

**A review of Dr Jason BeDuhn's
“Truth in Translation”**

Dr Trevor R Allin

<https://livingwater-spain.com/>

First published edition 12th July 2014

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Date of this revision: 26th March 2026

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About the Author

Dr Trevor R Allin graduated from the University of Leeds with a 1st Class Honours degree in Phonetics, French, Spanish and Philosophy and History of Religion. Following studies in linguistics, he undertook original research on a South American indigenous language, for which purpose he lived within the indigenous community and studied the language with native speakers over a period of more than a year. The University of St Andrews subsequently awarded him a Ph.D. for his thesis “A Grammar of Resigaró”.

For many years he taught a range of languages up to “Advanced” level standard in state schools in England and in Germany, and in state-recognised schools in Scotland and Spain. He also worked full time over a period of many years supporting and inspecting qualified Modern Language teachers and giving them professional development training. Teaching and examination materials written by him for French, German and Spanish at a wide range of levels, up to and including “A” Level, have been published by mainstream U.K. educational publishers and examination boards, for whom he has written and marked examination question papers.

He is also the published translator of books from Spanish and German into English and is the author of “Curso de Griego Bíblico: Los elementos del Griego del N.T.”¹ (Duff & Allin, 2019), the Spanish edition of the leading textbook on New Testament Greek, Jeremy Duff’s “The Elements of New Testament Greek”.² (Duff, 2005) In 2023 he published on YouTube recordings made by him of all 260 chapters of the New Testament in Koiné Greek.³ He has taught New Testament (Koiné) Greek to Spanish-speaking adult students in Spain and has delivered lectures in various places in Spain and England on the most important early Greek manuscripts of the Bible, including Codex Sinaiticus.

¹ CLIE, 2019 See <https://www.clie.es/curso-de-griego-biblico> (Duff & Allin, 2019b)

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

³ For an index and links, see here: <https://livingwater-spain.com/NTGk00.htm>

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to all those who have helped me by their feedback in the preparation of this book, in particular to my wife, to my brother and to P & L.

Trevor R Allin
27th July 2016

NOTES ON THIS REVISED EDITION

As well as incorporating numerous improvements to details, this revised edition adds a comprehensive bibliography that demonstrates that my conclusions reflect the widespread consensus of academic statements worldwide supporting my assertions on the matters discussed in this work. This presents a stark contrast with the lack of such support for the claims made by Dr BeDuhn in his controversial book.

Trevor R Allin
9th July 2024
Rev 5.8.24.

Additional information in chapter 4 and reference to the 2001 edition of Westcott and Hort, added 2.1.26.

INTRODUCTION

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Inc., of New York, a publishing name of the Jehovah's Witnesses, is the exclusive publisher of a translation of the Bible that they call the "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures" (*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, 1961). The first edition of the New Testament was published in 1950 and the Old Testament was completed and published in 1960. The first edition of the whole Bible in this translation was published in 1961.⁴

The New World Translation diverges from all other translations at many key points, and in the more than seventy years since the New Testament portion was published, to the best of my knowledge, it has not been adopted or accepted by any other Christian denomination, seminary or secular academic organisation. On the contrary, for decades independent academics have criticised numerous details of the translation.⁵

The New World Translation even totally ignores the Greek-English interlinear text of the New Testament that the Jehovah's Witnesses themselves produced (*The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, 1969)⁶, frequently even disagreeing with it.

This translation is used only by the Jehovah's Witnesses, and furthermore they use it to the virtual exclusion of all other translations in their publications and meetings.⁷

The Watchtower Society searches constantly and exhaustively in other translations and articles by academics, always publishing the most remote reference or phrase that lends support, or can be made to appear to lend support, to any detail of any significant phrase or word in their translation.

Then, in 2003, Jason David BeDuhn published his book, "Truth in Translation" (J. D. BeDuhn, 2003)⁸, which is overwhelmingly critical of all the most widely-recognised modern English language Bible translations (and the seventeenth-century Authorised Version, known in the USA as the King James Version). It also sets out to defend the New World Translation as being the only accurate English-language translation of the Bible.

Naturally, his book has been seized upon by the Watchtower organisation and they repeatedly quote from it in their publications. They claim that Dr BeDuhn is a leading independent academic in no way associated with the Jehovah's Witnesses⁹, a scholar specialising in Biblical languages and an expert in Bible translation¹⁰. They claim that his endorsement demonstrates that the New World Translation has been accepted by an expert in the field as being right, while all other translations are wrong.

Their website states: "Based on his analysis of nine major English translations, Jason David BeDuhn, associate professor of religious studies, wrote: "The NW [*New World Translation*]

⁴ "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures", Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc, 1961.

⁵ A revised edition was published by the Jehovah's Witnesses in 2013, but in all passages referred to in this review none of the changes have affected what is written here.

⁶ "The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures", 1969, Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; International Bible Students Association

⁷ Occasional references are made to other translations, either to claim the support of an isolated phrase in one translation or another, or to condemn them for being different, as the case demands.

⁸ Jason David BeDuhn, "Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament", 2003, Lanham, MD, University Press of America, Inc

⁹ In an internet article, the official Jehovah's Witness website describes BeDuhn as a "non Witness scholar". cf. [http://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/new-world-translation-accurate/#?insight\[search_id\]=12080872-2b72-4c4a-aab7-b72257df636d&insight\[search_result_index\]=1](http://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/new-world-translation-accurate/#?insight[search_id]=12080872-2b72-4c4a-aab7-b72257df636d&insight[search_result_index]=1) Accessed on 4.2.15

¹⁰ Information provided verbally by Jehovah's Witnesses, reportedly based on statements printed in their publications and training.

emerges as the most accurate of the translations compared.” Although the general public and many Bible scholars assume that the differences in the *New World Translation* are the result of religious bias on the part of its translators, BeDuhn stated: “Most of the differences are due to the greater accuracy of the NW as a literal, conservative translation of the original expressions of the New Testament writers.”—*Truth in Translation*, pages 163, 165.”¹¹

The “New World Translation” was not produced by any scholars recognised in the academic world. In fact, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has always rejected all requests to publish the names and qualifications of the people involved in its production, although lists of the members of the translation committee have been published (separately) by William Cetnar and Raymond Franz.

Cetnar was a Jehovah’s Witness for more than twenty years and worked at the Headquarters of the organization in New York between spring 1950 and December 1962, precisely the period when the Jehovah’s Witness version of the Bible was being prepared and published.¹²

Raymond Franz was a former leading member of the Governing Body of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Raymond Franz gives the names Fred Franz, Nathan Knorr, Albert Schroeder and George Gangas. Nathan Knorr was President of the organization from January 1942 until his death on 8th June 1977. He was succeeded by Fred Franz, who was President until his death on 22nd December 1992.¹³ Raymond Franz states that of the people on that list, Fred Franz, who was his uncle and the fourth president of the Jehovah’s Witness organisation, the Watchtower Society, Inc., “was the only one with sufficient knowledge of the Bible languages to attempt translation of this kind. He had studied Greek for two years at the University of Cincinnati but was only self-taught in Hebrew.” (Franz, 2002)¹⁴ (It is important to state that normally a full course in Koiné (“New Testament”) Greek as the main subject for a university degree would last three years, so one is led to the conclusion either that the course followed by Fred Franz was a subsidiary component to another subject or that he did not complete the full course.)

Cetnar gives the same names, but adds one extra name. He states, “From my observation, N. H. Knorr, F. W. Franz, A. D. Schroeder, G. D. Gangas, and M. Henschel met together in these translation sessions.” (Gruss, 1974)¹⁵ According to the Wikipedia article referred to above, Milton George Henschel became President of the Watchtower organization after F. W. Franz died in December 1992 and remained President until 7th October 2000, two months after his 80th birthday. Cetnar gives many further details concerning the production of the Jehovah’s Witness text of the Bible, including that F. W. Franz refused to translate into Hebrew a well-known verse from Genesis chapter 2, when asked to do so by the Scottish Court of Sessions, Scotland’s supreme civil court, in November, 1954.¹⁶

The reason for the presence of the additional name on Cetnar’s list may be that, as a leading member of the Jehovah’s Witness organization, Henschel may have attended the working meetings, perhaps as an observer or to discuss the wording of the English text, without being involved in the initial production of the English text. Cetnar used to see which members of staff left the office to go to the meetings, so he knew who attended the meetings, but not necessarily what each of them did in the meetings.

¹¹ Website reference and date accessed as above

¹² See “An Inside View of the Watchtower Society” in “We Left Jehovah’s Witnesses”, edited by Edmond C. Gruss, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1974, pp. 59-63.

¹³ According to the Wikipedia article “Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania”, accessed here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watch_Tower_Bible_and_Tract_Society_of_Pennsylvania on 28.02.22.

¹⁴ Raymond Franz, in “Crisis of Conscience”, 4th edition, 2002, Atlanta: Commentary Press, p. 56 fn 16.

¹⁵ Gruss, op. cit., p. 74

¹⁶ Gruss, op. cit., pp. 74-75

Cetnar comments, "If I were on the translation committee, I would want my name to be kept secret also."¹⁷ Concerning the writing that he did for the Watchtower Society's publications, he writes, "What were my qualifications for such work? None. ... I had no background for an objective evaluation of the evidence. The guiding principle was conformity to the Society's position."¹⁸

It should be noted that in his book Dr BeDuhn defends (p. 39) the lack of transparency by the publishers of the New World Translation, claiming that some other translations do the same, although in fact this is not the case, as information on the names of the translators of other translations is readily available in every case, even where such lists (which may contain as many as a hundred names or more) are not printed in all editions of the Bible.

It is quite remarkable to see an academic trying to justify non-transparency and the withholding of key information on a Bible translation – and doing this, moreover, by making claims that he should have known were false and could easily have verified to be so.

¹⁷ Op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 72.

CHAPTER 1: SCOPE OF THIS REVIEW

When academics review publications or claims made by other academics, they seek to engage with the arguments presented and not to discuss the suitability of the author concerned to make the claims that he or she makes. In other words, if they consider the arguments to be flawed, they seek to demonstrate this and to avoid criticising the author *per se*.

Unfortunately, in the case of the present book, one of the main claims made by BeDuhn is precisely his own, personal suitability to make these arguments about Bible translations, his status as an academic, a historian and a theologian, and his own lack of bias, which he claims make him unique in the academic world.

Given these claims by BeDuhn, which he repeatedly makes throughout the book and which are constantly reiterated by the Jehovah's Witnesses, any review is forced into evaluating whether the author's statements about himself can be substantiated.

I must emphasise that I have no desire to make any sort of personal criticism of Dr BeDuhn; throughout this review I endeavour to treat him with respect. However, any review of his book cannot avoid the foundational argument that BeDuhn himself presents to substantiate his other claims: who he is as a person and the importance of his standing and his qualifications.

Questions that need to be answered

Given this background, and the claims that are made by the author concerning himself, we must not only look at Dr BeDuhn's book; we are also justified in looking at his own qualifications and experience, and indeed we must do so. Is he the *leading, independent academic* that the Watchtower Society claims him to be? Is he a *Bible translator* and an *expert in the field of Biblical languages*, recognised as such by scholars throughout the world as *an authority in this field*?

And there are other questions: How has this book come about? Why does Dr BeDuhn make the claims that he presents? What led him to have the opinions that he holds, and why does he apparently believe that they are undisputed facts? What does his book say and what are his arguments? What new information does he bring that justifies his disagreement with the world-wide academic consensus in all branches of Christianity and even among those experts in Biblical languages who have no religious affiliation? In this review I believe that we will find out the answers to these fundamentally-important questions.

My approach in writing this review

I have chosen to take a topical approach, looking at the evidence concerning BeDuhn's competence to publish a book on the topic of Bible translation and Koiné (New Testament) Greek, and at various aspects of his *methods*. I therefore do not work through his book a page at a time. (To do so, anyway, would inevitably result in a review that was at least as long as the book – nearly 200 pages.) I have tried to allow BeDuhn to speak for himself as much as possible, with numerous quotations, always giving the relevant page reference, so that the reader of this article desirous of doing so can check and see that I have indeed fairly presented his arguments.

However, on many occasions there are so many aspects of a phrase or claim that require comment (the Greek, the linguistics, the references to other "authorities", etc.), that a degree of repetition is unavoidable. I have tried to minimise this by referring backwards and forwards to other sections in this review, and request the reader's forbearance in accepting this.

As far as possible, I ignore the "theological" arguments, choosing to focus on the Greek text and BeDuhn's statements about it. However, when a translation is wrong (or even when it is right), comment on it is likely to have theological implications, especially given the narrow spectrum of texts dealt with by Dr BeDuhn. Likewise, when a phrase is translated in such a way that it

contradicts the rest of the New Testament – or even other writings by the same New Testament author (for instance, the Apostle Paul) – then unavoidably one must look at those other texts for evidence or for an indication of the consistency or otherwise of the translators.

My aim here is not to argue for or against one doctrine or another, but merely to see whether BeDuhn's treatment of the Greek text and the translations of it is correct or not.

I have gone out of my way to be positive about BeDuhn wherever possible, drawing attention to valid points that he makes, such as his comments on sexism in translations of the New Testament and certain aspects of his comments on the use of the word "Jehovah" in the New World Translation. I regret that many of his statements make it impossible for me to be positive more frequently.

CHAPTER 2: DR JASON BEDUHN'S CREDENTIALS

The Watchtower organisation claims in its publications that Dr BeDuhn is a leading, independent academic, a specialist in biblical languages. It is therefore necessary for us to check these claims.

Dr Jason BeDuhn describes his post as “Associate Professor of Religious Studies.”¹⁹ This is United States terminology for what I believe we in the U.K. would call an assistant college or university lecturer – a post well deserving of respect, while not being that of a *leading* academic.

He further explains that he works in the Department of Humanities, Arts, and Religion of Northern Arizona University. I note that he does not refer to having any formal qualifications in linguistics and that there is no reference to Koiné Greek in his university degrees, although of course it may have been a component of his undergraduate or postgraduate studies. He also does not make any reference to any qualifications in the other biblical languages, Hebrew and Aramaic. His book merely informs us that he “holds a B.A. in Religious Studies from the University of Illinois, Urbana, an M.T.S. in New Testament and Christian Origins from Harvard Divinity School, and a Ph.D. in the Comparative Study of Religions from Indiana University, Bloomington.” ((BeDuhn, 2003), final page of book)

He thus presents no evidence of being *an expert in the field of Biblical languages*.

I further note that his speciality is not Christianity nor even Judaism but comparative cultures. The North Arizona University (“NAU”) website heads its page on him²⁰ with the title “Comparative Cultural Studies” and states that “His areas of research include Biblical Studies, Ancient Christianities²¹, Manichaeism, Religions of West Asia in Late Antiquity, ritual and and [sic] self-forming practices, and method and theory in the study of religion and history” – again with no reference to linguistics or languages studies or qualifications in these areas. I assume that this description of Dr BeDuhn for publication by his university must at least have been approved by him, and may even have been drafted by him.

In 2012 when I first heard of BeDuhn, neither he nor NAU made any reference to him having been involved in any Bible translation project, whether into English or into any other language. At the time of writing “Truth in Translation” (which was published in 2003) he had also not been involved in the translation of any other texts – whether ancient or modern – into English nor into any other language.²² So all the evidence indicates that at the time he *had no experience as a translator of Biblical texts*.

¹⁹ See his web page, <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jdb8/> Last accessed by me on 27.10.2012. Not found on 27.6.24.

²⁰ <http://nau.edu/CAL/CCS/Faculty-and-Staff/Beduhn/> Last accessed by me on 27.10.2012.

