* is actually needed. Once again, however, some of the points offered by Draper and Rhodes to support the inclusion of Revelation are flawed. For example, they write that Revelation was accepted by early Christians because it “showed Jesus in a new light, thus rounding out [the early Christian] understanding of him found in the Gospels and other writing.”<sup>33</sup> This assertion has no supporting citation at all. It is, in fact, an instance

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31. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 831.

32. In most academic commentaries the correspondence between Revelation and the rest of the Johannine corpus is attributed to different authors who were both part of an interpretive community centered on the insights of the character known as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” and thought to be an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus but not one of the Twelve.

33. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 854.



of presentism—that is, a logical fallacy in historical reasoning that assumes that people in earlier historical contexts thought as modern readers might.

The shortcomings of this introductory section are too significant to consider it useful as an academic reference work. Topics that are covered are generally dated and sometimes incomplete. Recapitulation and structure are completely missing. The presentation of authorship is, in particular, deeply flawed and makes claims in only one direction: it openly distorts the historical and textual record to assert unequivocally that the author of Revelation was John the apostle. The impetus for this warped demonstration probably lies with the assumption of inerrancy, as well as the priority given to the LDS tradition in situations where it diverges from other sources. In fact, Draper and Rhodes write, “So where do Latter-day Saints stand on the issue of authorship? We have scriptural insights that resolve the problem,” and then they quote the Book of Mormon scripture 1 Nephi 14:20, 22, identifying the author of Revelation as “the apostle of the Lamb” named John.<sup>34</sup>

However, in the absence of insight into how to read the textual and historical record in such a fashion as to conclude with the LDS tradition that the author of Revelation was unequivocally John the apostle, the matter cannot be considered resolved. No doubt, Latter-day Saints will continue to take a variety of positions on the authorship of Revelation, depending on how they weigh the evidence and the LDS tradition. In the larger spiritual sense, the authorship of Revelation is ultimately minor. However, in the immediate academic context it must be clear that bad scholarship is not faithful scholarship regardless of how closely the conclusions cohere with the LDS tradition. Evidence from the New Testament and early Christianity must be handled with integrity so that arguments can stand the test of critical exegesis and historical investigation. To do otherwise risks bringing the wider LDS tradition of the Restoration into disrepute precisely among those who value truth.

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34. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 896.

*Detailed exegesis*

The heart of a good commentary lies in the reliable presentation of interpretive options and analysis of their strengths and weaknesses. Some academic commentaries may attempt to be exhaustive in posing exegetical options; less ambitious enterprises survey the choices and present some sort of a representative range for their readers, along with citations into more detailed sources. Commentaries that portray themselves as presenting historical readings, as does this one, must then ground their arguments in first-century history, language, and culture if they wish to claim that they have some insight into what John and his earliest audiences might have understood. Thus, readers should expect to find a range of interpretive options explicitly mentioned in association with each pericope. The most salient of these should be analyzed by the authors for their suitability as first-century readings; their preferred choice may be mentioned, or they may opt to indicate that no decision can be made.

The bulk of the exegetical work in this commentary on Revelation is in the Translation, Notes, and Comments sections associated with each pericope. When the historical-critical reading of these passages is well aligned with the LDS tradition, Draper and Rhodes are content to follow the insights of others. Thus, readers of this commentary are often well served by the discernment that the authors of modern commentaries, monographs, and articles—such as David E. Aune, G. K. Beale, Adela Yarbro Collins, Leonard L. Thompson, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Richard J. Bauckham—bring to the task of reading Revelation. However, it must also be noted that most of the exegetical work has been left to these authors—very little interpretation actually comes from Draper and Rhodes until the scholarly analysis departs from the LDS tradition. The exegesis of three pericopes—celestial combat (Revelation 12:7–12), the great whore (chapter 17), and the sealing of the servants of God (7:1–4)—illustrates how the shift to the work of Draper and Rhodes generally plays out in much of the detailed exegesis.

Chapter 12 opens a new section in John's vision, one studded with astral imagery. The woman clothed in the sun, standing on the moon, and crowned with stars is menaced by a great red dragon who wishes to

destroy the child she is about to deliver. When the dragon's intentions are frustrated by the ascension of the child, John says that war broke out in heaven. Draper and Rhodes agree with the academic consensus that the woman and the child who is snatched up into heaven are associated with events of the first century.<sup>35</sup> However, where most scholars understand the war in heaven to be likewise associated with that era, Draper and Rhodes opt for a reading in which the celestial combat scene in Revelation 12 is said to have taken place before the creation of the earth, in the premortal existence.

If this reading were supported by arguments from the text, the departure from scholarly consensus would be unremarkable. Unfortunately, Draper and Rhodes do not alert their readers to readings other than their own, nor do they present any textual evidence to support the required temporal shift in narrative time. Thus, the celestial combat pericope is declared, without other interpretive options or argument, to be a sudden shift in "scenes flashing back to the pre-mortal period."<sup>36</sup> Nothing in the text itself indicates such a change, and some aspects contradict it. For example, John writes that at the conclusion of the combat scene Satan and his angels have been defeated and exiled to the earth. The saints are said to have "conquered [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death" (12:11 NRSV), which certainly sounds like martyrdom among early Christians. Draper and Rhodes respond to this by asserting that "this negative phrase can be recast to say, they persevered in their testimony and witnessing of Christ in spite of the fact that their spiritual lives were at stake"; however, they do not explain how John's use of *life* and *death* can be stretched to cover the deathless existence of the premortal realm in the LDS tradition.<sup>37</sup> In the end, Draper and

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35. Most scholars probably consider the man-child to be Christ and the ascension scene to be his resurrection and return to the Father. Draper and Rhodes opt for the man-child as a symbol of "a real political kingdom that the Lord attempted to establish during his and the apostles' early ministry" (Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 11284). Both readings are part of the first century of the Common Era.

36. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 11475.

37. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 11603.

Rhodes admit that “just how these faithful spirits [in the premortal sphere] were in danger of death is unknown.”<sup>38</sup> No such explanation is needed, however, if those who “did not cling to life even in the face of death” (12:11 NRSV) are the early Christian martyrs.

The significance of this pericope in John’s theological presentation is not minor: it teaches an inaugurated eschatology in which God has already won the decisive victory with the death and resurrection of Christ. Satan, however, still moves freely on earth, and the saints conquer by their faithful witness to the death, if necessary. Draper and Rhodes have suppressed the most likely reading of John’s understanding, probably through assumption of unity of scripture and their prioritization of the LDS tradition, which places a war in heaven in the premortal existence. A better way to handle the matter would have been to indicate the temporal distinction between the two versions but to note that the theological potential is relatively unchanged regardless of when the battle is thought to have occurred.

The most lurid figure in Revelation is probably that of a female character known as the whore. According to John, she is a prostitute with whom the world’s leaders fornicate daily (17:2), she persecutes the saints (17:6), she is seated on seven hills (17:7, 9), and she is “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth” (17:18 NRSV). Although formally titled as “Babylon,” it takes significant effort to escape the impression that the reality behind the symbol is Rome. Draper and Rhodes, however, first write that the whore is to be identified with two historical realities. As a whore and mother of whores she is “the philosophies and false theologies that have seduced, bound, and blinded humankind from the beginning. As Babylon, she represents secular society, that is, the society that results from the implementation of the philosophy” that the whore promotes.<sup>39</sup> They expound on various nuances of these two ideas at some length and then, finally, in their exegesis of 17:18, they provide the key interpretive options: “there are three primary interpretations for this imagery [of the whore]. Many see her as ancient Rome. Others see

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38. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 11608.

39. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 16339.

her as an apostate Jerusalem. The best context, however, suggests she represents Satan's transtemporal religio-economic combination."<sup>40</sup> Although in this instance other options are presented, once again Draper and Rhodes assert their preferred reading without argument.

A better way to handle the matter requires a candid encounter with the textual evidence. If John thought of the whore as a "transtemporal religio-economic combination" rather than the city of Rome, founded on seven hills, he certainly failed to make that point very clearly.<sup>41</sup> In fact, Draper and Rhodes have created something of a false dichotomy that distorts Revelation's narrative. John's earliest audiences would have clearly understood Rome as the reality behind the whore but would also have appreciated that the city was, at heart, a false religious and economic system working in opposition to God. Here the usefulness of eclectic readings is seen: the preterist approach preserves John's identification of Rome as the basis of the imagery, idealist readings find echoes of Rome's depravity in the oppressive systems that have continually degraded human life and godly spiritual values, and advocates of futurist approaches anticipate the appearance of a final Rome/Babylon entity.

A third example revolves around the treatment of the priestly reign of the saints. According to John, Christ has made the saints "to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father" (Revelation 1:6 NRSV). John's description of the saints in Revelation suggests that their priestly reign is modeled after Christ's. Just as Christ provided sacred service to God by restoring the relationship between God and humans, so also the saints may participate in a sacral role as suffering witnesses of Christ. Likewise, just as Christ came into his kingdom by conquering sin and death, so too the saints come into their reign by remaining faithful to death—they "overcome" or "conquer" as each of the seven letters

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40. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 16891.

41. An indication of cross-reading between Revelation and 1 Nephi is the word *combination* as a description of a secretive organization with evil intentions. It does not so occur in Revelation.

indicates.<sup>42</sup> According to John, this relationship with God follows from the love of Christ as expressed in his death and resurrection and is thus open to all (1:5). Draper and Rhodes, however, make no mention of these concepts in favor of reading ideas taken from the LDS tradition into Revelation. Thus, they indicate that “the Savior’s followers hold not only ecclesiastical authority but also civil and, therefore, will preside over both the religious and political orders of heaven. In doing so, they hold the fullness of priesthood power, all that a man can have in mortality . . . these offices [of king and priest; queen and priestess] are bestowed only to those individuals who have participated in all the ordinances of the house of the Lord, and thereby, have been sealed into eternal life.”<sup>43</sup> Although some of this coheres with John’s ideas, concepts such as “ecclesiastical authority,” temples as the Latter-day Saints understand them, and gender and marital requirements are significant expansions of John’s far simpler presentation.

This conflation of LDS ideas with John’s text presents some challenges in the authors’ reading of the sealing of the servants of God in Revelation 7:1–4. Four angels, given authority to damage the earth with wind, are called upon by a fifth to restrain themselves “until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads” (7:1–3 NRSV). In this case, those so marked are said by John to be protected from the predations of the locust warriors (9:4); some think they are also protected spiritually. According to Draper and Rhodes, those so sealed are not simply the servants of God as John describes them, but the kings and priests of modern LDS tradition.<sup>44</sup> Draper and Rhodes are willing to allow that the spouses of these men will be included and

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42. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 79. Although debate continues about what John intended to convey by calling the saints “a kingdom, priests,” a personal, ministerial priesthood as modern Christians understand such ideas is less likely.

43. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 2869.

44. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 7715. In connection with this section, Draper and Rhodes note the parallel with Ezekiel 9:4–6. Their explanation needs to be corrected to indicate that the sealing was *watched* by Ezekiel, not done by him (Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 7616).

so protected.<sup>45</sup> One hopes so; indeed, a man who accepted this security before his wife was similarly guarded would not be much of a husband. However, by implication, this reading leaves unprotected any number of otherwise presumably faithful people, including minor children and the unmarried. Those outside of the most exclusive LDS notions of a nuclear family remain without safeguards. John's text, however, indicates that God will protect all his servants.

I bring up this complication not to assert that there is no way to resolve it but to suggest that expansions on biblical texts do not necessarily illuminate the insights of their authors nor do they inevitably make difficult points easier to understand. A better way to handle such situations is to clearly distinguish between what John said and the associated expansions in the LDS tradition. Such an approach would allow readers to see for themselves both what John understood and how the LDS tradition re-images the interaction between God and his people for modern relationships and communities.

Where the historical-critical reading coheres with the LDS tradition, readers of this commentary are generally exposed to the best of modern scholarship on Revelation. Where it diverges, however, John's ideas are too often suppressed, distorted, or expanded to promote ideas from the LDS tradition. Somewhat ironically, Draper and Rhodes are aware that the LDS interpretive tradition cannot always be casually identified with the most obvious readings of the text. In the preface, they write, "It can be seen that Joseph Smith appealed to the writings of John as both proof texts and points of expansion as he taught the Saints the doctrines of the kingdom."<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Joseph Smith did pour new wine into old bottles. And this, I think, is entirely appropriate in a community, such as that of the Latter-day Saints, in which the canon is open and the prophetic voice is prominent, authoritative, and personal. That said, however, biblical exegetes within such a community are not free to ignore or manipulate the textual evidence in ways that do not reflect good scholarship regardless of how thoroughly the readings so

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45. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 7708.

46. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 1679.

constructed cohere with elements of the LDS tradition. Forcing Revelation into a procrustean bed created by the LDS tradition provides poor service to both the LDS community and the Bible.

## Homiletic commentaries and personal reflection

Homiletic commentaries are built upon exegetical commentaries, but their focus is on teaching and preaching the text to a modern audience of laypersons in order to promote a desirable change of viewpoint or behavior. The purpose of these homiletic sections is to give modern readers a sense of how the passage just analyzed might apply to them—a point that may well be lost in the historical-critical detail. Their challenge is threefold: they must be immediately relevant; this relevance must be lasting, or else they quickly become dated; and they must demonstrate good pastoral judgment in describing and motivating the desired changes. By contrast, commentaries created as an exercise in personal reflection are rarely part of the academy. Their content and form can be variable and idiosyncratic; their tone tends to be devotional and their coverage is often incomplete. Unless they are the work of a person who has had a profound, rigorous, and prolonged experience with a text, they tend to be of little interest outside of whatever niche the author occupies.

Most of the homiletic content and personal reflection in the present volume is limited to the analysis sections and the chapter conclusions. Overall, the homiletic and meditational elements seem extremely long, repetitious, and less than insightful. Unfortunately, however, some of the points made by Draper and Rhodes are rather surprising and unique—in an unpleasant way. The examples that follow are evidence of flawed analysis and reflection ranging from the unserious to a grave lack of judgment.

### *Pergamum*

Writing about the problems with assimilation in Pergamum, John wants his followers to know that their participation in the pagan festivals, which



featured meat sacrificed to idols, is unacceptable. For the Christians of Pergamum, this was a serious challenge because of the commercial, professional, and personal relationships that such participation fostered—to follow John’s advice was to risk financial ruin, professional disrepute, and ostracism. To make this meaningful to their modern LDS readers, then, Draper and Rhodes write, “These [festivals], however, were immoral by any standard and, therefore, not conducive to the Holy Spirit (*like Latter-day Saints justifying themselves in going to a sports bar today because they do not have cable*).”<sup>47</sup> In a world in which the persecution of religious minorities is rising, and in light of the LDS experience with religious bigotry that created, and still creates, social, economic, and professional barriers, patronizing sports bars in order to watch cable TV seems a juvenile illustration of the difficulties of avoiding unwanted assimilation.

#### *Authority in the seven churches*

A second questionable element, this time found in the conclusion to the chapters on the letters to the seven churches, addresses what Draper and Rhodes find to be of “greatest concern” in Revelation, the question of authority, that is, the “right to preside over and to define the doctrine of the Church.”<sup>48</sup> Regarding those who challenged John, they write:

Spurning authority, despising truth, loving error and the glory of men, these hell-inspired antichrists, like spiders, carefully spun their web of half-truths, counterfeit ordinances, and false doctrines. Luring and trapping a people no longer willing to follow living prophets and becoming ever more devoid of the Spirit, these spinners of heresy were able to suck out the juice of these Christians’ spiritual lives.<sup>49</sup>

This is not the language or discernment of academic discourse; indeed, it may not be appropriate for the pulpit, either. One wonders what purpose such a melodramatic diatribe, leveled against people now dead

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47. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 4189.

48. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 5284.

49. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 5298.

almost two thousand years, might have. Issues of authority are sensitive matters, now as always, and good, modern insights delivered in sober, reflective language would have been more useful.

### *Trumpet septet*

Revelation 9 records the events associated with the sounding of the fifth and sixth trumpets. According to John, one-third of the inhabitants of the earth were killed by the devastation so unleashed, and readers of Revelation are often surprised when John indicates that the rest of humanity refused to repent. Draper and Rhodes address this situation by writing:

*The Lord is perfectly prepared to allow thousands to die in order to protect his people. Some may have trouble with this idea, but the Seer has a very realistic understanding about death. From John's perspective, all must die. The question is when and how. Ultimate destiny is not determined by the moment or manner of death; it is by the manner of life. Those who are destroyed are not annihilated. They have further existence. But for the present they have not been playing by God's rules. They have become mean, and so they are thrown into the penalty box, so to speak, for unnecessary roughness while the game goes on.<sup>50</sup>*

If, in fact, God is “perfectly prepared to allow thousands to die in order to protect his people,” Draper and Rhodes will need to provide a citation from Revelation or otherwise make such an argument. According to John, many of the saints do die or go into captivity (Revelation 13:10); most scholars find the violence in Revelation to be excessive and without adequate justification as these things are now analyzed. In addition, the cold-hearted superficiality that turns religious persecution into meanness and deaths into penalties in an ice hockey game is trivializing and inappropriate. This is not the product of scholarly analysis, nor is it the language of sound pastoral judgment.

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50. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 9415.

More important, however, this suggests that Draper and Rhodes do not really understand the thrust of the *entire* trumpet septet, which is most definitely not on how God kills people, but on how he saves them. Briefly, the first six trumpets sound. As Draper and Rhodes report, many people are killed but no one repents. But, this is not the end of the matter. To motivate change, God tries a different approach—the suffering testimony of the church, symbolized by the two witnesses.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, the witnesses seal their testimonies in blood, but when the judgment of God inevitably falls, the sentence is moderated. Reversing the pattern of divine judgment described by Isaiah and Amos, who wrote that nine-tenths would die, John reports that only one-tenth were destroyed while nine-tenths react to the resurrection of the witnesses by being terrified and then finally giving glory to God, exactly as did the inhabitants of heaven in chapters 4 and 5.<sup>52</sup> Thus, before the sounding of the seventh trumpet, “the witness, death, and vindication of the community of faith accomplish what the prospect of judgment alone does not do. It brings people of many tribes, languages, and nations to fear God and give him glory.”<sup>53</sup> The focus of God, and John, is on life, not death, although the depth of the remaining violence is without suitable justification for modern sensibilities.<sup>54</sup>

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51. These witnesses are described as two olive trees and two lampstands (Revelation 11:4). Since the symbol behind the seven churches is a lampstand in chapters 2 and 3, it is likely the same thing here. The LDS tradition, however, suggests that two individuals are intended. For this reading, the distinction is not significant.

52. The reference is to Isaiah 6:13 and Amos 5:3. John’s numbers also reverse Elijah’s situation: in Elijah’s case, only seven thousand were left, while John writes that “only” seven thousand died.

53. Koester, *Revelation*, 111. The entire argument presented here regarding the trumpet septet is his.

54. Draper and Rhodes make another unsettling assertion in this section. When writing concerning the one-tenth who die, they say, “one-tenth, or a tithe, is the Lord’s portion, that which he demands. In this case, it is the lives of his enemies” (Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 10589). I am not convinced that God tithes evil, and the idea that he takes human life as a tithe is very disturbing.

*The two witnesses*

In chapter 11, John describes the work of the two witnesses, who testify in Jerusalem for a period of time before they are killed by the beast. Draper and Rhodes analyze the death of the two witnesses by writing:

The text suggests that it takes the beast some time to realize exactly who he is up against, but when he does, he will then direct his forces to move specifically against the two prophets. And he will win, *perhaps with help from certain rebellious Jews*.<sup>55</sup>

This paragraph is without citation or argument. In particular, the insinuation of Jewish malfeasance is not supported by Revelation and is found in neither the LDS nor the academic tradition. It does, however, appear in Draper's earlier book, *Opening the Seven Seals*. There he writes that the Jewish perfidy "is suggested through the association of [the death of the two witnesses] with that of the Lord, killed by his own people."<sup>56</sup> If Draper and Rhodes are following *Seven Seals*, they are arguing that since Jews betrayed Jesus, Jews will betray the two witnesses. The disturbing hostility toward Jews displayed here probably arises out of an inadequate understanding of the relationship between Jews, Christians, and God. Indeed, Draper and Rhodes write that "through the teachings of the synagogue of Satan, the rulers of the Jews found reason to reject and kill the Lord. In the process they caused their people *to lose the priesthood and their position as God's chosen people*."<sup>57</sup> Most Christian churches are very careful about this point for obvious reasons, and one does not often find college professors arrogating to themselves the sensitive leadership role of assessing the covenant status of the Jews.<sup>58</sup> To do

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55. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 10493.