²¹ Note plural. In this, BeDuhn may be inspired by the writings of the liberal theologian Bart Ehrman. See, for instance, his book “Lost Christianities”, 2003, Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Ehrman, 2003a) Ehrman describes himself as a former Christian who believes that Jesus was a Jewish prophet with mistaken ideas. cf for instance the interview with him here:

http://www.religiondispatches.org/books/atheologies/5890/inventing_jesus%3A_an_interview_with_bart_ehrman/ (Accessed on 2.11.2012.) (Chellev-Hodge, 2012)

Writing in October 2015, Professor Larry Hurtado states, “Some scholars have even taken to referring to “early Christianities” (which I consider just a bit precious myself). Today there are at least as many and as major divisions among those whom modern historians classify as “Christians,” but we don’t have references to “modern Christianities” (to my knowledge). And I also note that Roman/Ancient historians tend to refer confidently to “early/ancient Christianity,” fully aware that the term designates an impressive diversity of forms.” (From Dr Hurtado’s blog, <https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2015/10/08/early-christian-diversity/>, accessed on 28.10.15. (Hurtado, 2015b) For those readers whose mother tongue is not English, I would like to clarify that, in my opinion, Hurtado’s use, here, of the word “precious” is with the less-frequently-used negative overtone of “affected”, “pretentious” or “contrived”.)

²² Approximately a decade after the publication of the book reviewed here, in 2012 the NAU website stated that he “is currently engaged in a multi-year collaborative project to edit and translate an ancient Coptic Manichaean manuscript.” This would appear to be a religious text, but it is not a Biblical manuscript. As it is described as “a multi-year ... project”, it must not be expected that the project will result in publication in the near future. It would

When scholars have a book published, it is normal for them to quote from other books or articles that they have had published. Being specialists in their area of expertise, they will wish to refer colleagues and readers to places where they can find further documentation to support their arguments. Dr BeDuhn makes no such references to any further publications by himself on the topics dealt with in "Truth in Translation". One must conclude that he did not have any other publications in the sphere of linguistics, languages, principles and techniques of translation, Koiné Greek, other Biblical languages or Bible translation.²³ Not only – as far as I have been able to discover so far – do other scholars involved in Bible translation not quote from him on these subjects; he does not even quote from himself. One must conclude that *linguistics and Biblical languages are not his areas of specialist academic knowledge*.

Fundamental errors in references to Greek by Dr BeDuhn

Indeed, BeDuhn's lack of awareness of linguistics and language structures results in him making repeated "howlers" – fundamental errors in his use of linguistic terminology. For instance, he says that the language of the New Testament has "grammatical rules that are male-based." (p.63) This statement is misleading for a number of reasons.

First, at no time in its history has the Greek language had "grammatical rules that are male-based". As with many other languages, it has a noun system in which words can be classified as "masculine", "feminine" or "neuter". This is a *lexical* feature affecting all nouns, but not a "grammatical rule". "Masculine", "feminine" and "neuter" are titles given by people writing about languages to describe these three groups or classifications of nouns. It would be equally possible to call these groups "1", "2" and "3", or "Group A", "Group B" and "Group C", since they do not correspond to the gender of people or animals. This might avoid misunderstandings by those who are not professional linguists.

As with many other languages where nouns can be masculine or feminine (or neuter), in Greek the adjectives and certain other words change their ending, or even a large part of the form of the word, depending on the gender of the noun to which they refer, to "agree" with the noun. Those who have studied French may recall similar features, exemplified in pairs of phrases such as un petit garçon / une petite fille²⁴, but also in phrases such as le papier blanc / la maison blanche²⁵. In French, as in Greek, all nouns are classified as either "masculine" or "feminine" (with the addition of the "neuter" category in Greek) – nouns for *things* as well as those for *people*.

As adjectives referring to a feminine noun require a "feminine ending" (even if the noun refers to a non-animate object like a house), should we say that French (or Greek, German, etc.) has "grammatical rules that are *female*-based"? This is just as mistaken as to say that Greek has "grammatical rules that are male-based". It shows a fundamental lack of understanding of the nature of language.²⁶

Even in English, which does not classify nouns according to grammatical "gender", we note, for example, that a large ship is correctly referred to as "she", without this having any implication about gender of something that is in this case an inanimate object. In spite of this feature, which is observed in many languages, we must not confuse the "gender" of Greek *nouns* with male and female *people*. Dr Larry Hurtado, Emeritus Professor of New Testament Language and Literature

also appear that BeDuhn did not have any sort of lead role in this "collaborative project", since if he did have such a role, the NAU website would inevitably have given prominence to this.

²³ The paragraph "About the Author" at the end of the book states that, "He is the author of many articles in the areas of Biblical Studies and Manichaean Studies". One is led to the conclusion that the content of these articles was not relevant to the subject of the present book on accuracy and bias in Bible translations. No indication is given of where these articles were published.

²⁴ a little boy / a little girl

²⁵ the white paper / the white house

²⁶ We will come back to this later when we look in more detail at Dr BeDuhn's knowledge of Greek.

at the University of Edinburgh, makes the same point in his blog of 26th February 2015 (under the title "Beavis on Hebrews and Wisdom"): "in languages that "gender" their nouns, grammatical "gender" doesn't translate out consistently into sexual gender."²⁷ Unfortunately, even though Dr BeDuhn states that he has the "linguistic, literary, and historical facts" (p. xix), he commits precisely this basic error.

BeDuhn gives no evidence of being a theologian with a detailed knowledge of Koiné Greek and the Greek New Testament

At the time of the publication of "Truth in Translation", BeDuhn appears to have had no other publications on the text and translation of the New Testament, and he occasionally reveals fundamental flaws in his understanding of Greek or in his familiarity with the text of the New Testament. Thus, for example, he has a whole chapter on a verse from the letter to the Hebrews, and makes other references to this letter in his book, yet he erroneously states – *twice* – that the author "could have been a woman" (p.64), "he or she" (p.101). Those familiar with the Greek text of Hebrews and with a clear understanding of Koiné Greek know that in chapter 11 verse 32 the author refers to himself, using a present participle in the masculine singular (διηγούμενον – "diēgoumenon"), roughly translated, "I (masc. sing.) would run out of time relating (concerning Gideon) ...". This is an unequivocal indication that the author of the letter must have been a man, but this detail does not become apparent in most English-language translations of the text, and a writer with a limited knowledge of Koiné Greek and/or a limited familiarity with the Greek text of the letter to the Hebrews might not spot this detail, which has, however, been well documented in the academic world for many years.²⁸

It is not clear how this error by the author occurred. Does it perhaps reveal a limited knowledge of Koiné Greek and/or limited familiarity with the Greek text of the New Testament letter about which BeDuhn is writing? Or perhaps it is indeed just an embarrassing slip-up. I realize that every writer slips up occasionally, and I would be extremely surprised if I made no slip-ups in this review. However, it is unfortunate that Dr BeDuhn has made the same mistake twice. In the light of the amount of space that he dedicates to a discussion of the letter to the Hebrews I regret that it really does look as though he failed to carry out adequate research before making a pronouncement in his book concerning its authorship.

Lack of endorsement for BeDuhn's book by his own university

It is hardly surprising that even BeDuhn's own university makes a significant comment, seeking to distance itself from this publication. When its website statements concerning BeDuhn were first checked in 2012, it was discovered that North Arizona University (as it was then known) described this book with one word: "controversial".²⁹ This evaluation by the university may at that point already have been on its website for many years, as BeDuhn's controversial book was published in 2003.

Twelve years after that first visit to the university website, in 2024 Northern Arizona University (as it is now known), still continues to state on its webpage that "He also authored Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament (University Press of America, 2003), a controversial critique of doctrinal bias in contemporary English Bible translations."³⁰ (*Meet Our Faculty & Staff*, 2024)

²⁷ See <https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/> (Hurtado, 2015a) Last accessed on 11.3.15.

²⁸ cf., for instance, Harold W Attridge, "Hebrews", Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1989, p. 4, p. 347 fn 17 (Attridge, 1989); William L Lane "World Biblical Commentary" Vol 47A, "Hebrews 1-8", Thomas Nelson, 1991, p. xlix (Lane, 1991); F F Bruce, "The Epistle to the Hebrews", 1963, Revised edition 1990, Wm Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 18 fn 77 (Bruce, 1963).

²⁹ <http://nau.edu/CAL/CCS/Faculty-and-Staff/Beduhn/> last accessed on 27.10.2012.

³⁰ <https://nau.edu/ccs/departments-of-comparative-cultural-studies/meet-our-faculty-staff/> Accessed on 2.7.24.

By describing this book with only one word, "controversial"³¹, and retaining that negative appraisal on its website for at least twelve years, Northern Arizona University demonstrates a remarkable lack of support for a member of its own staff. It is informing all visitors to its website that leading academics in the field of knowledge covered by BeDuhn's book disagree with the claims that he makes in the book, and in this way the University seeks to avoid negative evaluation of the University itself arising from the negative expert evaluations of BeDuhn's book by academics. This is in fact a lasting public rebuke by the University of one of its own faculty members.

It is significant that in the twenty-one years since the publication of "Truth in Translation" until the revision of this review of it in 2024, BeDuhn has not been able to persuade Northern Arizona University to remove from its website this public negative evaluation of his book, an evaluation that is prominently displayed by the University on its website. Subsequent evidence from the book itself leads the reader to suspect that in fact even Dr BeDuhn himself may be embarrassed that his employer became aware of his authorship of this book, which does not appear to be based on his areas of professional expertise at the time. (By 2013, BeDuhn had at last published some material on a Biblical text, a decade after the publication of "Truth in Translation".³²)

I believe that we are thus justified in concluding that BeDuhn is not an acknowledged authority on theology, Bible translation or linguistics, that he is not recognised as an expert in these areas by fellow academics and that he is not consulted or quoted by them in their articles and books.

However, is BeDuhn's book on the Jehovah's Witness version of the New Testament widely sold? Is it a standard reference text that universities put on their essential reading lists for their students of linguistics, translation studies, theology or Koine Greek? This also appears not to be the case. To give my own experience: I ordered this book on 14th August 2012, at a time of year when publishers would be getting ready for the rush of orders from students entering a new year at university in the autumn. From the back of the copy that was delivered to me, I see that it was printed on 14th August 2012. The publishers are clearly not prepared to risk an investment in a large print run (or even a small one!) for a "controversial" book that they do not expect to have a high circulation. So there is at least here no evidence that this is a recognised and sought-after reference text written by an authority in the field. If I am mistaken in my conclusion, I apologise and would naturally welcome evidence to the contrary.³³

³¹ <http://nau.edu/CAL/CCS/Faculty-and-Staff/Beduhn/> last accessed on 27.10.2012.

³² BeDuhn, Jason, "The First New Testament: Marcion's Scriptural Canon", Temecula, California, Westar Institute, 2013 (J. BeDuhn, 2013)

³³ In the second and third decades of the 21st century, some publishers have started to adopt this method, which is known as "Print on Demand", for books that are likely to sell in extremely low numbers of copies, perhaps a handful each year, or even less than this. The procedure was not common in 2003, when "Truth in Translation" was published.

CHAPTER 3: JASON BEDUHN'S APPROACH TO HIS SUBJECT

In evaluating Dr BeDuhn's opinions, one also needs to understand his starting-point, as described by him in the book itself. He explains that he has “no stake in proving that *those* [first-century] Christians are most like a particular modern denomination of Christianity, or that they adhered to particular doctrines that match those of modern Christians.” (p. xix) He adds that he is just “a committed historian” (p. xix). Of course, the Jehovah's Witnesses also describe themselves as not being traditional Christians, and condemn all modern denominations of Christianity, all of whom they claim to be in error. BeDuhn does not say whether or not he is in fact a Jehovah's Witness. It is clear from what he writes that he rejects the standard Christian doctrine of the Deity of Jesus Christ. In this, he shares one of the principal doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In the New World translation, he has a translation that supports his opinions.

The stance taken by BeDuhn the moment that he starts referring to actual translations of the Bible (rather than general principles) shows that he approached his “research” with his mind already firmly made up before he started: it is immediately obvious that he supports the New World Translation and condemns all other translations.

Thus he writes, for instance, “The NW translation of John 1:1 is superior to that of the other eight translations we are comparing” (p. 133). He subsequently states, “All that we can ask is that a translation be an accurate starting point for exposition and interpretation. Only the NW achieves that” (p. 133).

BeDuhn's declared aim in writing this book

In paragraph two of his Preface he states, “Priests, ministers, and teachers like myself are often asked for their opinion and advice on this subject, and we all freely give it. *We recommend particular Bibles and warn people away from others*” (p. vii – emphasis added).

So here we have BeDuhn's aim in writing this book: to recommend a particular version of the Bible and “warn people away from others”. He goes on to state the modest purpose of the book: “This book is designed to be a starting point for exploring such information about the Bibles most widely in use in the English-speaking world” (p. viii).

He rejects not only all translations of the Bible other than the Jehovah's Witness New World Translation, but also other books on translation principles: “Only a handful of books have been published on this subject, and their own reliability is, unfortunately, very poor” (p. viii). No evidence is presented to support this claim.

In fact, very many books have been published on the subject of translation. As a tiny sample of books on the science of translation, see, for instance: “Toward a Science of Translating: with special reference to principles and procedures involved in Bible Translating”, by Eugene A Nida, 1964: Leiden: E J Brill (Nida, 1964); “The Science of Translation” by Eugene A Nida. In 1968 Nida was President of the Linguistic Society of America, and this was his presidential address. It was published in the Society's Journal, “Language”, Vol. 45, No. 3 in September 1969 (Nida, 1969); “The Science of Linguistics in the Art of Translation” by Joseph L Malone, SUNY Press, 1988 (Malone, 1988).

Dr BeDuhn writes that to understand the Bible, Christians “must rely on experts to guide them to its meaning” (p. ix), and he then makes a blanket condemnation of other authors: “Anyone can write a book about the Bible, claiming to explain it” (p. ix). He goes on to say in the next paragraph that this is “a debate that has been conducted mostly in the shadow of ignorance.”

Having dismissed all Christian scholarship of the past 2,000 years, BeDuhn proffers himself as *the* solution to the problem that he has depicted (or invented?): “So I am writing to clear up a number of misconceptions about the Bible, and about the claims made by those who are listened to when

they speak about the Bible. ... I am writing because I am a biblical scholar.” (p. ix) Are we to conclude that the other theologians, linguists and Bible translators are, in the opinion of BeDuhn, *not* “biblical scholars”? Their scholarship has been rejected by him in a few paragraphs, without the support of any evidence.

BeDuhn seems to be blissfully unaware that the condemnation that he has heaped on *everyone else* could equally be applied by others to him. After all, he has also not provided any evidence to support his claim to be *the one person in Christian history* with “the truth”. As he himself says, “Anyone can write a book about the Bible, claiming to explain it” (p. ix)! We may therefore legitimately examine whether his claims to be *the* appropriate person to write this book are valid.

However, he explains that he has written this book because he has taken on “the role of the neutral investigator” (p. ix). As we look at his techniques and his arguments, we will be able to evaluate whether in fact he is the first-ever “neutral investigator” (and indeed the only one) – or whether he is in fact “neutral”, at all.

He warns people not to expect to understand the Bible (without help from him of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses)

BeDuhn states in the Preface that “people ... cannot simply read the words on the page and have it make immediate sense to them” (p. ix). This is the standard argument that has been used for centuries by authoritarian religious bodies, to persuade their followers not to read the Bible and not to think for themselves; both the Roman Catholic Church and the “Watchtower Bible and Tract Society”, which runs the Jehovah’s Witness organisation, tell their followers that it is dangerous for them to read the Bible without guidance from the leader(s) of the organisation; to do so could lead them to wrong conclusions; the organisation will tell its followers what the Bible means and what they are to believe. The only ones authorised to define what the Bible means are those at the head of the organisation: the Pope (and the Councils of the church) in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Governing Body of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

To be fair to the Roman Catholic Church, since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), Roman Catholics have no longer been forbidden to read the Bible, although change since then in the actual practice of its followers has been slower than might have been expected, and all evidence seems to indicate that as yet in many countries few Roman Catholics regularly read the Bible at home.

In laying his ground-rule, BeDuhn is merely applying the standard instruction of the Watchtower organisation: “you will need a body with authority (them!) to tell you what the Bible *really* means.” You “cannot simply read the words on the page and have it make ... sense.”