56. Draper, *Seven Seals*, 122.

57. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 12694. The expression "synagogue of Satan" is anachronistic in discussions of the crucifixion since it comes from Revelation and reflects the polemical attitudes of the late first century. Kindness suggests such an offensive epithet not be used at all.

58. On a subject this sensitive, it may make no difference that Draper and Rhodes have, in the foreword, declared that the opinions in this commentary are their own and

so without citation, as Draper and Rhodes do, is not prudent. To suggest that Jews will betray the two witnesses without textual justification for the reading is simply unacceptable.

### *Fall of Babylon*

A final instance of questionable analysis centers on what Draper and Rhodes have to say about the fall of Babylon in chapter 17. They equate this symbolic action with a future breakdown of civil society and wish to warn their readers that modern, urban societies pose new threats:

And how will the earth dwellers react to this? Before, when downturns came, many people lived on the land and could, therefore, eke out a living. But that is not the case today. Many dwell in huge megalopolises and must rely totally on the local stores for their goods. But what happens when there are none? In addition, what happens when the restraining forces of society can no longer operate? What happens when *untamed and unholy people are left to run free*? Riots and looting have happened in the best of times. What will happen in the worst?<sup>59</sup>

At this point, the personal reflections recorded here seem to have degenerated into an idiosyncratic, skewed understanding of twenty-first-century urban life that appears to be on a rapid slide into a B-list apocalyptic drama. Two points stand out as particularly unsuitable. The first is a transparent attempt to play on fears of class violence in a crisis, a very unprincipled use of the Bible. Second, note the descriptors attached to urban citizens: they are “untamed and unholy” and when “left to run free” there is danger. *Untamed* is appropriately used of animals, not people, and *unholy* is a judgment the authors are in no position to make. In the hands of a person so inclined—and there are many—these negative stereotypes and unfounded judgments are ready evidence of bigotry.<sup>60</sup>

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do not reflect those of BYU or the LDS Church.

59. Draper and Rhodes, *Revelation of John*, 17480.

60. A similarly questionable bit of advice is rendered when discussing John’s instructions to the saints indicating that they must endure with patience the trials of their

The merit of homiletic content and personal reflection is very often a matter of taste, and the greatest possible latitude should be offered. However, some ideas, such as those presented in this review, lie outside the bounds of academic discourse, appropriate sensitivity, and sound pastoral judgment. Moreover, by virtue of the fact that the series advertises itself as the Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary Series, the institution is now, to some degree, associated with these unfortunate ideas. And because the lead time to produce a major commentary is often measured in decades, this volume will bear the BYU appellation for some time to come. This makes it all the more fortunate that no publisher has been found for printed copies; since this volume exists only in electronic form, it can more easily be edited for professional, academic quality.

## Conclusions

The purpose of the BYUNTC series is to provide “a responsible, carefully researched, multi-volume commentary” that “will combine the best of ancient linguistic and historical scholarship with Latter-day Saint doctrinal perspectives.” The authors of this particular volume set out to “bring John’s writing into its fullest light” by providing a new translation, a verse-by-verse exegetical commentary, and associated analysis. This, then, is the crux: does the way Draper and Rhodes have chosen to integrate historical-critical insights with the LDS tradition really “bring John’s writing into its fullest light”? This review has pointed out that their effort is not entirely satisfactory. The LDS tradition offered excludes women and lacks needed historical context, two hallmarks of a well-developed appreciation for biblical reception. The introductory

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time. Draper and Rhodes write, “The saints are duty bound to uphold and sustain the State, but only to a point. Should the State overstep its bounds and become a quasi-religious institution demanding reverence and worship from its citizens, then the Saint [*sic*] must not only resist but also be willing to pay the cost of that resistance” (12612). This should be clarified to preclude any suggestion of sedition, violence, or other illegal behaviors, which would be inappropriate in a commentary.

section is dated, incomplete, and deeply flawed by a slanted presentation where evidence runs against the LDS tradition. The rendition and the authors' reading of John's narrative are similarly distorted at certain points under pressure from the twin assumptions of unity of scripture and inerrancy, and the priority Draper and Rhodes assign to the LDS tradition. Finally, the homiletic content, while mostly unremarkable, deviates on far too many occasions from an appropriate academic voice, sensitivity to others, and sound pastoral judgment. This commentary is not the way forward.

Although I am not privy to the details of the review process, the flaws of the present work indicate that this part of the publication trajectory requires more consideration than it has heretofore received. The issues identified in this review are not minor or simply mechanical.<sup>61</sup> Instead, they indicate that the authors do not really control all the appropriate methodologies and that they lack the necessary commitment to handle contrary evidence reliably. The poor judgment displayed in elements of the homiletic and reflective contributions is of particular concern; indeed, I cannot help but wonder if any peer review was enforced by the editors. Future volumes will need a more robust internal critique, as well as the participation of scholars outside of the BYU system, in order to preclude the appearance created by this volume that a narrow orthodoxy has displaced genuine scholarship and its associated integrity.

Finally, faithful scholarship is more than good scholarship. Bad scholarship, however, is never faithful scholarship regardless of the "results" so achieved. Exegetes working from within the LDS community must handle textual and historical evidence with respect. Where this evidence diverges from the LDS tradition, integrity requires that the distinctions be noted with sensitivity to both the LDS tradition and the advantages and limits of scholarly insight. There is room for a both/and approach in which ancient and modern prophets are brought

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61. There are, however, far too many minor errors as well. I quit counting after one hundred instances of incorrect spelling, subject-verb disagreement, inappropriate punctuation, homophones, and the like. Of particular significance for a biblical commentary is that Cain's brother was not Able, a mistake that occurs at least twice.

together in interpretive readings that demonstrate congruence without demanding identity. To discern this, rather than to distort or suppress the historical-critical, is the way forward for LDS exegetes.

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# Some Reflections on the Revelation of John in Mormon Thought: Past, Present, and Future

*Grant Underwood*

WHEN THE INVITATION TO JOIN THIS PANEL was issued, session conveners sent me a copy of Richard Draper's paper, indicating it was "based on his Commentary on Revelation" and as such offered a glimpse of the volume's content and approach. "Feel free," they wrote, "to comment on specific things from his paper, his commentary, or the broader topic." I shall do a bit of all three in the reflections that follow.

Among the first questions that arise when approaching any new work is the matter of audience. I had always assumed that the BYU New Testament Commentary series was conceived first and foremost to speak to the broader scholarly community, to demonstrate, if you will, that LDS engagement with the Bible deserves a place at the biblical-studies table. Naturally the volumes would also be of interest to Latter-day Saints, but they would not be the target audience. Reading Richard's paper, though, made me wonder if the primary audience has actually shifted to Latter-day Saints. Statements indicating that the book of Revelation is instructive "for those living in the last days," or "the point is that the Saints must

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This paper was originally presented in the Latter-day Saints and the Bible session of the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature as part of a panel response to a paper by Richard Draper entitled "Some Aspects of the Apocalypse of John from an LDS Perspective" and the recent commentary on Revelation by Draper and Rhodes: Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Revelation of John the Apostle*, BYU New Testament Commentary Series (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2013). The other panelists were Professor Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary and Professor Richard Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary.

endure,” or “it behooves all of us to repent and help Him move the work forward,” while perfectly fine in an LDS context, strike me as in-house language less suited for an academic setting like this. While helping direct the Mormon Studies group in the American Academy of Religion, we urged LDS presenters at our annual sessions to keep the wider audience in mind and stressed that the AAR is a venue for the academic, rather than the confessional, study of religion. I imagine that the Society of Biblical Literature has a similar vision for its constituent units as well.

In this regard, I would also suggest a revision of the commentary’s promotional blurb on the series website. “Latter-day Saints,” it proclaims, “are in an excellent position to decipher and understand [Revelation’s] symbols. To these people the Lord promised [quoting the Book of Mormon] . . . ‘great and marvelous things which have been hid up from the foundation of the world. . . . And [the] revelations which I have caused to be written by my servant John [shall] be unfolded in the eyes of all the people’ (Ether 4:15–16). Now is the time of that unfolding.” Despite the excitement one might feel at the publication of a work many years in production, we should be careful not to let our enthusiasm carry us into overconfident triumphalism. On what grounds did the blurb writer decide to speak for God in proclaiming that the day of Revelation’s unfolding is now or to imply that Draper and Rhodes are the ones to unfold it? Along these lines it would also seem prudent to avoid disparaging other religious perspectives with statements like, “There is no good news in its worldview, only a lot of hokey advice,” ironically the very barb often hurled at Mormonism.

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of considering a non-Mormon audience is the need to speak the language of scholarship by employing methodologies that produce reasoned argumentation rather than doctrinal assertion. Let me illustrate by referring to Joseph Smith’s reading of Revelation 1:6, something Richard references in his paper. The King James Version (KJV) renders the verse “and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.” Richard correctly points out, “Joseph stated this should be taken literally and that the passage proved that God himself had a father.” Although it may be possible to read the

passage in this fashion, the dominant theological presuppositions and exegetical practices of Christian scholars make it unlikely that they will be persuaded by this reading. Indeed, not even Joseph Smith himself read it this way until *his* theological presuppositions about God changed later in his life. Only when he began to expound a literal, familial relationship between Deity and humanity, along with the possibility of their never-ending progress and development, could such a reading of Revelation 1:6 be imagined. Earlier, in 1832, Joseph Smith did modify the wording of the verse in what Latter-day Saints today call the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), a project he undertook to revise or amplify certain passages of the Bible that he deemed incorrect or incomplete. In this case, he dropped the crucial “and” in “God and his father” so that it read “God, his father.” This reference to a single God, of course, rather than a suggestion of divine plurality, is how virtually every other known Bible translation, including the rendition offered in the Draper and Rhodes commentary, translates the passage. Yet by the 1840s Joseph Smith was exuberantly proclaiming his new understanding and reading of the Bible in support of that view. Contrary to the usual interpretation of the statement in 1 Corinthians 8:5 that “there be gods many and lords many,” Joseph declared, “I testify that Paul had no allusions to [pagan gods]—I have it from God & get over it if you can.”<sup>1</sup>

So, what happens if most of the Christian world *cannot* “get over” Joseph’s claim that his unique interpretations came directly from Deity? What if, to mention several more arcane ideas highlighted by Richard, non-Mormons struggle to see being made “kings and priests unto God” as receiving the “fulness of the priesthood” in a culminating temple ordinance, or the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17 as a revelatory Urim and Thummim? Must the dialogue stop there? Latter-day Saints may rejoice in what they take to be revealed glosses on the book of Revelation even when they seem to defy history, language, or context. But a sympathetic Christian friend might reasonably reply: “You invite me to

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1. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 379.

lay aside the careful textual and contextual analyses of biblical scholars to accept the word of your prophet, who provides no reasoned exegesis but merely asserts as a fact divinely revealed to him that John was referring to God's father or that Paul had no reference to pagan gods or . . ."—and here a long list of idiosyncratic interpretations could be inserted. "I'm open-minded," continues the friend, "but I need more intellectual traction. Please set forth the logical, literary, and historical arguments in support of these views." That is precisely what I would hope would happen in an LDS commentary such as this. Though Richard devotes little space to it in the body of his paper, his two long footnotes engaging scholarship on the question of the authorship of the book of Revelation hint at his willingness to do so. If we Latter-day Saints want our writings to be more than curiosity shops where non-Mormons come to view the theologically exotic Other, it will be through such reasoned argumentation.

I turn now to methodological considerations and begin by interrogating Richard's practice of speaking of and for Latter-day Saints as a uniform collectivity. Is that desirable? Have Latter-day Saints spoken univocally across time and space? Can one really talk of *the* LDS view as if it were monolithic? Religious thought, whether in institutions or individuals, is not a static essence that moves unchanged across time and space. It is constantly, if subtly and perhaps not altogether consciously, being shaped and reshaped in response to changing circumstances and new ideological resources. This is true of each and every individual who constitutes the collectivity known as Latter-day Saints. Here I will take Joseph Smith as an example. In the 1832 document "Revelation Explained" (now D&C 77), Joseph offers answers to several questions about the first eleven chapters of John's Apocalypse. In response to a query regarding Revelation 4:6, "what are we to understand by the four beasts," he replies, "they are figurative Expressions used by the revelator John in discribing heaven the paradise of God" and were "shewn to John to represent the glory of the classes of beings . . . in the enjoyment of their eternal felicity." Revelation 4:6 (KJV) also describes the four beasts as being "full of eyes before and behind." Joseph explained that these eyes were "a representation" of knowledge and their wings were "a

representation of power to move to act &c.”<sup>2</sup> Further on in Revelation 13:1, where a seven-headed beast rising up out of the sea is depicted, Joseph revised the verse to read, “*And I saw another sign, in the likeness of the kingdoms of the earth; a beast rise up out of the sea . . . having seven heads and ten horns*” (JST).

A decade later, Joseph Smith found himself in the midst of national agitation over the predictions of William Miller, a New York farmer who believed he had cracked the Bible’s prophetic code and thereby learned that the second coming would take place about the year 1843. On several occasions Joseph explicitly repudiated Millerite teaching, but what particularly drew his ire was the historicist hermeneutics that underlay Miller’s reading of Revelation.<sup>3</sup> “John’s vision was very different from Daniel’s Prophecy,” insisted Joseph Smith. John’s vision referred “to things ex[is]ting in heaven,” whereas Daniel saw “a figure of things ~~on~~ ~~the~~ which are on the earth.” Joseph returned specifically to the subject of the four beasts, this time to argue for “the a[c]tual existenc[e] of beasts in heaven.”<sup>4</sup> John’s “grand secret was to tell what was in heaven.”<sup>5</sup> Rather than being “figurative expressions,” as he earlier declared, he now opined that they probably “were beasts which had lived on another planet. than our’s.”<sup>6</sup> More broadly, focusing on “every creature in heaven” mentioned in Revelation 5:13, Joseph said John saw “strange beasts of which we have no conception” that had been “saved from ten thousand times ten thousand earths like this.”<sup>7</sup> As for the beast of Revelation 13 that Joseph

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2. Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 209–10 (hereafter cited as JSP D2).

3. For more on the Latter-day Saint encounter with Millerism, see Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 112–26.

4. Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 325 (hereafter cited as JSP J2).

5. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 188.

6. JSP J2:325.

7. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 185.

had previously described as being “in the likeness of the kingdoms of the earth,” he now declared that “the beast John saw as spoken of in the 13th chapter was an actual beast to whom power was to be given. An actual intelligent being in heaven.”<sup>8</sup> Here is his reasoning for laying aside a figurative interpretation: In Revelation 13:4 the earth’s inhabitants are amazed at the beast and ask, “Who is able to make war with him?” “Suppose we admit,” asked Joseph, that the beast “means the kingdoms of the world [which he himself had suggested in 1832], what propriety would there be in saying, who is able to make war with myself. If these spiritualizing interpretations are true, the book contradicts itself in almost every verse, but they are not true.”<sup>9</sup>

So here we have Joseph Smith offering figurative interpretations at one point in his life and arguing against them in another. How might an LDS scholar explain this in a commentary? In speaking to other biblical scholars, an LDS biblical commentator could simply say that Joseph changed his mind or point out that differing contexts elicited different expressions. Individuals rarely systematize their thought, certainly not when speaking extemporaneously as Joseph almost always did. Systematizing and harmonizing is what followers do to such key religious figures as Augustine or Aquinas, John Calvin or Joseph Smith. The need here is to be discriminating enough to distinguish between the Joseph Smith of developed Mormon theologies and the Joseph Smith that can best be reconstructed from the historical documents. As my evangelical copanelists know, much has been said over the years in the name of John Calvin that is more Calvinism than Calvin himself.

On the other hand, if a commentator is writing as a believing Latter-day Saint to other believing Latter-day Saints, then it is necessary to consider some of the popular LDS paradigms for prophetic functioning. Did Joseph *always* speak the word of God? He himself answered that question on one occasion, remarking famously that a “‘Prophet is not always a Prophet’ only when he is acting as such,”<sup>10</sup>

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8. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 186.

9. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 187.

10. JSP J2:256.

echoing Paul's clarification to the Corinthians, "To the rest speak I, not the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:12). Over the years Latter-day Saints have created several rudimentary theological grids for plotting the relative authoritativeness of church leaders' expressions, including Joseph's, but the matter has yet to receive the detailed and careful calibration that centuries of Catholicism have brought to the question of what constitutes official or dogmatic pronouncements in their communion. Still, LDS commentators can make some assessments about levels of authoritativeness in the prophet's expressions. We might invoke the LDS construct of "line-upon-line" development, what others would call the evolutionary model of Joseph's thought, whereby the Nauvoo expressions are considered more mature and refined, more completely "true," than earlier statements. Or we might argue that in Nauvoo Joseph was overreacting to historicist hermeneutics and overstating his case, thus enabling those remarks to be gently laid aside. Of course, there is always the harmonizing move that leaves no expression behind and attempts to weave them all together into a consistent theological tapestry, or the Procrustean intervention that stretches or lops off parts of the body of a person's thought in order to make it fit the desired theological bed. Such are the activities that turn Calvin into one's preferred version of Calvinism or Joseph into a particular Mormonism. However LDS commentators proceed, they will want to maintain a rigorous approach to Joseph Smith's thought, one that does not ahistorically smooth out ambiguities or allow subsequent theologizing in his name to be taken as identical with his teaching. Even if LDS commentators are writing with an LDS audience in mind, what won't do is to silence variety in the name of seamless consistency.

If a single individual's thought is not monolithic or uniform, that of institutions or entire traditions is even less so. Consider the case of the "man-child" mentioned in Revelation 12, which Richard discussed. For much of Mormon history, it has been common to interpret it as the priesthood or ministerial authority "caught up to heaven" during the great apostasy that drove the woman or true church into the wilderness. Alternatively, following the death of the Prophet, Elder Orson Hyde opined that the man-child taken to heaven was the martyred Joseph

Smith.<sup>11</sup> As the JST gloss that Richard shared became more widely known in the second half of the twentieth century, the idea has circulated that the man-child was the political kingdom of God destined to govern during the millennium. Regardless of the exegetical difficulties in sustaining any of these, the point is that LDS interpretation has not been univocal—a reality nicely illustrated in the contrasting views of twentieth-century apostles and in-laws Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie. In a 1940s volume written for Sunday class use, Smith invoked the “priesthood” interpretation.<sup>12</sup> A generation later, McConkie—in his own commentary on the New Testament, which is consistently informed by JST readings—wrote that the man-child was the kingdom that would “hold sway during the Millennial Era.”<sup>13</sup>

Similar variation characterizes understanding of the two witnesses (Gk. *martyres*) in Revelation 11. Although many Christian commentators over the centuries have interpreted them figuratively, the idea that they were two actual individuals, such as Elijah and Enoch or Elijah and Moses, has not been unknown. In the past two hundred years, the human-witness interpretation has been popularized by dispensationalist eschatology that typically construes them as two individuals who will play a role in the dramatic events depicted in Revelation. Joseph Smith offered similar views: “They are two prophets that are to be raised up to the Jewish nation in the last days, at the time of the restoration and to prophesy to the Jews after they are gathered and have built the city of Jerusalem.”<sup>14</sup> Well into the twentieth century, LDS commentators tended to follow the view of Elder Parley P. Pratt, who wrote in his influential *Voice*

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11. Orson Hyde, *Speech of Elder Orson Hyde delivered before the High Priests quorum in Nauvoo, April 27th, 1845 upon the course and conduct of Mr. Sidney Rigdon, and upon the merits of his claims to the presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Liverpool: James and Woodburn, 1845), 33.

12. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946), 2:118.

13. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 3:511.

14. JSP D2:213.



of *Warning* that they were “a couple of *Jewish* Prophets.”<sup>15</sup> This is certainly a reasonable understanding of Joseph’s statement, but because Bruce R. McConkie believed God would not raise up *Jewish* prophets outside his latter-day church, he declared, “No doubt they will be members of the Council of the Twelve or of the First Presidency of the Church.”<sup>16</sup> As with his interpretation of the man-child, Richard again embraces McConkie’s view, which requires him to read Joseph’s statement so as to stress that “these prophets do not come *from* the Jews but are *raised up to* them.” Missing in his paper, in either case, is the acknowledgment that other LDS apostles interpreted John’s visions differently, and consequently there is no reasoned analysis from Richard as to why he favors the view of one apostle over another. But these are matters one would wish to see addressed in an LDS commentary on Revelation.