The arrogance of such a statement is staggering. It is truly astonishing that a person claiming to be an intellectual and a professional academic can publish such a statement in the 21st century and in the USA.
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For his Jehovah’s Witness readers, this is a clear reference to the Governing Body of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Dedication

Dr BeDuhn dedicates his book to “my Bible ladies: my mother and my grandmothers”. Dedications of works are of course not subject to any scholarly rules, and while many dedications are to great scholars, academic mentors or specialists, many other dedications are to personal friends, spouses, etc. In this we are not in any way critical of this dedication. On the contrary, it is natural – and indeed delightful – that Dr BeDuhn should wish to please these three ladies who are so important to him. In view of his radical claims that all other Bible translations are inaccurate, it would be reasonable to conclude that the Bible that these three ladies read is the New World Translation. He would, after all, hardly be likely to dedicate a book that condemns all Bible translations other than the NWT to ladies who used one of those condemned translations. They

might reasonably otherwise have been outraged to be the dedicatees of such a controversial book that condemns any other translation of the Bible that they might read.

And so an inevitable doubt enters our mind as regards the distance between Dr BeDuhn and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Is he really an *independent* expert? Did these "Bible ladies" who are so influential in his life read the Bible to him when he was young, and if so, from which translation did they read? It would appear highly probable that it was from the Jehovah's Witnesses' "New World Translation".

CHAPTER 4: THE STANDARD GREEK TEXT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The academic study of the thousands of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament has led to widespread scholarly agreement on the Greek text of the New Testament.

1) The Nestle-Aland text

For over one hundred years the most authoritative text of the Greek New Testament has been that produced by an international group of scholars under the leadership first of Eberhard Nestle, subsequently of Eberhard Nestle and Kurt Aland and more recently, other scholars. The first edition was published in 1898, and the text has been continually revised in the course of over 100 years in the light of new textual discoveries and the development of the scientific analysis of ancient texts (known as textual criticism).

This text has for many decades been referred to as the "Nestle-Aland" text, and in 1992 its 27th edition was published – "NA27". (K. Aland & Aland, 1992)³⁴ This text has been accepted by all major academic institutions as the standard text for New Testament studies. It has also been accepted by most Bible translators and religious bodies worldwide, including the Roman Catholic church and protestant churches of most persuasions.

It should be pointed out that the different editions of the Nestle-Aland text do not reflect major changes in the Greek text. In fact, between some editions (for instance, the 26th and the 27th) there are no changes at all in the Greek text, merely changes in some of the notes, as each edition incorporates references to more and more ancient copies of the Koiné Greek manuscripts.

2) The Greek text published by the United Bible Societies

The world's leading publisher of Bibles is the United Bible Society, now often known under the name Biblica. The UBS is also one of the two leading promoters of Bible translations world-wide (the other being Wycliffe Bible Translators).

Decades of studies by leading scholars of the Greek New Testament who were members of the Greek text Editorial Committee of the United Bible Society led to the production of the fourth edition of the United Bible Society's text of the Greek New Testament Greek ("UBS4") in 1993 (K. Aland et al., 1993). This is in fact the same as the text of "NA27", with the only differences being some decisions on punctuation. As there was no punctuation in the original texts, this is not significant. Thus, most scholars and Bible Translators now use "NA27/UBS4" as the Greek text for translation and study.³⁵

BeDuhn is critical of these texts

BeDuhn's evaluation of these texts is ambiguous. On the one hand, he says "these editions are vastly superior to anything that existed before them" (p. 9). On the other hand, he is critical of the consensus among academics world-wide who are experts in the Greek text, and writes, "Questions might be raised about this monopoly on deciding the 'best' text of the New Testament, but that would take us on a detour from our main subject" (p. 9). He thus impugns the reliability of the standard Greek texts of the New Testament without bringing any evidence in support of his

³⁴ The 28th edition was released in various bindings in late December 2012. This is the result of further studies of manuscripts of the "General Epistles" only: James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John and Jude. There is a small number of changes in the text of these epistles only. As this edition post-dates the publication of BeDuhn's book, it is not referred to in this review. (K. Aland et al., 2012)

³⁵ In 2014, the "Fifth Revised Edition of the Greek New Testament" (UBS5) was published by the United Bible Society, which is now known as Biblica. As it post-dates the publication of BeDuhn's book, it is not referred to in this review. (B. Aland & et. al., 2014)

assertion. As regards his justification – that this would be “a detour from our main subject” – in fact the “main subject” of his book *is* the text of the New Testament! If we start off with a different input (a different Greek text), we should expect a different output (a different English text).

An alternative Greek text

Two nineteenth-century scholars, Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Antony Hort (1828-1892) prepared an edition of the Greek text of the New Testament, “The New Testament in the Original Greek” (B. F. Westcott & Hort, 1881). This text, which is generally referred to as “Westcott & Hort”, was published in 1881 and therefore does not benefit from the major textual discoveries of the 20th century nor from the substantial advances in textual criticism since the nineteenth century.

The translators of the RSV pointed out in 1952 that “the most ancient of all extant manuscripts of the Greek New Testament were not discovered until 1931”³⁶. (*The Bible, Revised Standard Version*, 1952) In fact, since the RSV was published, further very early manuscripts have been discovered.

The New Testament Greek manuscript expert Philip Comfort writes concerning Westcott and Hort’s edition of the Greek New Testament Text, “Of course, I think they gave too much weight to Codex Vaticanus alone, and this needs to be tempered. ... the manuscript discoveries of the past one hundred years have changed things ... Since their era, hundreds of other manuscripts have been discovered, especially the New Testament papyri. Had Westcott and Hort been alive today, they ... would have undoubtedly altered some of their textual choices based on the evidence of the papyri. For example, the testimony of \mathfrak{P}^{75} (with \aleph and B)³⁷ in several Lukan passages clearly indicates that Westcott and Hort were wrong to have excluded several passages in Luke 22-24 based on their theory of “Western noninterpolations.”³⁸ (Comfort, 2005)

The editors of the Nestle-Aland and UBS texts naturally consulted these early manuscripts; Westcott and Hort were unable to do so.

BeDuhn does not address the important issue of the Greek text chosen by the Jehovah’s Witnesses for their translation

In chapter 1, “The Origins of English Bibles”, BeDuhn states (p. 8) that “Some modern translations are based upon the conclusions of Westcott and Hort”. He does not specify *which* translations. In fact, if we limit ourselves (as he does in this statement) to “modern translations”, there is only one: the Jehovah’s Witness version of the New Testament.

Indeed, the use of the Westcott & Hort text by the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society is itself unusual, as in 1961, when the Society produced the “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, the 21st edition Nestle-Aland text (1952) had been available for nearly ten years and was widely accepted as the most authoritative Greek text. In fact, in 1950 when they produced their translation of the New Testament (which they call the “Christian Greek Scriptures”), the 20th edition of the Nestle text was available, and earlier editions had been available over a period of more than fifty years.

In a book that focuses precisely on the accuracy or otherwise of Bible translations, some comment on the choice of source text is essential. The fact that one – and only one – of the modern

³⁶ Preface to The Revised Standard Version of The Holy Bible, p. vii in the edition printed by Oxford University Press, 1963.

³⁷ \mathfrak{P}^{75} , \aleph and B are standard references given to manuscripts. \aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, pronounced “aleph”. It is the name given to Codex Sinaiticus. B is Codex Vaticanus 1209.

³⁸ Philip W Comfort, “Encountering the Manuscripts”, Nashville, TN, 2005: Broadman & Holman Publishers, p. 100. See also in the same book on pages 291, 293, 309, 333 and 335 evaluations and discussions of other decisions by Westcott and Hort, all of which reach similar conclusions.

translations included in his study uses a source Greek text that is different from the source text used by all of the other modern translations that he looks at should have merited at least a section, probably in fact a whole chapter.

One would have expected as a bare minimum something along the lines of:

'The New World Translation, alone of all the modern translations included in this study, does not use the NA27/UBS4 text but the 1881 Westcott and Hort text.'

– followed by a discussion of the validity or otherwise of this choice. Why have the Jehovah's Witnesses rejected the standard Greek text that is accepted by the leading scholars world-wide who are the experts in the Biblical manuscripts? Is their choice of source text significant? Does it matter?

However, no such discussion takes place. Dr BeDuhn's answer is effectively, "No comment!" On the contrary, he goes so far as to seek to divert the reader's attention from this fact, merely mentioning it in passing in a paragraph that touches on a whole range of topics at the end of chapter 3, "Major English Translations". He writes, "The NW's text-base [my comment: whatever that means] is the Westcott and Hort edition" (p. 39). He follows this up by playing down the differences between the Westcott and Hort text and the Nestle-Aland/UBS texts, failing to inform the reader that the latter benefit from the major manuscript discoveries of the 20th century.

In the Foreword to the 2001 edition of the Westcott and Hort text, the renowned academic Eldon Jay Epp states, "appropriate use of Westcott-Hort's text requires knowledge of the manuscript discoveries since their time, and they have been legion." (B. F. Westcott & F. J. A. Hort, 2001, p. xxi) BeDuhn's book was published two years later, and for a work that apparently focusses on the Westcott and Hort text, one would have expected the author to have consulted the 2001 edition of that text. Unfortunately, that appears not to have been the case.

The paragraph in question then moves on quickly to a whole range of other, unrelated topics, among other things criticising three other translations ("the NASB, AB, and LB") for "draw[ing] in readings from the inferior traditional text" (p. 39). Thus a potentially tricky topic is hurriedly passed over and the reader's attention is diverted to alleged flaws in the source texts used by other translations.

BeDuhn tries to undermine confidence in the reliability of the original Greek texts of the New Testament

This is the standard, ultimate fall-back position of the Jehovah's Witnesses, when all their arguments about a given text are proved to be without justification. They say, "Of course, the text may be corrupted."³⁹ If this were indeed the case, then neither they nor anyone else would have any basis on which to argue about any Christian claim or doctrine at all.

On page 1 of chapter 1, BeDuhn lays the same groundwork, by speaking – *twice!* – of the Greek text of the New Testament as being a "crumbling manuscript". Naturally, with tens of thousands of New Testament manuscripts, some of them dating back at least to the beginning of the Second Century A.D. (within the lifetime of some first-generation Christians), there are some "crumbling manuscripts". However, there are also vast numbers of beautifully-preserved manuscripts, some of them from the second or third century, many of them easy to read for the scholar with a good knowledge of Koiné Greek and of the writing conventions of the time.

Yet BeDuhn goes on to write of "imperfect copies of lost originals" (p. 2). While there clearly are some "imperfect copies", there are many, many excellent copies, and the sheer volume and early dates of manuscripts give us more confidence that we know what the originals said than can be the

³⁹ I base this comment on what Jehovah's Witnesses have said to me when I have shown them places where the original Greek texts contradict their teachings and their version of the Bible.

case with any other document from antiquity – or indeed than many other much more recent documents.

The evidence for this is overwhelming. To quote from just one academic assessment: “The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the *authenticity* and the *general integrity* of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”⁴⁰,
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⁴⁰ Sir Frederic Kenyon in “*The Bible and Archaeology*” (1940), pp. 288-89 (Kenyon, 1940), quoted by F F Bruce in “The New Testament Documents – Are They Reliable?”, sixth edition, 1981, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company. (Bruce, 1981)

⁴¹ (Kenyon, 1940)

CHAPTER 5: PUBLICATIONS CONSULTED BY BEDUHN

BeDuhn rejects the standard lexicon of Koiné Greek, using instead an older lexicon of classical Greek

BeDuhn rejects the standard reference work on Koiné Greek, “A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature” by Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich⁴² (commonly referred to as “BDAG”) (Bauer et al., 2000), preferring instead Liddell and Scott’s “A Greek-English Lexicon” (1845, revised 1925 by Jones, referred to hereafter as “LSJ”) (Liddell et al., 1925), which he says “is based on the whole of Greek literature” (p. 54).

While Liddell and Scott’s lexicon is a major reference work, Sir Henry Stuart Jones, who prepared the 1925 revision on which subsequent revisions were based, makes much less grandiose claims for this book, stating in his preface that its focus is on classical Greek from the 8th to 4th centuries BC, not the Koiné Greek (approximately 3rd century BC to 3rd century AD) in which the New Testament was written.⁴³ He points out that for κοινή [“koinē”], a New Testament lexicon is to be preferred, at the time recommending Moulton and Milligan’s *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (LSJ Preface, page ix). In the second half of the 20th century, BDAG became the standard reference text on Koiné Greek, and remains so in the 21st century.

The author of the Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint, Bernard A Taylor, writes: “While LSJ does not ignore *Koiné* Greek, it does not do it justice.”⁴⁴ (B. A. Taylor, 2009)

Worse, BeDuhn only uses LSJ selectively, quoting from them when they support (or appear to support) his claims, and ignoring what they say when they contradict his claims.

BeDuhn only refers to the Liddell and Scott lexicon when he can quote a phrase or definition that supports his argument. However, he does not refute those definitions given by LSJ which undermine or contradict his claims; he merely disregards (or perhaps we might be justified in saying “suppresses”) the relevant information. *Either* this is the height of academic dishonesty, *or* Dr BeDuhn was unaware of the other LSJ definitions, in which case one would be forced to conclude that he did not carry out his research with the thoroughness that characterises a good scholarly, academic work. One could be forgiven for drawing the conclusion that he appears to be hoping that his readers will never discover what the LSJ lexicon actually says.

One must point out that the approach adopted by BeDuhn is precisely that used by the Jehovah’s Witnesses for more than 70 years: to quote (selectively!) from those commentators who appear (or who can be made to appear) to agree with their claims, while ignoring those who do not support their position.

This does of course mirror their approach to the Bible, selectively quoting those verses (or even parts of verses) that appear (or can be made to appear) to agree with their doctrines, while ignoring those verses that do not support their position. BeDuhn uses exactly the same techniques in his book.

Such an approach is just not worthy of a genuinely academic study, which one would expect to present all of the possibly-contradictory arguments concerning an issue, and all of the relevant evidence, before fairly evaluating the merits of each in order to reach a conclusion.

⁴² Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich “A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature”, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 3rd edition, 2000

⁴³ Liddell, Henry George and Scott, Robert, “A Greek-English Lexicon Revised and Augmented Throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the Assistance of Roderick McKenzie”, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press (University Press, Oxford), 1968 With Supplement, reprinted 1976. See Preface 1925, especially p. x.

⁴⁴ Bernard A Taylor, “Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint – Expanded Edition”, 2009, Hendrickson Publishers / Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft / United Bible Societies, p. xvii

Gentiles

As an example, BeDuhn criticises the Authorised Version (which he calls the “KJV”, in accordance with common United States usage) and NASB for translating the Greek word ἔθνη [“ethnē”] as “Gentiles”, claiming that this is “archaic” (p. 16). Incidentally, my thoroughly 21st-century Jewish friends would probably disagree with this assessment of the word “Gentile”. It is also strange that BeDuhn contradicts himself by using this supposedly-“archaic” word at least twice in his book (both times on p. 171).

More important for the purposes of his book, BeDuhn’s preferred lexicon, LSJ, also disagrees with him, giving “non-Jews” and “Gentiles” as appropriate translations (p. 480 of the 1976 reprint). BeDuhn does not challenge these definitions, preferring to ignore them. He merely states, without quoting any lexicon or other authority for support, “the NW translates more accurately as ‘nations’” (p. 16).

I would point out that the semantic range of ἔθνη [“ethnē”] is wider than that of “nations” in English, and in some cases the word “Gentiles” is needed if the translation is to convey the full meaning of the original. In Acts 10:45 and 11:1, for instance, the Jews were shocked that non-Jews had received the Holy Spirit and eternal life, and the contrast between the two groups here requires the use of the word “Gentiles” rather than “nations”. The whole point is that these people were not *Jews* who happened to be living in another nation, but *Gentiles*. However, in a passage like Matthew 28:19, where the universality of the Great Commission is being stressed and there is no contrast between Jews and Gentiles, “nations” would be a better English translation.

Worship

Here is another example: so keen is BeDuhn to reject the word “worship” as a possible translation for the Greek word προσκυνέω [“proskuneō”] that he claims (p. 46) that it means “cower”, even though the LSJ does not list this as a possible meaning of the Greek word (cf. Howe⁴⁵ p 56), while it *does*, on the contrary, list “worship” as one of the meanings of the word.⁴⁶

The real nature

A further example concerns Hebrews 1:3, where we read of Christ, “He is the radiance of his [God's] glory and the exact representation of his being” (NIV)”. In their definition of the key Greek word ὑπόστασις [“hupostasis”], translated above “his being”, LSJ states “real nature, essence”.

As BeDuhn denies that Christ possessed the real nature and essence of God, he naturally makes no reference either to this verse or to the LSJ definition, even though it is vitally relevant to the understanding of Phil 2:6-7, a passage to which he dedicates a whole chapter.

Thus, BeDuhn even ignores his chosen lexicon when it gives definitions that do not suit his arguments.

However, BeDuhn has laid the groundwork well in his introduction, by criticising dictionaries (p. xviii) and those who use them: “All they can do is argue the dictionary meaning of a term” (p. xix). However, he uses dictionaries himself, when it suits him, selecting only those “dictionary meaning[s]” that support his claims.

⁴⁵ Thomas A Howe, “Bias in New Testament Translations?”, 2010, Charlotte, NC, Solomon’s Razor Publishing. Dr Howe is an established academic who has served on the faculty of Bible and Biblical Languages at Southern Evangelical Seminary since 1993. (Howe, 2010)

In 2015 a new book by Dr Howe on the same theme was published: “The Deity of Christ in Modern Translations”. This book is available from Amazon (and possibly elsewhere). It appears to be a revised and slightly abbreviated version of the earlier book. (Howe, 2015)

⁴⁶ LSJ entry on προσκυν-έω on page 1518 of the 1968 edition (1976 reprint)

BeDuhn rejects the standard grammars of Koiné Greek, choosing instead as his main authoritative source to support his arguments one (only!) older grammar of classical Greek

There are numerous standard grammars of Koiné Greek. Among them, we could refer to the books by Dana and Mantey⁴⁷ (Dana & Mantey, 1955) and by Wallace⁴⁸ (Wallace, 1996). However, BeDuhn rejects these and others, referring instead inexplicably to Smyth⁴⁹ (Smyth, 1920).

BeDuhn describes Smyth's book as "*the* standard work of Greek grammar" (p. 93, emphasis added), implying that it is the only one or at least the leading one. However, he fails to point out that it is not even a grammar of Koiné Greek, but of the classical, Attic Greek from centuries earlier. Smyth himself states this in his Preface (p. viii). Could it be that BeDuhn did not notice that?

It is as though someone were to lay down rules for English grammar in the 21st century by referring to Shakespeare or Chaucer: it is recognisable as being the same language (at least in the case of Shakespeare), but the language and its rules have changed substantially since then.

BeDuhn may have chosen a grammar that he can use to support his arguments (and even that is not clear), but it is not relevant to the Koiné Greek of the New Testament.⁵⁰ When it suits him, BeDuhn quotes short phrases selectively from other grammar books, although on occasion his quotations do not fairly represent what the author actually wrote. Thus, BeDuhn refers (pp. 92-93) to Wallace. However, he appears either not to have understood what Wallace wrote, or else he misrepresents him. See Howe's discussion of this (2010, pp. 120-121).

Choice of academic experts, (1): Furuli

Dr BeDuhn struggles to justify the version of Hebrews 1:8 given by the NWT, which stands alone amongst all the translations that he has chosen to examine, disagreeing with all of them. As we are here looking at BeDuhn's use of other experts, this is not the place to study that verse (which we will do later in this review). BeDuhn concludes his chapter on it by quoting (on p.101) from Rolf Furuli, the author of a book with a title that is remarkably similar to that of BeDuhn's book. It is called, "The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation", which BeDuhn's bibliography indicates was published by Elihu Books in 1999. (R. Furuli, 1999)

According to the Elihu website, it is run by a certain Greg Stafford "to help promote accurate knowledge and understanding among people in general and, specifically, where it concerns the beliefs and practices of Christian Witnesses of Jah" –

http://www.elihubooks.com/content/online_papers.php (downloaded on 19.10.12). There is more information concerning Mr. Stafford in the next section of this review.

BeDuhn also quotes from Furuli on p. 54 in support of his contentious interpretation of a word in Philippians 2:6.

But what BeDuhn fails to reveal on either occasion is that Rolf Furuli is in fact a Jehovah's Witness! Furuli has written in defence of Jehovah's Witness doctrines since at least the 1980s and has regularly been quoted from in Jehovah's Witness publications.

The former leading Swedish Jehovah's Witness Carl Olof Jonsson states in his book "The Gentile Times Reconsidered – Chronology and Christ's Return" (Commentary Press, Atlanta, 2004) (Jonsson, 2004), "*Rolf Furuli is a Jehovah's Witness who lives in Oslo, Norway. He is a former district overseer and is regarded by Norwegian Witnesses as the leading apologist of Watch Tower teaching in that country, and Witnesses often turn to him with their doctrinal problems.*" (p. 308)

⁴⁷ "A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament", Toronto, The Macmillan Company, 1955.

⁴⁸ Daniel Wallace, "Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics", Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996.

⁴⁹ Herbert Weir Smyth, "Greek Grammar", Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1920.

⁵⁰ cf. Howe, 2010, pp. 116-7.

On p. 354 of the same book, Jonsson provides further information on Furuli: “for a long time he has produced apologetic texts defending Watchtower exegesis against criticism. His two books on Bible translation are nothing more than defenses of the Witnesses’ *New World Translation* of the Bible.”

Writing in 2020 on a website that he himself had set up, Furuli stated, “I have served as an elder [in the Jehovah’s Witnesses] for 56 years, and I have had special assignments, such as being a circuit overseer and a district overseer.”⁵¹

BeDuhn’s argument is thus reduced to this: “The Jehovah’s Witnesses are right because this Jehovah’s Witness says they are.”!

By concealing the nature of the source that he has quoted, BeDuhn blows the cover of neutrality that he constantly claims. Far from demonstrating scholarly impartiality, BeDuhn here reveals his bias, while at the same time trying to hide it from the reader. Apart from anything else, the use of this source reveals the weakness of BeDuhn’s defence of the New World translation of Hebrews 1:8. More fundamentally, it discredits BeDuhn himself.

To state the facts simply, it is a prerequisite that any professional academic would carry out a thorough search of all available publications before publishing a book on any topic. Furthermore, normal academic criteria would require such a search to include publications in the principal languages in which the topic in question was addressed. Dr BeDuhn dedicates a whole chapter to Hebrews 1:8, so here we are not referring to a passing comment by him on a minor detail that he might not have researched thoroughly.

We must therefore conclude that, in spite of presumably having carried out appropriate research for this book, *BeDuhn was clearly unable to find a single independent scholar world-wide who supported the JW mistranslation of this verse.*

In 2021 Furuli published a book, “My Beloved Religion – And The Governing Body”, in which he was critical of the Governing Body of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. He was then expelled from the “Organization” (R. J. Furuli, 2021).

Choice of academic experts, (2): Stafford

In ten pages of convoluted arguments that seek to justify changing the tense of the Greek word for “am” in John 8:58, BeDuhn enlists the support of another Jehovah’s Witness writer, Stafford, no less than three times (on pp 106 and 109 (twice)), although he again hides from the reader that this source, too, is a Jehovah’s Witness, by tucking this information away in a footnote that is not even printed on the same page. (It can be found six pages later, on p. 112.)

Thus the reader is misled into believing that there is independent, non-Jehovah’s Witness, academic support for the argument presented. To have quoted the title of Stafford’s book would have given the game away. It is “Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics”, 2nd edition, 2000. It is published by precisely the same publisher that produced Furuli’s book, referred to above: Elihu Books. (Stafford, 2000) Such subterfuge by BeDuhn is not worthy of an academic. It is therefore not surprising that Northern Arizona University has described this book by BeDuhn as “controversial”, and has sought to distance itself from it.

BeDuhn also refers to Stafford no less than five times for support on page 180, in footnotes to text that appears on page 174 (where, however, Stafford’s name is nowhere to be seen).

⁵¹ See <https://mybelovedreligion.no/about/>, accessed on 13.7.21. Revisited 2.7.24. (R. J. Furuli, 2020)

CHAPTER 6: BEDUHN THE HISTORIAN

BeDuhn shows an unfortunate lack of understanding of the historical context

Although he claims (p. xix) that he is a historian, BeDuhn shows a lack of understanding of the historical context of the period when the New Testament was written.

He refers to the fact that the original Greek manuscripts were written without spaces between the words, and by printing an English phrase without spaces between the words, he tries to create in the reader the idea that to read such texts will have been difficult. He asks why manuscripts were written like this, and says,

“The standard answer is that the culture was still largely oral, and that texts served as aids to memory rather than as sources of novel information” (p. 3).

He does not give any evidence to substantiate this claim and does not quote from any experts in support of it. As elsewhere in his book, he merely makes a statement as though it were an undisputed fact. However, every detail of this claim is wrong⁵². First, I will address the historical context.

Levels of literacy

Literacy was remarkably widespread among the Jews in Palestine at the time of Christ. Richard Bauckham refers to “the widespread presence of writing in Jewish Palestine at the time of Jesus”.⁵³ (Bauckham, 2006) He also writes, “the followers of Jesus, both during his ministry and in the early Jerusalem church, were drawn from all classes of people. There would undoubtedly be some who could write and more who could read.”⁵⁴ He goes on to state, “The first Christians were not all illiterate peasant laborers and craftsmen, as form critics supposed, but evidently included people who studied the Scriptures with current exegetical skills and could write works with the literary quality of the letter of James.”⁵⁵ (“Form Criticism” was an academic movement that was popular in Germany and in some other countries during the first half of the 20th century, according to which it was allegedly not possible to have confidence in the reliability of the Biblical texts.)

We know that Jewish people at the time of Christ had a high level of literacy from the fact that even fishermen, carpenters and others could even read and write proficiently in foreign languages. We need look no further than Peter, John, Mark, and the other writers of the New Testament, not to mention the apostle Paul, and Christ himself, both of whom were fluent in Aramaic, Greek, and Hebrew⁵⁶ and probably in Latin, too.⁵⁷ Pilate had a sign put on the cross, written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, and in John 19:20 we read that “many of the Jews read the sign”. In John 8:6, 8 we also read of Jesus writing. The fact that he wrote for the crowd of people surrounding him shows that he knew that he was in the presence of people who could read. Not only could Zechariah, the

⁵² BeDuhn may again have been inspired by the controversial and unsubstantiated claims made by Bart Ehrman, for instance in his book “The New Testament” (2003), 4th edition published 2008, p. 18, New York: Oxford University Press. (Ehrman, 2003b) However, he does not turn to him for support, nor refer to Ehrman at any point.

⁵³ In “Jesus and the Eyewitnesses”, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006, p. 287.

⁵⁴ op. cit., p. 288.

⁵⁵ op. cit., p. 289.

⁵⁶ The scroll from which Jesus read in the synagogue in Luke 4:17-21 would have been written in Hebrew, not Aramaic. The Apostle Paul received his training in Judaism from Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), who was “a teacher of the law” (Acts 5:34). As such, Gamaliel would have known Hebrew, and his students would have needed an ability to read the original, Hebrew text of the Law. We know, further, that Paul was one of his most committed students.

⁵⁷ Richard Bauckham writes, “The author of Mark seems to have been bilingual, competent both in Greek and Aramaic”, op. cit., p. 239. We note that Mark also includes Latin words, transcribed in Greek characters. (for instance, in Mark 15:39)

father of John the Baptist, write; his wife and other relatives could read (Luke 1:63). These people were not scribes or priests, but ordinary lay people, including women.

Millard writes: "The literacy situation in Jewish society differed from that in the Graeco-Roman in a notable way because there was a strong tradition of education in order that men, at least, should be prepared to read from the Scriptures in the synagogue services. In theory, every Jewish male was expected to do so. The Palestinian Talmud reports the rule of Simeon ben Shetach about 100 BC that all children should go to school."⁵⁸ (Millard, 2001)

Another scholar with expert knowledge of the production of the New Testament has written, "Literacy was widespread in Palestinian Judaism."⁵⁹ (Ellis, 1999) Other scholars give similar information.⁶⁰

Likewise, both throughout the Greek empire that had been established by Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C., and in the subsequent Roman empire, literacy was widespread among certain classes of society, there were libraries and there were businesses that copied manuscripts of all sorts and in a range of languages.

Other examples of reading in the New Testament

In fact, the New Testament is full of references to reading. The word "read" occurs no less than seventy-seven times in the NIV translation of the Bible, starting in the book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible. Of these, twenty-eight references are in the New Testament.

A key question repeatedly used by Jesus in response to those who tried to trick him was to say, "Have you not read...?" This reprimand shows that he knew that they could read, that he believed that they probably had read the passage referred to, and that if they hadn't read it, they should have. Examples of this can be seen in Matthew 12:3, 12:5, 19:4, 21:16, 21:42, 22:31, Mark 2:25, 12:10, 12:26, Luke 6:3. In Luke 10:26 he is recorded as saying, "What is written in the Law?" (NIV). He clearly assumed that the person to whom he addressed this question could read, and indeed the man questioned had no difficulty in answering.

On another occasion, Jesus asked those who came to him to read what was written on a Roman coin (Matthew 22:20-21, with parallel references in Mark 12:16 and Luke 20:24). This assumed not only an ability to read, but also to read even a foreign language that was, moreover, written in a different alphabet – Latin, written in Roman script. None of his interlocutors had any difficulty in reading this, and the fact that they could do so was not considered remarkable in any way.

In Acts 8, we read of a foreigner, an Ethiopian, who was reading a text originally written in Hebrew, although he was probably reading the Greek translation. The record states that he was "an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet." (Acts 8:27-28, NIV)

When the church in Jerusalem wrote a letter to the church in Antioch and sent it there, we read that in Antioch "they gathered the church together and delivered the letter. The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message." (Acts 15:30-31, NIV)

Acts 18:24-26 tells us of "a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria" who came to Ephesus. He is described as "a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures." (v 24) However, there were serious gaps in his knowledge (v 25), and we read that "When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately." (v 26, NIV)

⁵⁸ Alan R Millard, "Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus", Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, p. 157.

⁵⁹ E. Earle Ellis, "The Making of the New Testament Documents", Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 1999, p. 22.

⁶⁰ See also Howe, 2010, pp 319-323.

We must conclude that, in order to be able to correct Apollos's understanding of the Scriptures, Priscilla and Aquila could also read. It is also remarkable that five of the six times in the New Testament that Priscilla and Aquila are referred to in the same phrase as a couple, contrary to the cultural norms, Priscilla is named first.⁶¹ It is generally accepted by scholars that this indicates that she was the principal teacher in this couple, which would lead us to conclude that – in spite of being a woman – she, too, could read.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand.” (2 Corinthians 1:13, NIV)

He instructed the Colossian believers, “After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.” (Colossians 4:16, NIV)

To the church in Thessalonica he wrote, “I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of them.” (1 Thessalonians 5:26-27, NRSV)

These are not all the references to reading in the New Testament, and if we looked for the references to writing, we would find another very long list.⁶²

It is thus abundantly clear that an ability to read (and write) was considered normal among the Jews at the time of Christ. It is indeed extremely puzzling that BeDuhn has not noticed this or that, as “a historian”, he is unaware of the overwhelming amount of readily-available evidence that confirms this, even in the very Scriptures about he has written a whole book.

Texts *not* written to convey “novel information”?

BeDuhn next claims that “texts served as aids to memory rather than as sources of novel information” (p. 3). The amount of data, going back to clay tablets over 1,000 years earlier, is so overwhelming that it provides irrefutable evidence that this claim is fundamentally mistaken. In fact, a large part of writing throughout the Roman empire consisted of reports and letters sent to Rome by regional governors and administrators, and letters from Rome to such people, as well as letters from one administrator to another. Most of these letters in fact *did* contain “novel information”, and many of them were sealed so that the carrier could not read them. So they clearly were not written “as aids to memory”. Moreover, the fact that they were sealed indicates that it was assumed that the messenger carrying the letter was able to read.