Of course, the practice of picking a particular voice and presenting it as *the* LDS view is all too common in Latter-day Saint writing. Nonetheless, it is incumbent on scholars to acknowledge variety where it exists and not perpetuate the myth of a single Mormon view, especially because very few biblical interpretations have been officially, dogmatically endorsed. Presentations of LDS teachings should be richly textured, Kodachrome assessments of Mormon thought rather than monochrome portraits of perfect consistency in prophetic expression or churchwide uniformity in biblical interpretation.

The idea that biblical commentaries are straightforward, theology-free expositions of a perspicuous Bible text is widely acknowledged to be an illusion. Even with the classic commentaries, what we are still getting is *Karl Barth’s* Romans or *Raymond Brown’s* John. That this commentary, therefore, is *Draper and Rhodes’s* Revelation rather than *the* LDS Revelation is no indictment, merely a reminder that the personal and the idiosyncratic are unavoidable. The challenge is to discipline theological idiosyncrasy through the rigor of time-honored scholarly

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15. Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People: Containing a Declaration of the Faith and Doctrine of the Church of the Latter-day Saints, Commonly Called Mormons* (New York: Sandford, 1837), 82, emphasis added.

16. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:509.

methodologies. It is, for instance, to avoid letting textual exegesis drift into theologically driven eisegesis, something that can be subtle as well as overt. To interpretively link passages from one biblical book with another where there is no direct quotation or clear allusion involved, as Richard does with Isaiah 51 and Revelation 11, is a mild form of eisegesis rather than exegesis. It may be fine for Sunday sermons and devotional literature, but not for biblical commentaries. A full commentary provides ample space to set forth both the methodological principles and reasoned analyses by which we arrive at our own creative interpretations of Revelation, or come to favor certain LDS interpretations over others, or by which, to fill in the gaps left by a paucity of LDS engagement with the entire book of Revelation, we may depend on certain non-Mormon commentaries more than others.

At one point Richard correctly observes that “Restoration materials have not solved all the problems associated with Revelation.” I would adjust that to say they have not solved *many* of the interpretive problems. Given the modicum of *official* LDS interpretation of Revelation, given Joseph Smith’s own differing interpretations, and given the varying views found throughout the corpus of LDS literature, it seems premature to claim much about what Latter-day Saints have “solved” with regard to the book of Revelation. Moreover, despite Joseph Smith’s intense interest in the last days, he was not nearly as enraptured with the book as other eschatologically oriented individuals in his or any other era. Not until April 1843, just a year before his death, did Joseph Smith give an extended discourse on the Apocalypse of John. “This is the fi[r]st time I have ever taken a text in Revelati[o]n.— and if the young elders would let such things alone it would be far better.”<sup>17</sup> “To have knowledge in relation to the meaning of beasts with seven . . . heads and te[n] horns and other figure[s] made use of in the revelations,” he added, “is not very essential to the Elders.”<sup>18</sup> Perhaps that is part of the reason Joseph Smith did not include the brief “explanation” of the book’s first eleven chapters

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17. JSP J2:325.

18. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 183.

now known as Doctrine and Covenants 77 in either the original 1835 compilation of his revelations or the 1844 second edition.

Be that as it may, there is still much that a broad audience will find fascinating, possibly even insightful, about the ways in which Latter-day Saints have interpreted Revelation. Given the time, energy, and resources that are being devoted to this milestone series, it has the chance to be the standard for a generation or more. Few living Latter-day Saints have spent more time researching and reflecting on the Apocalypse of John than Richard Draper. Perhaps by drawing on the talented pool of younger LDS scholars trained in New Testament studies, he and Michael Rhodes can extend their work in ways that more effectively bring LDS views into tough-minded conversation with biblical scholarship generally. I do hope my few remarks will be received as a modest assist to that end. Along with others who care about the project, I, too, would like to see the Revelation commentary, as well as the series generally, be “all that it can be.”

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# A Closer Look: Luke 22:43–44 and Questions of Interpretation

*Mike Pope*

Review of S. Kent Brown. *The Testimony of Luke*. Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2013.

S. KENT BROWN'S TRANSLATION OF and commentary on the Gospel of Luke is massive (1,271 PDF pages). He is to be commended for undertaking such an ambitious project. For LDS audiences unaccustomed to the genre of academic commentaries, Brown's interaction with long-respected scholars like Alfred Plummer, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Raymond Brown should bring welcome amendment to familiar readings of Luke within the Latter-day Saint tradition. Kent Brown spent untold labors in producing such a work, and one rightly pauses before raising criticisms. Nonetheless, in view of the BYU New Testament Commentary's methodological aims, I see the volume as incomplete in spite of its length. Each commentary in the series is expected to "combine the best of ancient linguistic and historical scholarship with Latter-day Saint perspectives," but I am concerned that this standard is not met, specifically in regard to recent Lukan scholarship beyond the LDS tradition.<sup>1</sup> In fact, by relying heavily on LDS scholarship, Brown often simply reproduces LDS understandings of Luke rather than extending our understanding of the text

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1. <http://www.byunewtestamentcommentary.com/about-us/the-project/>.

by employing the best scholarship available.<sup>2</sup> In this short review I aim to illustrate how drawing from recent scholarship, specifically regarding his discussion of Luke's "garden" scene, could have further enriched Brown's commentary. In particular, I will examine his treatment of the famous sweat-as-blood simile from the garden scene, arguing that his reading introduces significant interpretive difficulties for readers of Luke.

In his discussion of the garden scene from Luke 22:43–44, the angel-and-sweat-as-blood verses, Brown notes that the inclusion of the verses are controversial and that some scholars (e.g., Joseph Fitzmyer and Bart Ehrman) see them as interpolations. To countermand this position, Brown cites only two recent articles by Thomas Wayment (2008) and

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2. Of the 301 total sources included in Brown's bibliography, nearly one-third of these (94) are LDS authored or LDS themed, and almost every LDS-authored source is also LDS themed, which is to be expected in a volume that aims to "combine the best of ancient linguistic and historical scholarship with Latter-day Saint doctrinal perspectives." Yet, by examining the bibliography further, we find that perhaps such a degree of engagement with these LDS-related sources is partly responsible for the incompleteness I see. As I tally it, 72 sources published from 2000 to the present are listed in the bibliography. Well over half of these (42) are LDS authored or LDS themed. The 30 remaining sources are, however, problematic in terms of breadth. Subtracting entries for encyclopedias and theological dictionaries, 26 articles or book-length studies published from 2000 to 2014 remain. Thus, from the last 15 years of Lukan scholarship, only 26 sources are referenced in composing a commentary exceeding 1,200 pages. Many important studies from the past decade and a half are, perforce, absent. As a general and rather startling example, not one of François Bovon's works on Luke is listed. Though he is a world-renowned Luke specialist, omission of his studies published in French is, perhaps, understandable (no non-English sources appear in Brown's bibliography). Much less so is the absence of Bovon's material translated into English, especially his three-volume *Hermeneia* commentary, the last volume having been published in 2012. Another example is Denaux and Corstjens's 2009 (Peeters) study, *The Vocabulary of Luke: An Alphabetic Presentation and a Survey of Characteristic and Noteworthy Words and Word Groups in Luke's Gospel*, a critical translation tool for a project like Brown's. As a final case in point, Brown makes a claim in his introduction about Luke's rhetorical training and historical writing: "Luke . . . is obviously an educated man skilled in composing his native language, Greek. Both of his books exhibit a finely attuned ability to communicate well and they form a genuine history." In regard to these very issues, Clare Rothschild's 2004 (Mohr Siebeck) monograph, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History: An Investigation of Early Christian Historiography*, would have been a natural and useful conversation partner at this point and elsewhere in Brown's study.

Lincoln Blumell (forthcoming). Citing these two peer-reviewed articles published in highly respected journals as evidence for the authenticity of verses 43–44 is, I assert unequivocally, legitimate. However, the fact that Wayment and Blumell are both Latter-day Saints and employed in the same department at Brigham Young University as Brown (now emeritus) points up the issue of narrowness in Brown's interaction with wider and recent scholarship on Luke. By limiting his treatment of a highly contentious issue to two papers from his departmental colleagues, Brown bypasses the greater, current academic conversation in which Wayment and Blumell are participants. Most notably, to make claims about the authenticity of verses 43–44 and to interpret these verses without any engagement with Claire Clivaz's monumental 2010 (Peeters) book, *L'ange et la sueur de sang (Lc 22,43–44) ou comment on pourrait bien encore écrire l'histoire*, is methodologically inadequate and, consequentially, deleterious to Brown's own arguments.

To see an example of how Brown's disregard for Clivaz's work undermines his claims, we can examine his reading of the sweat and blood in verses 43–44. Brown takes great interpretive pains to place actual blood in this scene even though the blood is taken by most specialists as a comparison in a simile. The simile construction notwithstanding, scholarship has shown that grounds do exist for a more complex reading of the verse's sweat and blood. Most recently in her book, Clivaz builds on previous research and provides fresh evidence that the phenomenon of *haimatidrosis*, or the sweaty secretion of blood, was well known in ancient literature and plausibly known by Luke as well. By ignoring Clivaz's work, Brown misses a potential buttress to his interpretation of those verses. In regard to this same issue, the same can be said of Brown's failure to consult François Bovon's *Hermeneia* commentary on Luke. First, Bovon also discusses the issue of *haimatidrosis*. Second, Bovon, like Brown, often appeals to apocryphal and later Jewish literature in his explication of Luke. Had Brown engaged with Bovon's analysis of a passage from the *Testament of Abraham*, for example, he would have garnered ancillary justification for reading actual blood into the sweaty tableau. In addition, had Brown fully investigated the entry

for sweat in Adalbert Denaux and Rita Corstjens's *The Vocabulary of Luke*, he would have been directed to further articles that would have substantially supported his reading of blood. Unfortunately, neglect of these three recent publications has the effect of rendering Brown's claims more tenuous and, at the same time, less cautious than necessary.

The danger of interpreting a text in the absence of current critical literature also seems to be at issue in Brown's treatment of the term ὡσεῖ, "as if, as though, like," which launches the sweat-as-blood simile of verse 44.