We have one such letter by one Roman administrator (Claudius Lysias) to another (Felix) recorded in the New Testament (Acts 23:25-30), and in the Old Testament there are numerous references to letters that were not “aids to memory rather than as sources of novel information” (twenty-seven Old Testament references, starting with 2 Samuel 11:14), and we have the complete text of several letters, sometimes even in the original language when the letter was not written in Hebrew (for instance, in Ezra 4: v 8 ff – two letters in this chapter alone). None of these letters were written “as aids to memory rather than as sources of novel information”.

The Bible describes or quotes from many other letters. One example is a letter that was written 1,000 years earlier than the letter from Claudius Lysias in the book of Acts. The King of Israel, David, wrote it to his military commander, Joab, who was attacking a foreign city. The letter was carried from Jerusalem to the battlefield by Uriah the Hittite, and it contained instructions to Joab to engineer a situation where Uriah himself would be killed (2 Samuel 12:14-17). It is clear that Uriah did not know the contents of the letter that he was carrying, nor could Joab have possibly imagined receiving a letter with such an instruction. Thus, the letter contained a message that was totally unexpected by Joab – “novel information”! – and Uriah the Hittite was not able to use this

⁶¹ She is also referred to when Aquila is introduced into the account, in Acts 18:2.

⁶² The word “write” occurs 86 times in the NIV translation of the Bible, 51 of them in the New Testament.

letter as an “aid to memory” to help him to remember contents that had supposedly (according to BeDuhn!) been previously explained to him by King David.

This Old Testament incident is extremely well-known and Uriah is even referred to in the New Testament (Matthew 1:6). It clearly demonstrates the total inaccuracy of BeDuhn’s claim, “The standard answer is that the culture was still largely oral, and that texts served as aids to memory rather than as sources of novel information” (p. 3).

The sealing of letters and documents

On the practice of sealing letters so that they cannot be read by the bearer, we need to look no further than the New Testament. See, for example, Revelation 5:2, 5:9, 6:1, 6:3, 22:10. Seals are also referred to in the Old Testament, sometimes to authenticate the identity of the writer (e.g., 1 Kings 21:8), sometimes to prevent a document being read (e.g. Daniel 8:26, 9:24, 12:4).

And of course, most of the New Testament itself consists of letters, none of which were designed as “aids to memory rather than as sources of novel information”.

Further, it is widely accepted that Matthew and Luke had access to written copies of Mark’s gospel, and while this may have served as an *aide-mémoire* for Matthew, this would not have been the case with Luke, who had almost certainly not been present when the events described in his gospel occurred. In fact, he himself writes, “I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (Luke 1:3), and the evidence is that his investigations included written, as well as spoken, sources.

BeDuhn writes, “I am a biblical scholar ... by training - - I know ... the social, political, and cultural environment that shaped how the New Testament expresses itself” (p. ix). One would expect a professional historian who was an expert on the culture of first century Palestine to be aware of these facts. Yet BeDuhn’s claims about the oral culture and the nature of texts fly totally in the face of the historical evidence. This deeply undermines his credibility as a historian.

CHAPTER 7: BEDUHN THE LINGUIST

BeDuhn's lack of understanding of the nature of language

There is also a second aspect of BeDuhn's claim about the reasons why texts were not written with spaces between the words. How does this reflect on his credibility as a linguist? What was the *real* reason why texts were written without spaces between the words? As we have seen, it definitely was not any of the reasons that BeDuhn has given.

Any professional linguist will be able to answer this question straight away: when people speak they (we!) do not put spaces (silences) between the words. In a society where we learn to read at a very young age, we usually overlook this fact, and over the years I have had more than one discussion with speakers who sincerely believed that they *did* speak with a silence between each and every word. We often first discover that there are no such silences between spoken words when we hear a foreign language: all the words seem to flow together. The fact is that the words flow together in our own language, too, but our brains are so good at decoding the information that we are not consciously aware of this. One would really have expected a genuinely competent professional linguist to have known this.⁶³

BeDuhn's strategy

BeDuhn's strategy of printing an English text without spaces between the words will naturally present problems for modern readers, all of whom will have been trained to expect a space on the page between each word. However, just as we understand people without difficulty when they speak, even though they do not put a silence between each word, readers of antiquity had no difficulty in understanding text that was written without spaces between the words. The New Testament manuscript specialist Dr Philip Comfort writes, "Of course, ancient readers were accustomed to [this] format, so they could read it more quickly than moderns can."⁶⁴

Dr David C Parker, Director of the Institute for Textual Scholarship at the University of Birmingham (England) writes:

"the words are written without any spaces, so that there is a continuous flow of letters. ... Perhaps [the ancients] were right. Speak the text out loud as you read it, and your ear makes perfect sense of the text. This is exactly what was done in antiquity."⁶⁵ (Parker, 2010)

I would add that this works much better for a language that has a spelling that is largely phonetic, such as Greek, than it does for modern English.

Dr Parker also writes:

"Readers spoke out loud in antiquity, even when reading privately. The sound of the words compensated for the lack of punctuation and spaces."⁶⁶

In an article published in 2014⁶⁷ (Hurtado, 2014), Professor Larry Hurtado writes:

⁶³ Every language does of course introduce pauses in speech for the purpose of breathing, emphasis, etc., and this is indicated by the punctuation. But in speech there is not a pause, a gap or a silence after every word.

⁶⁴ Philip Comfort, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

⁶⁵ "Codex Sinaiticus", 2010, London: The British Library and Peabody, MA : Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., pp. 70-71.

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ Larry W. Hurtado (2014). Oral Fixation and New Testament Studies? 'Orality', 'Performance' and Reading Texts in Early Christianity. *New Testament Studies*, 60, pp. 321-340 doi:10.1017/S0028688514000058. Downloaded on 9 June 2014 See <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/new-testament-studies/article/abs/oral-fixation-and-new-testament-studies-orality-performance-and-reading-texts-in-early-christianity/D9EE5096CE21348A1297A4A7087ABA6B> Accedido on 2.7.2024 Accessed on 2.7.2024.

In particular, the typical use of scriptio continua (i.e. no spaces between words) and the common absence (or nearly so) of punctuation, especially in high-quality literary manuscripts, present readers of modern books in European languages with what can only seem a demanding format. But this response tells us more about modern readers (and what we are used to) than it does about ancient readers of literary manuscripts. The fact is that Greek and Latin literary manuscripts reflect a preference for scriptio continua over word-separation, probably because readers regarded it as a more elegant format.⁶⁸

Hurtado continues by stating:

We must realise that education in the Roman era was geared towards equipping readers progressively to cope with texts precisely in the way that they were written then.

He also points out that:

We should also note that, although elite Greek literary manuscripts made 'few concessions' to readers, they did make a few concessions. One of these was that columns were formed of narrow lines, typically of ca. 15–20 letters, or about 6–9 cm width. Such short lines actually make it a bit easier to cope with scriptio continua, and it is interesting that this linear space is about what studies have shown to be the ocular space taken in by an experienced reader in a single 'saccade' (eye-movement in reading).⁶⁹

One of Dr Hurtado's conclusions⁷⁰ is:

So, it is a red herring to point to the demanding format of ancient Greek and Latin literary texts as if this means that they were a serious impediment to trained readers, and still less that such manuscripts could not be read from but only functioned as scripts to memorise.⁷¹

The evidence presented by these and other experts in first-century texts show that Dr BeDuhn's argument is not valid, which unfortunately has implications for his credibility as a linguist and a historian.

Why does BeDuhn play the trick on his readers of presenting English text without spaces between the words? We have already seen that he sought in his Preface to persuade the reader that understanding the Bible is difficult, not something for the lay person to attempt without the help of "an expert". He went on to claim that the manuscripts of the New Testament are no more than "crumbling manuscripts"⁷². Now he wants to persuade his readers that even reading the Greek text is difficult. This encourages his readers to believe that if they attempted to read the texts, they would not be able to understand them, and at the same time it enhances his own status as an expert who *can* understand such allegedly-difficult texts.

It also ignores the fact that from the earliest times Christian manuscripts (and manuscripts of the Greek Septuagint), influenced by previous Jewish scribal practice, were written with what are known as "sense-unit spacing", i.e., there were gaps at points in the manuscripts, often corresponding to what might be a sentence or paragraph break.⁷³ (Hurtado, 2006) It further ignores the facts that from as early as at least the 4th century AD some manuscripts were in fact written with spaces between the words, and that writing with spaces between the words subsequently became standard practice. I would refer to the photographic reproductions of sample texts in Bruce

⁶⁸ Op. cit., p. 308, emphasis added.

⁶⁹ Op. cit., pp. 328-329

⁷⁰ Without referring to BeDuhn, from whose book he does not quote.

⁷¹ Op. cit., p. 329

⁷² Chapter 1 p. 1.

⁷³ cf. Larry W Hurtado, "The Earliest Christian Artifacts", 2006, Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge UK: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 61. cf. also Robert A Kraft, "The 'Textual Mechanics' of Early Jewish LXX/OG Papyri and Fragments" in "The Bible as Book: The Transmission of the Greek Text", ed. Scot McKendrick and Orlaith O'Sullivan, London: British Library, 2003, p. 68 (Kraft, 2003)

M Metzger, "The Text of the New Testament", 3rd, enlarged edition, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 (see in particular plate VI). (Metzger, 1992)

Even in the Codex Sinaiticus, which was produced in approximately 340 AD, there is some punctuation, the text is divided up into paragraphs (and into the correct lines for poetic verse in the poetic books of the Old Testament), and at some points in the New Testament the text is divided into words – see for instance 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 and a large part of 1 Corinthians 13 on Quire 83 Folio 4 recto⁷⁴. This is not the only such example in the Codex Sinaiticus. See also, for example, Romans 13:13 on Quire 82 Folio 6 recto.

BeDuhn shows an unfortunate lack of understanding of the nature of linguistic constructions

As an example, I will refer to the chapter in which he rejects the most obvious translation of Titus 2:13, which speaks of "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (BeDuhn chapter 8, pp. 89-95). He is naturally keen to change this, so that it no longer refers to Jesus Christ as God.

In order to justify changing the translation, he quotes from other passages in the New Testament. For instance, of 2 Thessalonians 1:12 he says, "The form of this passage is the same as Titus 2:13" (p. 91). He does not present any grammatical analysis of either passage, preferring just to make the unsubstantiated claim. However, if we do analyse the structure of each sentence in the Greek, we find that it is radically different.

Does BeDuhn really think that the structure is the same? If so, he has failed to understand the nature of the linguistic constructions concerned. In fact, as the structure is different, 2 Thessalonians 1:12 is not remotely relevant to the understanding of Titus 2:13. For a detailed study of Titus 2:13, see my article here: https://livingwater-spain.com/Titus_2_13.pdf (Allin, 2021)

In the rest of the same chapter, BeDuhn tackles other verses that are problematical for him and for the Jehovah's Witnesses, again referring in each case to other verses in which he claims that "the grammatical structure ... is identical" (p. 92). On each occasion, an analysis of the linguistic or grammatical structure shows that this is not the case, but as BeDuhn does not provide any analysis, it is difficult to refute his claims.

Most readers are likely to assume that what he claims is justified, from which they will imagine that his conclusions are justified, too. But since the comparisons are not valid, the conclusions are not based on solid foundations.

Howe has done a detailed grammatical analysis of these and other verses, and here I can do no better than recommend that readers who wish to know more should consult chapter 5 of his 2010 book (pp. 107-126).

BeDuhn makes a similar mistake when discussing John 1:1c. He selects John 6:60 (which through a typo in his book is referred to as "John 6:20"), in which we read "this saying is hard". BeDuhn says that it is "a sentence set up exactly like John 1:1c" (p. 122).

He goes on to explain that the word "hard" is "the predicate noun." In fact, it is of course an *adjective*. It is difficult to see how BeDuhn could have made such a fundamental mistake of basic linguistics, yet he bases a whole argument on this faulty grammatical analysis. The structure of John 6:60 is not "*exactly like* John 1:1c". It is in fact *nothing like* John 1:1c. BeDuhn's argument is therefore totally invalid. More significantly, what does it tell us about his proficiency as a linguist or the thoroughness of his research?

⁷⁴ Based on my own examination of the facsimile of the manuscript, published in 2010, London: The British Library and Peabody, MA : Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. (*Codex Sinaiticus Facsimile Edition*, 2010)

Has he just made a major blunder? Some might claim that he is in fact trying to “adjust” the data so that it matches his arguments and provides support that is just not there when the Greek text is correctly analysed. I prefer to conclude that this is merely another linguistic “*faux pas*” by him.

BeDuhn appears to have major gaps in his knowledge of Koiné Greek vocabulary

BeDuhn states “ ‘neuter’ nouns [in Greek] are only used for impersonal things, such as objects, animals, forces, abstract principles, and so on” (p. 140). This is factually inaccurate. There are many common Greek nouns, some of which occur frequently in the New Testament, that are neuter but that refer to people. It is difficult to imagine that BeDuhn might not know the Greek word for “child” (τέκνον – “teknon”), which is neuter⁷⁵ or the word for “infant” (παιδίον – “paidion”), which is also neuter. Yet children are not “impersonal things, such as objects, animals, forces, abstract principles”.

In Greek (and in the New Testament) there are also other neuter nouns that refer to people. For example, κοράσιον (“korasion”), girl, is another neuter word found in the New Testament that definitely does not refer to an “impersonal thing”, an “object, animal, force or abstract principle”. Likewise, παιδάριον (“paidarion”), which means “little boy”, is also neuter. So is θυγάτριον (“thugatrion”), “little daughter”.

I am not trying to trip Dr BeDuhn up here with a rarely-used exception that he might have overlooked or forgotten. Between them, the above five neuter words referring to people occur *more than one hundred and sixty times* in the New Testament, and BeDuhn even quotes Luke 1:80 in his book⁷⁶, although he quotes from the English (“and the child grew”), and so may not have noticed that in the Greek original the neuter word παιδίον (“paidion”) is used – together, moreover, with the neuter article το (“to”), *so it is easy to spot that the gender is neuter!*

Another misunderstanding of a fundamental linguistic fact

More fundamentally, BeDuhn makes the error that is common among people whose mother tongue is English (where nouns are not grouped by gender) of assuming that a noun that is categorised as “masculine” refers to males and a “feminine” noun refers to females. Anyone with a knowledge of foreign languages that use gender categories for nouns will be aware that this is not the case. Thus, the French word for a soldier who is a sentry is a feminine word⁷⁷, even though, until recent years, virtually all sentries would have been males. Likewise, the word for “person” is feminine in French, even though the person referred to may be male⁷⁸. In German, the word for a young lady is neuter.⁷⁹ Many other examples could be quoted from a range of languages.

How is it possible for someone who writes “I know the language in which the New Testament was originally written” (p. ix) to make such major, fundamental errors? We are not talking about a slip-up in an off-the-cuff comment, a momentary lapse of memory by a speaker who might be tired, but a major point that forms a large part of the author’s argument that dominates a whole chapter of his book – the chapter on the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps we have here a clue to the reasons behind BeDuhn’s remarkably-inaccurate claim. BeDuhn is determined to demonstrate that there is no Holy Spirit, but only an abstract force that he calls “holy spirit”. Having laid the ground work higher up, with his totally inaccurate claim that “ ‘neuter’ nouns are only used for impersonal things, such as objects, animals, forces, abstract principles, and so on”, given that the Greek word for “spirit” is neuter, he believes (or at least he claims) that he is half way to proving his point. He goes on to write, “the ‘Holy Spirit’ is referred to by a ‘neuter’ noun in Greek. It is a ‘which,’ not a ‘who.’ It is an ‘it,’ not a ‘he.’ ” (p. 140) – as though the nature of God could be limited by the language categories of human speech!

⁷⁵ As is indeed the case in German with the equivalent word, das Kind.

⁷⁶ on p. 145

⁷⁷ une sentinelle

⁷⁸ As an example from French, see the original French text of the dedication of the book “Le Petit Prince” (“The Little Prince”) by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry to Léon Werth (a man!). As the word “personne” is feminine, the adjectives applying to it (for instance, “grande”) and even the pronouns referring to this word (for instance, “elle”) have to be in the feminine – without in any way implying that Mr Werth was anything other than a man.

⁷⁹ das Mädchen

If BeDuhn is right here, then a child “is a ‘which,’ not a ‘who.’ He or she is an ‘it,’ not a ‘he/she.’” But BeDuhn is not right. If he is the “expert” in Greek and linguistics that he claims to be, then he should realise this.

BeDuhn’s other argument is the one that he used in his discussion of John 1:1c (the Word was God): he says that if there is no Greek article (the word “the”) before the noun, the noun is referring to a “category” or a “quality”, not a specific person. This does not correspond to the actual use of the article in Greek, whether with the word “God”, “Spirit” or numerous other nouns. BeDuhn’s argument with regard to the NWT translation of John 1:1c was therefore without a solid linguistic foundation, and exactly the same applies when he uses the same erroneous argument in his chapter on the Holy Spirit.

BeDuhn misunderstands rules of Koiné Greek grammar

BeDuhn refers to a rule of Greek grammar known as “Sharp’s Rule” in his discussion of Titus 2:13. However, he manages to misunderstand and misrepresent the rule (pp. 92-94). To support his criticism of Sharp’s Rule, he quotes from his chosen Greek grammar book, Smyth, but again misunderstands or misrepresents Smyth, whose actual statements do not support BeDuhn’s claims.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Readers who wish to study the detail of the grammatical rule concerned are referred to Howe, 2010, pp. 116-120.

CHAPTER 8: THE TRANSLATION OF HEBREWS 1:8

The first chapter of the New Testament letter known as “Hebrews” compares Christ to angels and says that Jesus is not an angel; he is superior to the angels. In verse 8, in all translations seen *other than* the NWT, Christ is described as “God”. Thus, for example, the NIV (1984) gives the translation:

“But about the Son he says,
"Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever,
and righteousness will be the sceptre of your kingdom. " ”

Hebrews 1:8 is quoting from Psalm 45:6, which addresses the following words to God:

“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;
a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom.” (NIV translation from the Hebrew)

It is interesting to note that the translators of “A New English Translation of the Septuagint”⁸¹ (Pietersma & Wright, 2007) render this verse from the Psalms (44:7 in the Septuagint numbering) as follows: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever”, showing that they, too, understand ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] to be a vocative in the source text, the very rendering that the Jehovah’s Witnesses and BeDuhn reject.

The academics who made this translation of the Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures are experts in these texts and do not necessarily have a Christian viewpoint, so it is not possible to disregard the importance of their understanding of the meaning of the original.

By applying Psalm 45:6 (LXX: 44:7) to Jesus Christ, the letter to the Hebrews states that Christ is God. Naturally, the NWT has to change this verse in order to hide this statement from its readers. BeDuhn dedicates a whole chapter (chapter nine) to defending the NWT mistranslation and to attacking all the other translations in his study, all of which he claims are wrong.

Unfortunately, BeDuhn repeatedly reveals a lack of thoroughness in his studies of the Greek text

He is determined to demonstrate that “O God” in Hebrews 1:8 is an inaccurate translation of the Greek. He says that this form of address to God (technically known as the vocative) “occurs just three other times in the New Testament” (p. 98), referring to Luke 18:11, Luke 18:13 and Hebrews 10:7. However, he inexplicably misses at least a further six occurrences (Mark 15:34 (twice), John 20:28, Revelation 4:11, Revelation 15:3 and Revelation 16:7).

F. F. Bruce points out a further possible vocative form of “God”, in the very next verse, Hebrews 1:9: “Indeed, our author may well have understood ‘God’ in the vocative twice over in this quotation; the last clause could easily be construed ‘Therefore, O God, thy God has anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.’ ”⁸² (Bruce, 1990)

BeDuhn insists that ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] in Hebrews 1:8 cannot mean “O God”, but he does not look at how the NWT translates the same phrase in the other passages that I have referred to above. He would find that in fact the NWT translates this phrase as “O God” in all three of the verses that he mentions.

*It is extremely relevant that one of these verses is in the **same** New Testament letter! The NWT translates Hebrews 10:7 as: “Then I said, ‘Look! I am come (in the roll of the book it is written about me) to do your will, **O God.**’ ” – correctly using the vocative.*

Precisely as in the case of Hebrews 1:8, Hebrews 10:7 is a quotation from a Psalm, on this occasion from Psalm 40:7-8, MT (= LXX Psalm 39:8-9). Significantly, the NWT also uses

⁸¹New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 569.

⁸² F. F. Bruce, “The Epistle to the Hebrews, Revised”, Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990, p. 60.

the vocative form (correctly) in its translation of this Psalm: "To do your will, **O my God**, I have delighted."

The NWT also translates ὁ θεός ["ho theos"] as "O God" in Mark 15:34, and it translates it as other, equivalent, forms of the vocative in all of the other four verses (adding the word "Jehovah" in each of the verses from Revelation, even though this word is not present in the Greek).

It should also be noted that in Matthew 27:46, which is a parallel passage to Mark 15:34, the evangelist translates the Lord's words from the cross (which were spoken in Hebrew) with the alternative Greek vocative form θεέ ["the'é"], showing that in the Koiné Greek of the day both that form and ὁ θεός ["ho theos"] were equivalent vocative forms. The NWT in fact confirms this by also translating Matthew 27:46 with the vocative.

Other examples of the use of the nominative article with a vocative meaning in the New Testament

Let us remember that BeDuhn states that this form is used so infrequently in Greek that it is found only three times in the New Testament. Above, we have already indicated six other places in the New Testament where one finds the phrase Ὁ ["ho", "the"] + θεός ["theos"] with a vocative meaning.

Some grammatical definitions

The word "the" (and its Greek equivalents) is known in grammar as an "article".

The Greek word Ὁ ["ho"] is defined grammatically as a "masculine singular nominative article", but it is used with a vocative meaning in the examples quoted.

"Vocative" means the form used to address God or someone.

A "noun" is a word used to denote something or someone (words such as "God", "Lord", "Master", or any other object, such as "house", "city").

In the Koiné Greek that is used in the Septuagint translation of the Jewish Scriptures and that was spoken by Christ and by those who wrote the New Testament, the nominative article was commonly used followed by a noun when addressing God or a person. This is called vocative use and it is what is found in Hebrews 1:8, according to all translations other than the one produced by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Ὁ ["ho"] is also repeatedly used with a vocative meaning when God is addressed in prayer as ὁ πατήρ ["ho patēr" – "Father"] in the New Testament: in Matthew 11:26, Mark 14:36, Luke 10:21, Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. In the first three occurrences, it is Christ Himself who uses ὁ ["ho"] with a vocative meaning. In every single one of these occurrences the NWT translates ὁ ["ho"] as vocative.

Ὁ ["ho"] is also used as a vocative with other nouns in the New Testament. See, for example, ὁ βασιλεὺς ["ho basileus"] in John 19:3. The NWT correctly translates ὁ ["ho"] in this verse as a vocative, adding the word "you" in the English as a way of showing that it is vocative. Other occasions in the New Testament when ὁ ["ho"] is used as a vocative with other nouns include John 13:13 (with two different nouns), Mark 14:36, John 20:28 and Revelation 4:11 (both of these verses with ὁ κύριος ["ho kurios", "O Lord"], as well as the examples of ὁ θεός ["ho theos"] mentioned above), Revelation 6:10: ὁ δεσπότης ["ho despotēs", "O Sovereign Lord"] and Revelation 15:3 (another example of ὁ βασιλεὺς ["ho basileus"]), in Revelation 15:3 and again in Revelation 16:7: ὁ παντοκράτωρ ["ho pantokratōr", "O Almighty one"], Revelation 16:5 with three further words: ὁ ὢν ["ho ōn", "O One Who Is"], ὁ ἦν ["ho ēn", "O One Who Was"] and ὁ ὅσιος ["ho hosios", "O Holy One"] – a further eighteen times just in the verses referred to in these two paragraphs. All of these are translated as vocatives by the New World Translation.⁸³

⁸³ Although they mistakenly translate ὁ ὅσιος ["ho hosios", "O Holy One"] (Revelation 16:5) as "the loyal One", both in their original 1961 edition and in their 2018 revision (and again in Revelation 15:4, where ὅσιος ["hosios"] is not vocative).

Examples of this use by Christ and his disciples

There are also other examples of the use of this structure by the disciples when addressing Christ, and it is Christ himself who points this out to us. In John 13:13 we read, 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am.' (John 13:13 NIB) The Greek is: ὑμεῖς φωνεῖτέ με· ὁ διδάσκαλος, καὶ ὁ κύριος, καὶ καλῶς λέγετε· εἰμι γάρ. [humeis fōneite me ho didáskalos kai ho kurios, kai kalōs legete, eimi gar]. A translation that is closer to the Greek text would be, “You call out to me, ‘Teacher!’ and ‘Lord!’ and you do well to say this, for that is what I am.”

It is appropriate to point out other aspects of the text in John 13:13.

1. The verb that Christ employs for “you call out to me” is φωνέω [fōneō], which means to call out as in when calling to someone so that they respond or come. In his “Analytical Greek Lexicon”, Friberg defines the meaning of this verb as: “of a person *call* or *cry out*, *speak loudly* (LU 8.8)”⁸⁴ (Friberg et al., 2005) In his “Greek NT Lexicon”, Gingrich defines this verb as “*call* or *cry out*, *speak loudly*, *say with emphasis* Mk 1:26; Lk 8:8, 54; 23:46; Rv 14:18.—**2.** *call* someone—**a.** in the sense *address as* J 13:13.—**b.** *call to oneself*, *summon* Mt 20:32; Mk 9:35; 10:49; Lk 19:15; J 1:48; 2:9; 9:18, 24; 10:3; Ac 9:41.”⁸⁵ (Gingrich, 2018)

Thus, Christ is not here saying, “You say to me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’”. For “you say to me”, Christ would have used the verb λέγω [legō], just as Luke records him saying in Luke 9:20 ὑμεῖς δὲ τίνα με λέγετε εἶναι; [humeis de tina me legete einai], “But who do you say that I am?” Another possibility would have been to use the verb καλέω [kaleō], as in Luke 6:46: Τί δέ με καλεῖτε· κύριε κύριε, καὶ οὐ ποιεῖτε ἃ λέγω; [ti de me kaleite kurie kurie kai ou poieite ha legō], “Why do you say ‘Lord’, ‘Lord’ and not do what I say?”

But in John 13:13, in contrast, Christ is saying, “to attract my attention, you shout out “ὁ διδάσκαλος” [ho didaskalos] or “ὁ κύριος” [ho kurios].” This is a use with a clearly vocative meaning for both phrases, using the nominative form of the article.

2. The verb is in the present, so it indicates that this is the way that the disciples habitually called out to him, on any and every occasion. In other words, Christ is enabling us to see that the disciples always or nearly always used the nominative of the article with a vocative meaning, to attract his attention.
3. The verb is in the plural. This means that all of the disciples were in the habit of calling out to him using the nominative of the article with a vocative meaning.
4. Christ gives examples of two different words, one of them κύριος [kurios], and he shows that with both words the disciples used the grammatical form “nominative article + noun” with a vocative meaning.
5. So all of this is summarised in a few phrases in one verse, but it represents the hundreds of times that the disciples must have called out to Christ in the course of three years of living and travelling with him. When they were not going somewhere by boat, they normally “travelled” on foot. We know that Christ frequently walked fast and that the disciples had to make efforts to follow him. See, for example, Mark 10:32, 9:2, 9:34. They were so far behind Christ that they thought that he couldn’t hear what they were saying, even when they were arguing. On such occasions, they will often have had to shout out in order to call to Christ. They did this using the nominative of the article + a noun, with a vocative meaning.

Ὁ [“ho”] is the masculine singular form of the Greek article (the word “the”). As may be expected, the feminine, neuter and plural forms of the Greek article are also sometimes used with a vocative meaning in the New Testament. See, for instance, Luke 8:54, where Jesus addressed a girl with

⁸⁴ Friberg, Timothy et. al. *Analytical Greek Lexicon* in the electronic version included with Bibleworks 10.

⁸⁵ Gingrich, F Wilbur *Greek NT Lexicon* in the electronic version included with Bibleworks 10

the words ἡ παῖς, ἔγειρε [hē pais, egeire], “Child, get up!” (The word παῖς [pais] is feminine.) This is a command addressed to the girl, and by definition, commands (technically known as imperatives) are always in the vocative. The presence of an imperative is often indicated by translators by the use of an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. Even the NWT translates this imperative correctly as a vocative, even including an exclamation mark: “Girl, get up!” Mark uses a neuter word, τὸ κοράσιον [to korasion], and has τὸ κοράσιον, σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε [to korasion, soi legō egeire], “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” (Mark 5:41) Again, the NWT renders this as an imperative, again including the exclamation mark: “Maiden, I say to you, Get up!”

For the use of the article in the plural with a vocative meaning, see the masculine plural in Ephesians 5:25: Οἱ ἄνδρες [hoi andres], “Men, husbands!” The NWT translates this as an imperative, although without the exclamation mark. In the same context, just three verses earlier, the feminine plural words Αἱ γυναῖκες [hai gunaikēs], “Women, wives” (Ephesians 5:22) are also in all probability vocative, although the verb has not been included in this verse, being understood from the context.

In fact, Ὁ θεός (“ho theos”) is regularly used with the vocative meaning in the Septuagint Greek translation of Psalms, which was the version that was usually quoted from in the New Testament (rather than re-translating from the Hebrew original). The “New English Translation of the Septuagint” states: “Not only did the Septuagint become Holy Writ to Greek speaking Jews but it was also the “Bible” of the early Christian communities: the scripture they cited and the textual foundation of the early Christian movement.”⁸⁶

The use of Ὁ θεός (“ho theos”) in the Psalms does of course correspond to the appropriate vocative form in the original Hebrew, and it is indeed translated as such, even by the NWT.

To give merely a few examples, I refer to Psalm 22:1 (LXX numbering, 21:2), 25:1 (LXX: 24:1), 25:22 (LXX: 24:22), 27:9 (LXX: 26:9), 30:2 (LXX: 29:3).

Anyone who reads the Greek translation of Psalm 45:6 (LXX numbering: 44:7) after having read the previous 44 psalms (43 in the LXX numbering) will be forced to recognise that *in this verse ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] can only be vocative.*

Use of the phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”, “O God”] elsewhere in the Old Testament

The vocative phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theós”, “O God”] also occurs repeatedly in prayers and declarations of praise to God throughout the rest of the Old Testament, among them (and here excluding the large number of occurrences in the Psalms⁸⁷): Genesis 32:9 (LXX: 32:10), Numbers 12:13, 1 Kings 8:26 (LXX: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΩΝ Γ’/Regnorum III: 8:26, NETS: 3 Reigns), I Kings 8:28 (LXX: Regnorum III: 8:28), 1 Chronicles 16:35, 1 Chronicles 17:17, Nehemiah 4:4 (LXX: ΕΣΔΡΑΣ Β’ 13:36, NETS: 2 Esdras 14:4), 5:19 (LXX/NETS: B’ 15:19), 6:14 (LXX/NETS: B’ 16:14), Isaiah 26:13, Daniel 2:23 (LXX: text from Theodotion). Many other examples could be given.

In all these cases, the NWT translates the original with the phrase “O God” (in some cases adding the word “Jehovah”).

It is thus clear that, even statistically, the use of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”], “O God”, as a way of addressing God is common throughout the Bible, and it is recognised and translated as such even by the New World Translation.

When we look at the whole of the relevant data, rather than taking Hebrews 1:8 in isolation, as BeDuhn does, it becomes clear that statistically, linguistically and culturally, the use of ὁ θεός

⁸⁶ NETS, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, back cover.