The force of the Greek particle *hōsei* is difficult to judge. Some scholars propose that it means "like" and thus they translate "his sweat became like drops of blood" or "the sweat was falling like drops of blood," thus discounting that Jesus actually sheds blood in Gethsemane. The other sense for *hōsei* is "as" (see 24:11; Rom. 6:13), that is, "his sweat came to be as drops of blood."<sup>3</sup>

Serious problems undermine this argument. First, the supposed difficulty of interpreting the Greek particle ὡσεῖ/*hōsei* is largely mitigated based on general use of the term in Greek literature, other New Testament instances (e.g., Matthew 3:16), Luke's own usage elsewhere (Luke 3:22), entries for the term in lexica like BDAG and LSJ,<sup>4</sup> and common scholarly acknowledgment of the term's use in similes. The term ὡσεῖ is not so mysterious that it eludes the understanding of those analyzing this verse. It is widely seen as introducing a simile, regardless of how one then interprets the simile. In this regard, Brown's claim that "some scholars propose that it means 'like'" seems to me to be a rhetorically unfair understatement. Challenging the *status quaestionis* is basic to scholarly inquiry, but one cannot simply dismiss it as though it were a matter of minority opinion made by "some." This leads to the second problem. In contesting the

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3. Brown, *Testimony of Luke*.

4. Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Henry G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968).

status quo and bolstering his interpretation of ὡσεὶ as meaning “as” in the sense of “equating to,” Brown relies on citations to the well-known commentaries of Alfred Plummer and Raymond Brown and an entry in Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner’s grammar.<sup>5</sup>

However, these citations cannot be used to support Kent Brown’s claim. Plummer, who does not directly address the meaning or force of ὡσεὶ, is duly cautious about seeing actual blood in the simile construction.<sup>6</sup> Although Raymond Brown acknowledges that actual blood *could* be suggested by the ὡσεὶ construction, he is forced to conclude—after weighing the arguments, including the use of ὡσεὶ elsewhere in Luke and Acts—that “there is no surety, therefore, that the passage means that Jesus’ sweat became bloody. . . . In the narrative Jesus does not appear to have been weakened by this sweat, and there is no indication of pain.”<sup>7</sup> More awkward is Kent Brown’s citation of Blass and Debrunner. The section he cites, 157(5), does not deal with the ὡσεὶ construction of verse 44 but with issues of predication and oblique predication (accusative of object and a predicate accusative). How might this mistake have been made? Section 157(5) is the first entry listed in the index for ὡσεὶ, and 157(5) does in fact contain an example from Luke. From this it would be easy enough to draw a hasty but unfounded connection to the grammatical question in 22:44. However, the example in section 157(5) concerns the use of ὡσεὶ with φαίνεσθαι and is from Luke 24:11, where the reported words of the women who were witness to the empty tomb appear “as if” (ὡσεὶ) nonsense to the apostles. Even if we were to (mis)apply the grammatical principle of 157(5) to the ὡσεὶ of 22:44, the salient feature of the ὡσεὶ from 24:11 is that Luke (and his audience) know that the women’s words are expressly *not* nonsense; hence the “as if” indicates the nonactuality of the situation. This is hardly compelling

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5. Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); hereafter BDF.

6. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1922), 510–11.

7. Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1:185.



evidence to support Brown's reading of ὡσεὶ in 22:44 in which he wants the ὡσεὶ to indicate the actual presence of Jesus's blood.

If we continue to follow Brown's grammatical argument on this verse, further consequences arise. Brown seems so determined to see actual blood in the ὡσεὶ construction that he goes as far as to reverse the constituent parts of the simile in 22:44. Thus, in regard to the question of authenticity for verses 43–44, Brown asks rhetorically, "Does the angel really come and does Jesus bleed as if he is sweating?" This is a violent and grammatically untenable overhaul of the ὡσεὶ construction. Suddenly actual blood is being compared to figurative sweat. It is as though in misapplying BDF 157(5), Brown has turned the ὡσεὶ construction into a simple predication in which nouns on either side of the copula (the ἐγένετο, in Brown's reading) stand in the nominative. But this is not how the verb γίνεσθαι forms predicates. Rather, the predicate of γίνεσθαι stands in agreement with the case of the subject without additional words like ὡσεὶ. When γίνεσθαι does form a predicate in conjunction with another word, it may do so with the preposition εἰς followed by the predicate-like noun or substantive in the accusative case as the object of εἰς, as in the clause ἐγενήθη δέ μοι εἰς γυναῖκα, "And she became my wife," from Genesis 20:12 (LXX). This is not what is happening grammatically with the ὡσεὶ in verse 44. To return to the BYU New Testament Commentary's statement on methodological aims, Brown's idiosyncratic and grammatically tenuous reading of ὡσεὶ cannot be seen as an example of employing "the best of ancient linguistic and historical scholarship."

Brown's decision to read actual blood in verse 44 leads him to make further claims that unfortunately remain unexamined and unsubstantiated. In the closing paragraph of his analysis of the garden prayer pericope, Brown declares that Jesus "bleed[s] into his clothing, staining his garments." The onus is on Brown to make such a statement stick. Weighted against Brown's claim is the fact that no mention of Jesus's clothing being stained exists in verses 43–44; rather, the specified destination of the descending bodily fluid is the ground (ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν). Further, if Jesus's clothing was drenched with coagulating blood, one would

expect someone in the text to have pointed this out. However, nobody at the arrest scene or the nighttime mocking scene says anything about Jesus's blood-soaked garments. More to the point, the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pilate in their daytime interrogations of Jesus do not comment on or question any blood-stained clothing. Indeed, at junctures where the topic of Jesus's clothing does intrude on the narrative and where observations about its blood-stained state would naturally fit (such as in 23:11 when Herod's soldiers dressed Jesus in bright clothing or in 23:34 when Jesus's clothing is divided), Luke is silent. Moreover, one might expect that Pilate would have specific interest in how one of his subjects came to be so bloodied, particularly one reputed to have a stake in local power politics. These are all reasonable, text-based objections to Brown's claim, and it is his responsibility to preclude or answer them. As with his treatment of the sweat-as-blood question, Brown could have avoided these problems had he engaged with the best of current Lukan scholarship in accordance with the stated aims of the BYU New Testament Commentary.

The editorial aims listed earlier appear on the BYU New Testament Commentary project website and do not belong solely to Brown, of course (though he also sits on the board of editors); it is the editors' duty to ensure that each volume in the series meets their standards through review processes. Though I am not privy to the editors' pre-publication practices, it seems to me that Brown's commentary did not have the benefits of external peer review. External review, I am positive, would have remedied the difficulties discussed above and aided Brown in producing a commentary that, to borrow again the language of the BYU New Testament Commentary project's description, profits from the "rapidly growing number of studies on the New Testament."

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## Book Reviews

Sidney H. Griffith. *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

*Reviewed by D. Morgan Davis*

THE BIBLE TRANSLATED INTO ARABIC is a happening, an event or artifact that craves explanation. As a text it is both product and producer. It has come into being and it brings into being. It is the result of the transformative events of seventh-century Arabia, and in turn, it has resulted in or facilitated the formation of new religious and social realities that have shaped the cultural contours of the Islamic world for centuries.

Sidney H. Griffith, the doyen of Arabic Christian studies in North America, has been nominally retired for a number of years now but has once again set his emeritus status aside for the point of authoring another valuable contribution to the field, this time a summary of the research to date (much of it his own) on the history of the Bible as translated into Arabic. Drawing together many strands of historical and lexical investigation, he has braided a stout cord of historical narrative and philological argument that will reward the attention of scholars of Arabic Christianity for another generation.

As with his other studies, Griffith's latest volume is structured to move methodically through the subject matter. An introductory chapter lays out the major contours of the book and gives a foretaste of what will be salient in each subsequent chapter. In this case, he proceeds both chronologically (opening with chapters on "The Bible in Pre-Islamic Arabia,"

“The Bible in the Arabic Qur’an,” and “The Earliest Translations of the Bible into Arabic”), as well as thematically (“Christian Translations of the Bible into Arabic,” “Jewish Translations . . .,” “Muslims and the Bible in Arabic,” and concluding with a final chapter on the impacts of the Arabic Bible on Muslim, Christian, and Jewish relations). If Griffith’s language is somewhat old school (e.g., “the present writer” or “one” as the subject, and further self-effacement by resorts to the passive voice), his points are nevertheless freshly and clearly stated and then restated as they become relevant to other discussions in other sections of the book.

In the first substantive chapter, Griffith observes that the Qur’an represents the earliest attestation of a fully developed written Arabic and that it is also the earliest written source for any hints as to the identity of the Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews living in Arabia prior to and during the emergence of Muhammad’s following. The consensus is that the Jews to whom it speaks were those contemporary with Muhammad and with whom he is known to have interacted—for example at Yathrib (Medina). There is less clarity about the Christians, so Griffith lays out his case (compelling, in my view) that “contrary to prevailing scholarly consensus,” the Christians to whom the Qur’an occasionally addresses itself “were in fact among the contemporary Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians” of Arabia and its periphery—in other words, those mainline Christian sects in Muhammad’s milieu rather than heretical factions like the Ebionites or Nazarenes (pp. 8–15, 27–28). To buttress this argument, Griffith points to tantalizing linguistic evidence in the Qur’an and other early Islamic sources that Syriac and Ethiopic Christian influences were present in Muhammad’s world (p. 18).

Turning to the biblical figures and stories that are related in the Qur’an itself, Griffith adduces a Qur’anic typology of prophethood by examining the Qur’an’s references to every patriarchal or prophetic figure (biblical and not) and identifying a significant set of features common to its treatment of all of them. This is an impressive elucidation and is helpful not only for making the case that there appear to be no quotations from the Bible of any significant length in the Qur’an (and that, therefore, the Bible in Arabic almost certainly postdates the written composition of the Qur’an), but for showing how the Qur’an

is working to establish Muhammad as the natural and culminating successor to all who had preceded him. This chapter, though long on detail, is Griffith at his most perspicacious. The paradigm by which he adduces the Qur'an's prophetic typology is effective and elegant. He concludes by observing that not only does the Qur'an advance its own distinctive prophethood, even while making reference to biblical figures, it also sets itself forth as a corrective to both Jewish and Christian readings, thereby obviating, in many Muslim minds, the need for any serious consideration of the Bible. The Qur'an also established a vernacular for sacred language in Arabic that was significant not only for Muslims, but for Arabized Jews and Christians as they began to consider ways of rendering their sacred texts and liturgies into Arabic.

Griffith's next task is to offer an informed opinion about the origins and dating of the earliest translations of the Bible into Arabic. First he summarizes the results of his search through medieval reports, catalogues, and biographies for secondary mentions of early translations of the Bible, or portions of the Bible, into Arabic. He includes here the intriguing evidence of early (eighth-century) Muslim authors who only quoted biblical passages in their works, but who presumably had access to now-lost early translations. Based on the evidence, the Gospels were probably the first canonical texts to receive Arabic translation, and the translations likely happened at monasteries in Syria/Palestine and in the Judean Desert as early as the late seventh/early eighth centuries. There is admittedly much surmise here, and Griffith's suggestions can certainly be challenged, but only on the basis of further guesswork; his treatment of the evidence, including extant manuscripts (none of them primary), is careful and thorough.

Examination of these extant manuscripts also suggests that the first Arabic translations were likely made from Syriac *Vorlagen*, with later translators revising the work of their predecessors rather than generating completely new translations. "In all probability," writes Griffith, "this practice attests to the liturgical contexts in which the translations were used, where continuity and familiarity would be desirable" (p. 118). In addition to the liturgical motive for these Arabic translations among Arabized Christians, there was an early apologetic motive that extended

to Jews as well since the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>an, in addition to establishing a sacred idiom in Arabic, had also proclaimed its own primacy over the sacred books of Jew and Christian alike. Both communities would therefore have been concerned to “set the biblical record straight” with respect to the Qur<sup>ʿ</sup>anic treatment of Jewish and Christian history, theology, and prophecy (p. 126). And Arabic versions of the Bible would have been an important step for such a program.

By the ninth century, and continuing thereafter, translations of the Bible into Arabic were becoming more numerous and more widely available, fueled in no small part by the intellectual and cultural foment being generated at Baghdad and the well-known translation movement there. Griffith develops separate chapters on the Bible as translated by Christians and Jews, respectively, during this period. Such a move is understandable, given the complexity of the textual traditions he is chronicling and the real differences at work between Christian and Jewish approaches to their scripture. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the two traditions did not develop in isolation from one another, that the confluence of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim currents at Baghdad was a signal characteristic of the period, and that the specific features of each community’s textual production cannot be properly understood without this fact born firmly in mind. Griffith reflects these crosscurrents throughout his discussion. For example, he cites Ronny Vollandt’s important dissertation showing that

while the Melkite and Nestorian Christian communities possessed what [Vollandt] calls “preferred, quasi-canonical versions of the Pentateuch,” done under community auspices from the Septuagint and Peshita versions respectively, the Jacobite and Coptic communities were more inclined to adopt and adapt translations made by translators from other communities, including . . . the widely appreciated Arabic translation of the Torah made in the tenth century by the Jewish scholar Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>adyah Ga<sup>ʿ</sup>ōn. (p. 130)

This passage demonstrates the variety of Christian approaches to the Arabic Bible, as well as the fact of Jewish influence in some Christian circles. A further section discusses what Richard M. Frank called a Muslim

cast to the language of Christian translations of the Bible into Arabic, featuring “stock phrases or oft-repeated invocations from the Qurʾān that soon became common wherever Arabic was spoken” (p. 137).

Griffith’s book contains more than a brief review can convey—the role of Judeo-Arabic in the evolution of the Jewish Bible in Arabic, the role of Arabic translations from Syriac or other languages for addressing lacunae in the textual traditions of those languages, the significance of individual translators and commentators for the evolution of the Arabic Bible, and so forth. There are occasional bracing admonitions, as well, such as when Griffith remarks that modern scholars often become “so focused on the biblical text itself that they systematically leave out of account any other information, liturgical, historical, or editorial, that the manuscripts may also contain. The result is a continued scholarly camouflaging of the role of the Bible in Arabic in the wider religious culture of the Arabic-speaking world in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages” (p. 208).

Griffith finishes weaving the work of so many scholars into this history by exploring the ways that the three religious traditions—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—have themselves been woven together, sometimes harmoniously, more often in tension, by the Bible in Arabic. His concluding example is of the figure of Abraham, who functions so differently in each tradition as to have historically been invoked by sectarians to highlight their mutual incompatibilities. And yet today, in an ironic twist of history, he is sometimes uncritically acclaimed as a unifying factor for all three (pp. 213–14).

Much more than an overview of a subject of paramount importance to students of the Islamic world, Griffith’s work is a guide to the literature and to the scholars who have produced it over the past half century. His footnotes and bibliography are a trove of information about the state of the discipline and the scholars who have made, and who are currently making, significant contributions to it. It is perhaps no surprise that, as often as not, Griffith’s own previous work features in the notes, and not just peripherally, but as central to a stunning variety of specific issues. It is an inadvertent disclosure, no doubt, but no less certain as such that Griffith’s legacy as a benefactor second to none in this field was assured well before he braided this latest shining strand.



## Errata

I noted a few mechanical errors in passing, which I give here in case some of them might be remedied in future printings of this significant and valuable work. The levels of the headings in chapter 3, “The Earliest Translations of the Bible into Arabic,” have a few problems: The second subheading on p. 106 (“Reports on Bible Translations”) should probably be styled one level lower, like that on p. 108, while the subheading on p. 122 (“Earliest Jewish Translations of the Bible into Arabic”) should be styled one level higher (also like that on p. 108).

I also noted a few typographical errors, though I make no claim to being thorough in this regard:

p. 43, l. 14: The “in fact” here is redundant.

p. 44, l. 14: “in an early Islamic texts” should read “in early Islamic texts.”

p. 102, l. 16: “these development” should be “these developments.”

p. 147, n. 72: “Aziz Z. Atiya” should be “Aziz S. Atiya.”

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Frans van Liere. *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

*Reviewed by Carl Griffin*

SOME NEW BOOKS FILL SUCH a clear need that it is a wonder they were not written sooner. This is one of them: Frans van Liere’s *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible*. The Bible in the Middle Ages is a subject of intense study in a number of different fields, including history, literature, and religion. This is no obscure topic. But while this book has clear antecedents, there is no other today quite like it. It is concise but

comprehensive, thick with detail but always readable. It is a perfect first book on the Christian Bible in the West from late antiquity to the Protestant Reformation.

Like many good subject introductions, this one was born from want of an adequate textbook. Van Liere teaches classes on the medieval Bible at Calvin College (Grand Rapids, Michigan) and has regretted the lack of a suitable introduction. He remedies that with his own book and also addresses some vexing popular misconceptions. He notes that, like many biblical scholars, his Protestant students often struggle to see any value in premodern readings of the Bible. This is often based in a lack of hermeneutical awareness (the Bible means “just what it says”) and in an “unfortunate banalization of the Protestant notion of the ‘sufficiency of scripture’” (p. xii). They too often accept the common viewpoint that “the ‘real’ history of the Bible was that of the Greek and Hebrew text of the Bible and of its recovery in the Renaissance” (p. 3). Most introductions to the Bible, if they treat earlier reception at all, begin with the Renaissance and Reformation. A consistent exception (he grumbles) is that modern scholars avail themselves of “the rich body of medieval biblical illustrations [that] is often freely exploited for its aesthetic value” (p. xi).

Van Liere sets out to correct this deficit with a discussion of four subjects:

1. “The history of the Bible as a material object.” This includes discussion of the medieval Bible’s forms and formats, media of transmission, its contents, the history and methods of its production, and the cultural significance of bibles themselves. This cultural reception is illustrated in the book’s introduction with a tale of two manuscripts, the famous Codex Amiatinus (seventh century) and a common thirteenth-century Paris bible with an uncommon story. This engaging bit of anecdotal history both makes the author’s point and draws readers effectively in.
2. “The history of the Bible as a written text.” This includes the history of the Latin Bible’s translation and the practice

of textual criticism, meaning “the efforts medieval scholars made to establish a ‘correct’ Latin Bible text” (p. 3).

3. “The history of the interpretation of this text.” Van Liere discusses both medieval hermeneutics generally and the specific forms and traditions of medieval biblical commentary.
4. “The diffusion of the biblical text and its influence on broader culture.” This last subject is dauntingly broad. Perhaps it can only be evoked through a wide selection of representative examples.<sup>1</sup> But Van Liere has a more specific pedagogical goal. He focuses on the “popular myth” that “common” Christians in the Middle Ages did not have access to the Bible. To that end he discusses translations into vernacular languages, the Bible in preaching and worship, and artistic and dramatic reception of the Bible.

## The Bible as a book

The author first discusses the use by Christians of the codex, or book format, rather than the scroll for their sacred texts. This is a well-known fact. Less commonly known is that all-in-one bibles like our modern bibles were uncommon until the thirteenth century. Cassiodorus (d. ca. 585) “commonly referred to his Bible as a ‘sacra bibliotheca’ (holy library), suggesting that he saw it as a collection of writings rather than one book” (p. 26). Much more common were multivolume bibles or, for liturgical use, partial bibles and related liturgical books (lectionaries). Over time bible books were increasingly glossed with brief, adjacent commentary to facilitate study, or decorated with lavish illustration either for display or devotion. Van Liere illustrates a number of ways in which evolving reader needs and changing demand drove innovation in bible layout and production. In fact, the medieval bible in its various forms was mostly the product of consumer demand and not, as might be supposed, church authority.

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1. See Michael Lieb et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. 1–8.

Similar variety may be found in modern bibles, though “a modern reader who opens a printed bible has a good idea of what to expect.” The modest formal differences between our bibles today “pale in comparison to the bewilderment that can confront a modern student who opens a medieval bible” (p. 53). Vital differences include books appearing out of order, like the book of Acts following the Epistle of Jude; books varying in name and numbering; regular inclusion of the Old Testament Apocrypha, which most bibles now lack; the inclusion of books like 3 Corinthians that are completely unfamiliar; books, chapters, or verses that are missing because of alternate versification or combination (for example, Lamentations was part of Jeremiah); and finally, a large variety of paratext such as prefaces, commentaries, and headings.

Van Liere provides a very thorough survey of these and other aspects of the medieval Bible, including its canonical history and authority. Mormon scholars have sometimes found theological value in the fact that “the biblical canon was not completely ‘closed’ in the Middle Ages” (p. 78).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the canon might better be described as modestly variable rather than open, at least in the strong Mormon sense. “There was a broad consensus, but an absence of definite rules. In the Middle Ages, when every copy of a book was unique, it was next to impossible to regulate the exact contents of every copy of the Bible. This changed with the advent of printing. It is therefore no coincidence that the canon of Scripture became permanently fixed by an ecclesiastical decision only after the Middle Ages ended” (p. 79).