⁸⁷ A complete list of occurrences of ὁ θεός [“ho theós”, “O God”] in the Psalms can be found in the article on Hebrews 1:8, here: https://livingwater-spain.com/heb1_8en.pdf (Allin, 2022a)

[“*ho theos*”] to mean “O God” was **the norm** over a period of hundreds of years, both in the Hebrew [using Hebrew words] and in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament. These facts destroy the supposed validity of BeDuhn’s claim and make even more obvious that the NWT translation in Hebrews 1:8 (and in their subsequent “translation” of Psalm 45:6) is a departure from the decisions of the NWT translators in the rest of the Bible.

Thus, Hebrews 1:8 is the **only** occasion where the New World Translation does *not* translate into an appropriate, vocative, form in the English a phrase in which God is addressed with the phrase ὁ θεός [“ho theos”].

This reveals a lack of consistency by the translators of the NWT.

Their refusal to translate ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] in Hebrews 1:8 as a vocative thus looks all the more remarkable and difficult to justify. To depart from their normal translation principles for this one verse only shows clearly that the translation has been dictated by theological bias on the part of the translators of the NWT.

It is unfortunate that BeDuhn has not observed this fact (or chooses not to report it).

His handling of the use of the vocative “Oh God” in the Greek text of the New Testament, and of the different ways that the NWT translates this phrase, and his total failure to refer to the usage in the Greek Septuagint, the source text of Hebrews 1:8, shows a complete lack of academic rigour and on the contrary reveals a fundamental bias by him in favour of Jehovah’s Witness doctrine, to the point of ignoring most of the data, which are not favourable to the JW claims.

This wrong “translation” by those who produced the NWT Bible is all the more indefensible, since they themselves state in one of the Watchtower Society’s publications that the nominative form in Greek is often used with the vocative meaning (e.g., “O God”). In their own “Kingdom Interlinear Text”⁸⁸ (*The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, 1969), the NWT translators state: “when, in addressing a person or a thing, the nominative case is used instead of the vocative, then the nominative case of the definite article may be used along with it”.⁸⁹

This statement is couched in grammatical terminology that seems more designed to intimidate or impress than to enlighten.⁹⁰ However, it does show that the translators knew that ὁ θεός [“ho theos”] can (and in fact, on numerous occasions does) mean “O God”. However, when they translated Hebrews 1:8, they went against this fact that was well-known to them, since the verse, when correctly translated, disproves their theology concerning Christ. Thus, they showed that it was in fact they who were influenced by theological bias in their version of this verse, not the translators of hundreds of other translations into many different languages.

It is quite remarkable that Dr BeDuhn missed this contradiction between what the translators stated and how they actually translated. Their statement also clearly shows that the argument that he presents on this grammatical point does in fact go against the way the Greek language actually works.⁹¹ It is difficult to understand how Dr BeDuhn was not aware of this.

We look further at Hebrews 1:8 at the beginning of the next chapter, when considering “BeDuhn the Greek expert”.

⁸⁸ *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*, Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1969

⁸⁹ “THE PECULIARITIES OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE IN GREEK”, op. cit., printed inside back cover.

⁹⁰ See the discussion of the technique of intellectual intimidation, later in this review.

⁹¹ The translation of Hebrews 1:8 will be revisited later in this review, when looking at Dr BeDuhn’s appeal to Jewish denial that Jesus was the Messiah.

CHAPTER 9: BEDUHN THE GREEK EXPERT

In chapter 7 we demonstrated (p. 32) that BeDuhn appears to have major gaps in his knowledge of Koiné Greek vocabulary – and that he misunderstands some rules of Greek grammar (p. 33). Unfortunately, he also repeatedly shows a weak grasp of other aspects of Koiné Greek. I will limit myself here to three examples.

Example 1

As indicated above, the normal translation of Hebrews 1:8 reads: “But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever. ””

However, the NWT has a totally different “translation”: “But with reference to the Son: “God is your throne forever.””

It is not clear that this sentence in the NWT has any meaning at all. What can “God is your throne” *actually mean?* It seems to mean “You sit on God”, which is absurd, whether applied to Christ or to the original reader or hearer of the Psalm that is quoted in this verse.

After having written this article, I discovered what Eugenio Danyans says in his book “Respuestas bíblicas y doctrinales a los Testigos de Jehová” [“Biblical and Doctrinal Answers to the Jehovah’s Witnesses”] (Viladecavalls (Barcelona): Editorial CLIE, 2014) (Danyans, 2014). Danyans writes: “bearing in mind the background context, it is impossible to adopt the translation of the «Witnesses». Indeed, the Jews always placed God above everything and everyone. The blasphemous idea of putting him at a level that was inferior to or below something would never have occurred to them. This would be the case if God were converted into someone’s throne, when He is always above all thrones. Moreover, such a version does not benefit the Russellists in any way, but rather the contrary; it is equivalent to recognising that Christ is more than God, since according to the *New World Translation* the effect would be that the Son is seated on top of the Father.” (p. 118, note 1)⁹²

However, seeking to justify this NWT “translation” of Hebrews 1:8 BeDuhn says, “there is no other way to say ‘God is your throne’ [in Greek] than the way Hebrews 1:8 reads” (p. 99). ***This is inaccurate.*** In Greek, “God is your throne” would be “ὁ θεός ἐστὶν ὁ θρόνος σου” [“ho theos estin ho thronos sou”], which is not remotely like what the Greek text of Hebrews 1:8 actually says. It is difficult to understand how BeDuhn was unaware of this.

It is thus not surprising that the only place where BeDuhn could find support for his argument and the Jehovah’s Witness translation of Hebrews 1:8 was by quoting from a writer who turns out to be a Jehovah’s Witness, Rolf Furuli, as indicated above in the section on BeDuhn’s choice of academic experts.

Example 2

On page 46 BeDuhn gives his translation of a phrase in Matthew 14:33. The Greek text reads:

Ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ. A standard Greek-English interlinear text⁹³ renders this word for word:

TRULY GOD’S SON YOU ARE (Brown & Comfort, 1990)

⁹² Translation into English of this above quotation by the author of the present article. The original Spanish can be found in the Spanish version of this article on Hebrews 1:8, on my website, here: https://livingwater-spain.com/heb1_8esp.pdf (Allin, 2015)

⁹³ The New Greek English Interlinear New Testament, translated by R K Brown and P W Comfort, edited by J D Douglas, Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990

The Jehovah's Witnesses' own "Kingdom Interlinear Text" gives the same meaning: "Truthfully of God Son you are", and the New World Translation renders this as follows: "You are really God's Son".

BeDuhn, however, translates this phrase as "a son of God" (p. 46). Adding further emphasis to this claim, he continues, "Yes, that's what the Greek says: 'a son of God'." (He fails to mention that according to his translation, the Jehovah's Witnesses have mistranslated this verse both in their interlinear text and in the New World Translation.) His translation here is simply wrong.

Example 3

In his convoluted criticism of the straight-forward translation of John 8:58, BeDuhn claims (p. 104) that Jesus' words πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί ["prin Abra'am genesthai egō eimi"] ("Before Abraham came into being, I am") "is fine, idiomatic Greek". This is factually, linguistically and historically not the case. Jesus' words sound just as odd in Greek as they do in English, and that was part of the impact of what he said. (See discussion of this in chapter 11 of this book.)

Lest it be thought that here I am, myself, making an unsubstantiated claim, I will quote from no less an authority than Dr Larry Hurtado, Professor Emeritus of New Testament Language, Literature and Theology at the University of Edinburgh. Dr Hurtado writes:

"it is as strange-sounding and mysterious in Greek as it is in literal translation." ⁹⁴ (Hurtado, 2005)
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Either BeDuhn here reveals a faulty knowledge of Greek or he is presenting one of his regular claims that are unsubstantiated by the facts or even go against the evidence. He here rejects the evaluations of the world's leading experts in Koiné Greek.

⁹⁴ Hurtado, Larry, "Lord Jesus Christ", Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005, p. 370.

CHAPTER 10: BEDUHN THE ACADEMIC

BeDuhn ignores relevant Bible passages if referring to them would undermine his argument

Thus, he dedicates a whole chapter to Philippians 2:6, redefining the relevant Greek words to match Jehovah's Witness doctrine, but he ignores parallel passages on the same theme (such as Hebrews 1:3) that contradict his argument.

Writing techniques employed by BeDuhn in "Truth in Translation"

Alarmist style

From paragraph 1 of the Preface (p. vii), BeDuhn seeks to alarm his reader, saying, "There are many different English translations of the Bible and no two read alike. If you have noticed this, you may have been alarmed."

This is not a fair depiction of the actual situation. However, BeDuhn exaggerates the difficulties of translating the New Testament, describing it as "English translations of texts written about two-thousand years ago in Greek". While this is factually accurate, it ignores the fundamental fact of the existence of translations made into a wide range of languages throughout that two-thousand year period, and that the texts in question have been studied, copied and translated by experts throughout that time, so that understanding the original texts does not present the problems that he claims. However, BeDuhn drives his point home by describing the different wording of Bibles as "disturbing".

Lack of academic and linguistic approach evident in his choices of words

The author's lack of academic rigour and scholarly approach in this book soon become obvious, as he describes the King James Version as "pretty good" (p.7), with the rider "for its time".

He describes another translation as being "in that unsatisfactory region of not-quite-this and not-quite-that." (p. 20) It is difficult to know how to respond to such claims, as it is not clear what the author is actually trying to say.

A further vague and poorly-defined criticism by BeDuhn is his description of the NRSV⁹⁵ (*The Bible New Revised Standard Version*, 1989) as showing "the dynamic tendency to 'mix it up' .." (p. 22) – another vague allegation not worthy of a historian, a linguist and an academic, all of which designations BeDuhn attributes to himself.

Elsewhere he uses pejorative language to belittle and criticise five of the nine translations in his study: "The NASB, NIV, NRSV, and NAB follow the translation *concocted* by the KJV translators" (p. 132, emphasis added)⁹⁶. Thus with derogatory vocabulary he dismisses all of these translations. If his claims are supported by undisputed facts, he should not need to resort to such non-academic language.

Similarly, he lambasts un-named translators by writing that the advantage of having modern editions of the Greek text is "squandered by the bias of translators" (p. 9). Such unsubstantiated and non-specific disparaging comments do not become the writing for publication of a linguist and

⁹⁵ "New Revised Standard Version", Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, 1995

⁹⁶ BeDuhn constantly uses abbreviations for the English translations of the Bible that he includes in his study. The meaning of these abbreviations is as follows: AB: "The Amplified New Testament" (*The Amplified New Testament*, 1954); KJV: King James Version or "Authorised Version", 1611; LB: "The Living Bible" (K. N. Taylor, 1971); NAB: "New American Bible with Revised New Testament" (*New American Bible with Revised New Testament*, 1970); NASB: "The New American Standard Bible" (*The New American Standard Bible*, 1960); NIV: "Holy Bible, New International Version (*Holy Bible, New International Version*, 1979); NRSV: "New Revised Standard Version" (*The Bible New Revised Standard Version*, 1989); NW: "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures" (*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, 1961); TEV: "Good News Bible in Today's English Version" (*Good News Bible in Today's English Version*, 1976). (The relevant copyright information is given at the beginning of this book.)

a Biblical scholar. One assumes that this phrase comprises Dr BeDuhn's defence of those who produced the "New World Translation" for not using the UBS/Nestle-Aland Greek text of the New Testament.

In his chapter on "the spirit", he condemns translators who "sometimes stumble into the nonsensical 'a Holy Spirit'" (p. 139, emphasis added).

In his discussion of what he calls "the god category", he writes "Christians chewed on this problem in the decades and centuries after John" (p. 130). Ignoring, for the moment, his concept of "the god category", both his choice of vocabulary and the vagueness of the time-frame referred to are most un-scholarly.

In talking about status in first century society, he writes "Those who neglected or forgot this stratification of rank would be readily reminded by those around" (p. 41). While this reveals a vivid imagination on the part of the author, it also provides no historical, factual evidence to substantiate the claim made – hardly the approach of a historian who is an expert in first century society, as BeDuhn claims to be.

BeDuhn is determined to re-define the Greek word προσκυνέω ["proskuneō"] to match the meaning given to it (sometimes, but not always!) in the NWT, and claims that the translation "worship" "*works its way into* modern translations" (p. 45). Such vague statements are so lacking in academic precision that they are difficult to evaluate. They also ignore historical facts, such as the translation of προσκυνέω ["proskuneō"] into the Latin word for worship, "adorabis", in the Vulgate translation in the 4th century AD – certainly not a "modern translation".⁹⁷

BeDuhn also sometimes surprises us by his non-standard use of English. For example, on page 93 he writes, "the article is left *off of* the second noun." While this usage is common in certain dialects of colloquial English, in the writing of a professional linguist one would have expected a better command of standard English.

His misunderstanding of the meaning of the word "euphemism", or misuse of it, is discussed towards the end of this review.

BeDuhn is also keen on using the word "absurd" to describe those who disagree with the New World Translation (p. 85). This is not the type of language that normally characterises scholarly publications. However, we may thus be justified in using his own choice of descriptive word at certain points in this review – but with reference to what *he* has written.

BeDuhn invents his own rules to support his claims, and states them as though they were facts accepted by the experts in this field of study

BeDuhn says "a Greek definite noun will have a form of the definite article (ho), which will become "the" in English. A Greek indefinite noun will appear without the definite article, and will be properly rendered in English with "a" or "an"." (p. 114)

No such rule exists in Greek, and the translations that BeDuhn gives are even rejected by the translation that he is trying to defend, the NWT, in the preceding clause *within the same verse!* If the "rule" that BeDuhn has just stated were applied to the middle clause in John 1:1, it would have to be translated "the word was with *the* God", which not even the NWT says, translating it instead (correctly) as "the Word was with God".

⁹⁷ cf Matthew 4:10. and Howe, 2010, op cit. p. 54. For the Vulgate, I refer to Bover and O'Callaghan, "Nuevo Testamento Trilingüe", Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2005 (Bover & O'Callaghan, 2005). This reproduces the *Neovulgata* text, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974. (*Neovulgata*, 1974) In this verse, the wording of the *Neovulgata* is identical to the original, 4th century Vulgate text.

BeDuhn uses (or possibly invents) novel terminology to support his arguments, talking of “definitizing elements” (p. 117) Howe comments, “there is no support from any standard grammars for BeDuhn’s claims about ‘definitizing’ elements” (Howe, 2010, p. 152).⁹⁸

BeDuhn spends twenty-two pages trying to justify the NWT version of John 1:1c: “the Word was *a* god”, with a combination of his opinions stated as though they were facts, interpretations based on his theological bias and incomplete quotations from other writers. I shall not even attempt to address here this catalogue of errors, but would refer readers who wish to know more to the thorough treatment in chapter 8 of Howe’s book of 2010.⁹⁹

With reference to BeDuhn’s statement “anarthrous *theos* must be indefinite” on p. 126, Howe comments, “BeDuhn has ... applied non-existing grammatical principles” (Howe, 2010, p. 164). In his further discussion of BeDuhn’s presentation of his argument, Howe writes (p. 165) “... BeDuhn [has] presented this as a rule of grammar when in fact there is no such rule” (emphasis added).

BeDuhn appeals to other translations when they support him, but ignores them when they do not

BeDuhn appeals to translations that he has not included within the scope of this book, when he can claim their support, but ignores them when they contradict his claims. Thus, for example, in his discussion on John 1:1 he says “Goodspeed and Moffatt came to the same conclusion long ago” (p. 129).

The reference by BeDuhn to Goodspeed appears to be based purely upon statements in Jehovah’s Witness literature and on their website, as Edgar J Goodspeed is nowhere recorded as having made any favourable comments on the New World Translation in any published article or book written by him.¹⁰⁰

However, in his discussion of the translation of the word προσκυνέω [“proskuneō”], BeDuhn studies translations of Matthew 14:33, claiming that the Greek should be translated “did obeisance” (as in the NWT), not “worship” (as in most other translations).¹⁰¹ If Moffatt is an authority of such standing that he should be quoted from, even though his translation is not one of those selected for study in this book, then BeDuhn should quote from him here. This is Moffatt’s translation of the verse: “the men in the boat worshipped him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son.’”¹⁰² Incidentally, the translation of this verse also undermines BeDuhn’s claim (p. 46) that the final phrase should be translated “*a* son of God”. Either Moffatt is an authority or he is not. To quote from him only when further support is needed but to ignore him elsewhere is not an even-handed approach. As this was not one of the translations selected by BeDuhn for study, it might just be best to be consistent by not quoting from him on any occasion.