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2. See Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 51–55; and David L. Paulsen, “Are Christians Mormon? Reassessing Joseph Smith’s Theology in His Bicentennial,” *BYU Studies* 45/1 (2006): 45–50. Lee Martin McDonald, an evangelical historian of canon whom Paulsen cites favorably, responds, “It is not clear to me that the Mormons’ claims for these additional books would survive the ancient test of orthodoxy,” but “it is nonetheless difficult to argue biblically or theologically for a closed collection of Scriptures.” Lee Martin McDonald, *The Origin of the Bible: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Clark, 2011), 7–8; see also McDonald, *Forgotten Scriptures: The Selection and Rejection of Early Religious Writings* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 62.

## The biblical text

Van Liere devotes one chapter to “the important junctures in the history of the [Latin] Vulgate, its creation and background, the reason for [its] contamination and corruption, and different recensions” (p. 81). His treatment could easily be nerdish. This is a technical topic. More usefully, instead of a text-critical primer, the author creates an engaging narrative around his contention that medieval scholars “helped to establish the beginnings of scholarly textual criticism, which was one of the great accomplishments of the medieval study of the Bible” (p. 81).

There is a great story here, and van Liere tells it well. Medieval scholars gave high effort to establishing a reliable text of the Bible and laid the groundwork for the enduring achievements of Renaissance textual scholarship. The story ends in anticlimax, though. They failed completely in their object. Paradoxically, says the author,

the effect of all this medieval textual criticism on the quality of the bibles that were circulating was limited. Medieval critics did not have the means to ascertain with any certainty which readings were true and which were false. Thus, most medieval textual critics were content to show the diversity of the textual tradition rather than deciding on one reading. . . . Medieval textual criticism remained largely a learned debate, without much direct implication for most of the actual texts produced. (p. 102)

Renaissance humanists better succeeded where medieval scholars failed, in large part through more effective study of the original Greek and Hebrew texts. This led them to reject the Vulgate. This is yet another paradox since they were, after all, following in the footsteps of its very translator, St. Jerome. Jerome always insisted on the priority of the original texts, even daring to tell his Christian readers, “Whenever I seem to you to err in my translation, ask the Hebrews” (p. 100).<sup>3</sup>

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3. Jerome’s full, striking statement is: “Whenever I seem to you to err in my translation, ask the Hebrews, consult the teachers of diverse cities; what they (i.e., the Hebrew books) contain concerning Christ, your books do not contain.” *Incipit prologus Sancti*

## Medieval interpretation

Readers benefit from the fact that van Liere is a specialist in medieval hermeneutics, the “art of finding meaning in a text” (p. 110). This is a challenging subject, but he starts with the basics. Medieval readers believed “the Bible was not just a story about God, but a story by God” (p. 111). God was the Bible’s author in the strictest sense, and therefore, unlike any other book, every word in it was truth. “If the Bible were a book unlike any other, it also needed to be interpreted in a unique way,” to be read as “one extended metaphor, a Great Code” (p. 112). While believing the Bible could be read conventionally (*ad litteram*, “literally”), medieval readers employed special interpretive techniques to reveal the Bible’s “spiritual” meaning, which was seen as its primary meaning. Van Liere explains the nature and evolution of this special hermeneutic in necessary detail. Detail is necessary for even modest understanding, because these ways of reading the Bible are now so alien to us (which is one reason they should interest us).<sup>4</sup> Post-Enlightenment Christians came to have a very different view of biblical authority and inspiration, and thus of biblical hermeneutics. The Bible’s spiritual meaning became personal; only its literal and moral meaning was universal. Rather than radical divine self-disclosure—God made Word—the Bible became writings by human authors who were inspired, more or less. We live in a different world interpretively.

Van Liere does full justice to the sophistication of medieval biblical hermeneutics, but without overwhelming the reader. He shows that “allegorizations are not without their own logic” (p. 115). He explains clearly how in medieval hermeneutics, “whereas words are signs for things, things can also be signs for things” (p. 120), a fundament of medieval theology that was also presupposed in spiritual exegesis. It is true that in

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*Hieronymi presbyteri in Pentateucho*, in *Biblia Sacra Vulgata* (ed. Weber-Gryson), 4, translation mine.

4. In some cases, “it is the ‘otherness’ of medieval practice that draws our attention and invites reflection. . . . The exploration of a tradition so wholly alien to one’s own may sometimes lead to a renewed perception and a critical examination of one’s own criteria of interpretation” (p. 262).

*On Christian Teaching* “Augustine warns his reader that some passages in Scripture clearly only have spiritual meaning; in fact, many things taken in their literal sense alone may seem strange, absurd, or even offensive” (p. 124). But close literal reading always remained necessary for spiritual exegesis, in theory if not fact, since “the words [of the Bible] themselves did not lead directly to spiritual truth, but the objects or events that those words referred to” (p. 126). That is, scripture records creation and history, but it is creation and history themselves that point us to God, the author of both Word and Nature. Van Liere explains well, too, how Jewish interpretation paralleled and shaped Christian interpretation. As is well known, this was the case in the early Christian era when, for example, the allegorical method of Philo was a decisive influence on Alexandrian theologians. The author shows how later Jewish *derash* and *peshat* likewise influenced Christian interpreters.

Medieval reading, preaching, and teaching of the Bible were more strictly guided by interpretive precedents than they would be following the Protestant Reformation. For most of the Middle Ages, the principal scriptural authorities were the church fathers. Commentaries written by patristic authors or based on their works became necessary complements to Bible reading. Van Liere surveys both the history of medieval commentary and the various, sometimes surprising, forms it would take.

The first medieval project was to make the fathers “readily accessible” (p. 144). This might be through simple selection and abridgment into digests (*florilegia*, “garlands”) or by commentaries based on the patristic legacy. Commentaries took many shapes. They could be short notes (glosses) added directly to a Bible text or long, mystical meditations. From the twelfth century onward they increasingly reflected university curriculum and scholastic method. The Bible was the basis of education. As higher education expanded, so too did the production of commentary, very dramatically. “More sermons and commentaries were written in the period from 1400 to 1500 than ever before,” and most of them “sit in libraries and archives, and still await their first editions” (p. 173). Commentary production has only increased over time, arguably out of all proportion to changes in need or fashion, constantly

directing attention away from preceding works. “Today, the medieval Christian commentary tradition seems not so much scorned as simply forgotten” (p. 174).

## The influence of the Bible

The concluding chapters on the influence of the Bible take aim at the “popular myth” that in the Middle Ages ordinary Christians did not have access to the Bible. The author goes after this pointedly in a chapter on the vernacular Bible, or medieval translations into the languages of common speech. It is a common Protestant (and Mormon) misperception that “common” people did not read the Bible in the Middle Ages or even that biblical literacy was restricted by the church. Catholic scholars have long argued the opposite, and they are correct. “Biblical literacy was not only widespread among the laity in the later Middle Ages,<sup>5</sup> but it was even actively encouraged by the Church. Most scholars today, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, agree with [this] point of view” (p. 178). One component of lay literacy was vernacular translation. Van Liere surveys a selection of these translations and paraphrases, highlighting two issues with respect to them that certainly were debated: “whether biblical translations in the vernacular were legitimate and, if they were, what authority these translations held” (p. 178).

However, the private study of bibles, Latin or vernacular, was not the primary source of general biblical literacy. “Most medieval Christians came to know the Bible not by reading, but by hearing it” (p. 208), particularly in worship and preaching. The author surveys its use in the liturgy of the Mass and the divine office, in private and collective prayers, and later in private devotional practices for which lush Books of Hours would be produced. His treatment of “The Bible Preached” is

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5. Van Liere is careful to clarify that there were great differences in lay literacy between the early and late Middle Ages and that medieval literacy is altogether a complex issue. “Recent research has added many shades of gray to a black-and-white image. There was both more illiteracy among the clergy, and more literacy among the laity, than is often supposed” (p. 179).



even more comprehensive, with a history of the medieval sermon that is a strong, independent primer (pp. 214–34). The volume of surviving sermons from the high Middle Ages is staggering, witnessing to the epic scale of preaching.<sup>6</sup> The Bible was of course ever present in sermons. The prominence and clarity of its exegesis, however, was far from assured since “the medieval sermon was a florid discourse, rich in images, illustrations, symbols, and stories. It was sometimes hard to see the forest for the trees” (p. 234).

A final chapter on the Bible in medieval art and drama is titled as a question: “The Bible of the Poor?” In surveying the subject, van Liere also interrogates the popular century-old thesis of Emile Mâle that biblical art was intended to teach the Bible to those who could not read and write. Some early churchmen also made statements to this effect in defending the use of images in the church since their use reliably provoked periodic debate or even violence. Biblical art often served an explicit exegetical function that required “an intricate process of visual interpretation,” which presupposed the biblical if not exegetical literacy of its viewers (p. 245). Van Liere’s examples illustrate this clearly. The general evidence suggests that “art in the Middle Ages was rarely used intentionally as a didactic tool” or “bible of the poor,” though “it did help believers to visualize biblical content, and enrich their imagination” (p. 257).

For me van Liere’s book brought to mind some of the popular books on “how we got the Bible” that especially flourished in the postwar era.<sup>7</sup>

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6. “In his repertory of medieval sermons, Jean Baptiste Schneyer enumerates some 140,000 sermons alone for the period he covers, 1150 to 1350. This does not even include sermons written in languages other than Latin or the much larger number of sermons written in the later Middle Ages” (p. 214).

7. See the preface in H. G. G. Herklots, *How Our Bible Came to Us: Its Texts and Versions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 5. The prototype for Herklots and others was certainly Frederic G. Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1895), which was printed for more than sixty years in four editions. These and similar books became the inspiration and basis for the later Mormon title by Lenet Hadley Read, *How We Got the Bible* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), which can be commended at least for its readability.

But his *Introduction to the Medieval Bible* is fully up-to-date, more serious in intent, and much more comprehensive for its subject. It is still written for general readers, certainly, and never leaves its readership behind. Specialists may wish their own interests received more coverage. In that vein, I wished in a few places that the early Middle Ages had received a little more discussion. For example, the author defends Carolingian commentary, heavily dependent on the fathers, against charges of being merely derivative, saying suggestively that “selection bears the signature of the commentator” (p. 148). This recognizes that such works are subtly inventive, “exegesis of the exegesis” (Silvia Cantelli), and this point may merit more discussion. However, introduction requires compromise and longer is not necessarily better. This will rightly be the standard introduction and textbook for many years to come. It is also van Lier’s argument that the medieval Bible may be of interest to modern biblical scholars for more than pretty cover art. And it succeeds well in that argument, too.

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