In making this argument, BeDuhn ignores the fact that the NWT regularly translates the word προσκυνέω [“proskuneō”] as “worship”, and only never translates it as “worship” when it applies to Christ. This is a most astounding example of bias by the NWT.

⁹⁸ Plus see the following two paragraphs in Howe, 2010, p. 152. Howe concludes, “BeDuhn’s claim ... is simply false” – and in many subsequent pages he provides the evidence to substantiate this statement.

⁹⁹ 2010, op. cit., pp. 147-218

¹⁰⁰ See http://www.forananswer.org/Top_JW/Scholars%20and%20NWT.htm or http://www.forananswer.org/Top_JW/Scholars and NWT.htm Last accessed on 23.2.15.

¹⁰¹ It is interesting that, given his criticism elsewhere (p. 16) that the word “Gentiles” is “archaic” he is not even-handed enough to admit that, even in 1950, when the NWT New Testament was first published, “do obeisance” was an archaic style of English – and much more so in 2003 when this detailed study written by him was published.

¹⁰² “The Moffatt Translation of The Bible”, 1964, London: Hodder and Stoughton. (The first edition of the translation of the New Testament by Dr James Moffatt was published in 1913.) (Moffatt, 1913)

BeDuhn even appeals to Jewish denial that Old Testament verses apply to Christ, in order to support his claims

As indicated above, the writer to the Hebrews quotes (in chapter 1 verse 8) from Psalm 45:6 and says that it applies to Jesus Christ, whom he refers to as God (see Hebrews 1:1-13).

In rejecting this attribution of deity to Christ, BeDuhn appeals to “the Jewish tradition” (p. 100). This is one of the most astounding arguments presented by Dr BeDuhn in his book.

Starting in Matthew chapter 1 (vv 22-23) and throughout the whole of the New Testament, verses are taken from the Old Testament and applied to Jesus Christ. The application of these verses to Jesus was rejected by the Jewish people of New Testament times and is still not accepted by them today. Therefore, when an Old Testament prophecy about Christ is quoted in the New Testament and it is stated explicitly there that this passage applies to Jesus Christ, for anyone to claim that it is in fact not about Christ at all, or that it does not say that Christ is God, *on the basis of Jewish interpretation of the source verse*, is to go against not only the writers of the New Testament but against the very teachings of Christ himself, who said, “These are the [Old Testament] Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39, NIV).

The consistent message of the New Testament and of Christ himself is that many Old Testament passages were in fact prophecies about him and had a meaning that “the Jewish tradition” (to use BeDuhn’s phrase) had not recognised. (See, for example, 1 Peter 1:10-12.)

BeDuhn may by all means claim that these Old Testament passages do not refer to Jesus Christ, or that they do not support Christ’s claim to be God, and Jewish groups would welcome such claims, but in doing so he is arguing against the message of the New Testament itself.

Let us read Christ’s own teachings on this in Luke 24:44-46: “ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: ..."”(NIV)

Is it really possible that Jason BeDuhn is unaware of these teachings of Christ? Surely, as “an expert” in the Bible (his description of himself, p. ix), he must be aware of this.

Is it really possible that he is unaware of the use of Old Testament scriptures throughout the New Testament, giving them a meaning that was not recognised or accepted by “the Jewish tradition”? Surely, as “a biblical scholar” (his description of himself¹⁰³), he must be aware of this.

Is it really possible that he is unaware that central to the disputes between Jews and Christians from the first century to the present day has been disagreement on the meaning of key Old Testament verses? Surely, as “a historian” (his description of himself¹⁰⁴), he must be aware of this.

When BeDuhn says that an Old Testament verse quoted in the New Testament does not have the meaning attributed to it by the New Testament writer *because the Jews say that it does not have that meaning*, he is saying nothing at all that is relevant to an understanding of what the New Testament actually says. Here I am laying no claims to the validity of the arguments made by the New Testament writers. I am merely pointing out what the New Testament texts actually say.

BeDuhn stated in his Preface, “I am writing because I understand how to take on the role of a neutral investigator” (p. ix), but there is nothing neutral here; he is saying that the New Testament is wrong because the Jews say that it is wrong!

¹⁰³ “I am a biblical scholar ... by training.” (p. ix)

¹⁰⁴ “I am a committed historian dedicated to discovering what Christians said and did two thousand years ago.” (p. xix)

Why does he do this? Only he can answer that question. However, we must observe the facts: the Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Jesus Christ, so does BeDuhn, so do the Jews.

BeDuhn claims that when Old Testament verses are applied to Christ in the New Testament "slight changes in how the verses are quoted ... are *always* made" (p. 100).

This is factually inaccurate and I am surprised that Dr BeDuhn is not aware that this is the case. There are hundreds of quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament, and many of them quote verbatim – i.e., "word for word, exactly as spoken or written"¹⁰⁵ – from the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. In fact, the quotation that BeDuhn is discussing – and to which he dedicates a whole chapter – is a case in point: *there is not one letter different between the Septuagint text and the quotation in Hebrews.*

It is difficult to understand how BeDuhn can make such sweeping statements that he, as "a biblical scholar ... by training" (p. ix) should know are totally mistaken. It is quite remarkable that he has made such an erroneous claim – and so emphatically – without checking the facts before going into print.

Is he really so unaware of the Greek text of the New Testament and the Greek text of the Septuagint? That is the best conclusion about him that we could draw from such fundamental errors, so brazenly stated.

Unfortunately, readers of BeDuhn's book who do not have a familiarity with the original texts may take his categorical and unambiguous statements at face value. If they do so, they will be misled. I regret that there is no other way to say this. This statement by BeDuhn is wrong. Not my opinion. Fact.

¹⁰⁵ Definition taken from "Longmans English Larousse", Harlow & London: Longmans, Green & Co Ltd, 1968 (*Longmans English Larousse*, 1968)

CHAPTER 11: BEDUHN'S PRINCIPLES

BeDuhn fails to apply the principles that he claims govern his decisions in this book

BeDuhn states a number of principles that he says should guide translators, but then breaks these very principles himself in pursuit of arguing that his interpretations and those of the NWT version are justified.

i) The most obvious, straightforward, unspecialized understanding of the word

Thus on pp xv-xvi he writes, "The first choice when faced with options of how best to translate the original Greek usually should be the most obvious, straightforward, unspecialized understanding of the word or phrase."

In this, he is absolutely right. However, he abandons this principle repeatedly throughout the book. I could comment in detail on his handling of Colossians 1:15-18, but in the interest of brevity I will refer at this point only to John 8:58, a short verse in simple and easy-to-understand Greek that presents no translation problems. A literal, word-for-word translation would be, "Before Abraham became¹⁰⁶, I am", and most translations follow this very closely, the one exception being the New World Translation, which renders the Greek as "Before Abraham came into existence, I have been".

BeDuhn is aware of what is at stake here: a literal translation, using "the most obvious, straightforward, unspecialized understanding of the word or phrase" – to quote from the principle that he established in his introduction – is undesirable to the Jehovah's Witnesses and to him because it has resonant echoes of the great "I am" statements by God in the Old Testament, for instance, in Exodus 3:6, 3:14, Isaiah 41:4, 43:10, 43:25, 45:18, 2 Samuel 12:7 (2×), etc.

In the case of 2 Samuel 12:7, the close parallelism is not obvious in most English translations, but the Septuagint Greek text reads: τάδε λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ ἐγὼ εἰμι ἔχρισά σε εἰς βασιλεία ἐπὶ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐγὼ εἰμι ἔρρυσάμην σε ἐκ χειρὸς Σαουλ [tade legei kurios ho theos Israēl egō eimi echrisa se eis basilea epi Israēl kai egō eimi errusamēn se ek cheiros Saoul]. In English, this is: "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'I am anointed you as king over Israel and I am rescued you out of the hand of Saul' " [my translation].¹⁰⁷ This important text about King David would have been well-known to the Jews of Jesus' day. They no longer spoke Hebrew in daily life, and many of them only read their Scriptures in the Septuagint Greek translation. The implication is obvious: that Jesus was claiming to be God.

The NWT and BeDuhn find such an implication unacceptable, as it goes against their own theological bias. Therefore, a way must be found to hide this link, and it is achieved by translating the Greek present tense for "I am" by a past tense in English, "I have been".

The Jehovah's Witnesses also try to hide the other end of the link, by translating Exodus 3:14 with another tense that is not the present, although on this occasion they opt for the future tense: "I SHALL PROVE TO BE WHAT I SHALL PROVE TO BE" (capital letters in their text throughout). They argue that the Hebrew original can be rendered in English by a future tense at this point, and in this they are correct. However, they ignore or disregard the facts that it can also correctly be translated by the present and that the Jewish translators who produced the Greek Septuagint translation of Exodus in the third century BC *understood the Hebrew to indicate the present tense*, and translated it accordingly as ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν ("egō

¹⁰⁶ The Greek word for "before" requires that the verb in its clause be in the infinitive, which is the case here in the Greek. That does not result in any difficulties translating the clause for any of the translations included in Dr BeDuhn's study, including the NWT.

¹⁰⁷ Readers without a knowledge of Koiné Greek are referred to "A New English Translation of the Septuagint" 2007, New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 271, 284.

eimi ho ōn”) – “I am the one who is” [or “exists”]). Again, the Jews of Jesus’ day would have been extremely familiar with the Greek translation of this important and well-known passage, so the reference was obvious to them.

BeDuhn presents ten pages of abstruse arguments, yet not once does he admit that in Greek there is a past tense for the verb “to be” and that Christ could have used that past tense – indeed he would have *had to use it* – if he had wished to say what BeDuhn (and the NWT) claim that he *meant* to say (even though what he *actually* said did not mean that!). In fact, the same evangelist, John, does quote Jesus as having repeatedly used on other occasions precisely that form – the first person singular of the *past* tense of the verb “to be” – in 11:15, 16:4 and 17:12. So why did he not use it in John 8:58, if that is what he *meant* to say?¹⁰⁸

And as the height of effrontery, BeDuhn entitles the chapter in question “Tampering with Tenses”, while claiming throughout that the *other* translations are the ones doing the tampering. In fact, *the opposite is the case*: it is indeed the other translations that give “the most obvious” translation, while he and the NWT “tamper with the tense” and change a Greek present tense to an English past tense!

This just shows that if one is audacious enough, one can call “black”, “white”, and hope that no-one will notice.

BeDuhn’s argument is that the straightforward translation sounds odd in English. The fact is, that it sounded, and sounds, odd in Greek, too. The job of the translator is to translate *what the text says*, not to *tamper with what it means*. BeDuhn repeatedly says such things himself, in the apparent hope that the reader will assume that this is the principle that he is applying throughout the book, when nothing could be further from the truth.

If we have difficulty understanding a text, we should always first of all ask the question, “What did the first hearers understand to be the meaning of what was said?”

With such simple Greek as we have in John 8:58, we do not need to appeal to dictionaries, grammar reference books, philosophical and theological arguments – or even the first hearers.

However, given BeDuhn’s remarkable claims, let us look no further than the immediate context – principally, the very next verse! Here we see how the Jews who were present understood the meaning of what Jesus had just said. Verse 59 says, “At this, they picked up stones to stone him.” Jesus got away from them, but shortly thereafter the Jews again tried to stone him (John 10:31). Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?” (John 10:32). The following verse gives their answer: “ ‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ replied the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.’ ” (John 10:33).

Needless to say, in ten pages of convoluted argument, BeDuhn does not find time or space to refer to the immediate context of the statement or the unambiguous understanding of Jesus’ original hearers. These verses are nowhere quoted or referred to.

Thus BeDuhn prefers to abandon the principles that he has claimed that he will follow, in order to defend an indefensible mistranslation, while at the same time attacking all those translators who have in fact applied that principle. In making this blatant mistranslation of present tense ἐγώ εἰμι (“egō eimi”, Greek for “I am”) as past tense “I have been” in John 8:58, he is in agreement with the NWT translation, which uniquely commits the same error.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Matthew and Mark also record Jesus as having used the same past tense form of the verb (Matthew 25:35, 25:36, 25:43, Mark 14:49).

¹⁰⁹ See my paper on John 8:58, here: https://livingwater-spain.com/John8_58.pdf (Allin, 2013)

ii) BeDuhn claims that he is not influenced by theological considerations, but he then uses the doctrinal stance of the Watchtower organisation to defend his interpretations of passages

He says, "I am not going to enter into a debate over interpretation" (p. 47), yet uses theological considerations to justify his conclusions, not only in the case of the translation of the word προσκυνέω ["proskuneō"], as indicated below, but also on numerous other occasions.

Thus, he has a whole chapter on Philippians 2:5-11 and he starts by claiming, "I will not attempt here to settle the interpretive debate" (p. 51), but he concludes the chapter precisely by defining the key terms based on an interpretation that is no more nor less than a statement of the traditional Jehovah's Witness argument concerning this passage (p. 61). This paper is not the place to explain why these arguments are fallacious, but I have written a separate article on Philippians 2.¹¹⁰

BeDuhn does exactly the same thing in chapter seven (penultimate paragraph on page 85), where he uses exclusively theological arguments to defend the addition by the NWT of words that totally change the meaning of the original Greek text of Colossians 1:16-17 (see details below).

In chapter nine he uses a *theological* argument – and one remote from the linguistic point in question, moreover – to justify the NWT translation of Hebrews 1:8. I will not take the reader's time with a point-by-point refutation; the start of the relevant paragraph is sufficient to substantiate my statement. On page 100 BeDuhn writes, "It's really quite simple: Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah is the rightful king of Israel." The paragraph in question concludes with BeDuhn's interpretation of Psalm 45, which is used as support for his interpretation of Hebrews 1:8. This from the man who stated as one of his foundational principles that "I am not going to enter into a debate over interpretation" (p. 47). [See also Howe, 2010, p. 77.]

BeDuhn makes blanket condemnations of all other translations for supposedly translating incorrectly, while hiding the fact that the NWT does exactly the same thing, even with the same words

As an example, he objects to the translation of the Greek word προσκυνέω ["proskuneō"] as "worship" with reference to Jesus, stating (p. 47) "the presence of such an idea cannot be supported by selectively translating a word one way when it refers to Jesus and another way when it refers to someone else."

However, this is precisely what the NWT does, translating the word as "do obeisance" when referring to Jesus, but as "worship" in other occasions, not only when it applies to God but also even when it applies to "the Beast" in Revelation 13:4, etc.

Does he not realise that this is what the NWT has done? He does, after all, dedicate a whole chapter to this one Greek word. How is it possible that he did not see that what he was criticising other translations for doing is precisely what the NWT does *with the same word* – with the difference that their *normal* rendering of the word is "worship", but that they "selectively translate [it] ... another way" when it applies to Jesus, to prevent their readers seeing the Biblical evidence that Jesus was in fact *worshipped*.

This is clearly determined by the doctrinal orientation of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and one is led to the inescapable conclusion that BeDuhn shares the same theology, in spite of his protestations that he would not allow theological considerations to influence his decisions (see the previous section).

BeDuhn writes elsewhere (p. 108) that "Inconsistency in translation is often an indicator of bias." The inconsistency in the translation of προσκυνέω ["proskuneō"] by the New World Translation reveals precisely that bias, and BeDuhn's handling of this word is a very partisan account that promotes Jehovah's Witness doctrine while ignoring or hiding the evidence of the bias that is

¹¹⁰ That article can be seen here: https://livingwater-spain.com/phil_2.pdf (Allin, 2017)

clearly present specifically in the New World Translation. In doing this, BeDuhn reveals his own profound bias.

BeDuhn presents his personal opinions as though they were facts

One could give many examples. Here are a few.

Zoroastrian priests

On page 45 BeDuhn states, "The magi were priests of the Zoroastrian faith." There is no Biblical nor extra-biblical evidence to support this claim, and nor indeed does BeDuhn make any effort to justify it. However, he bases the following argument on this allegation, as though it were a fact. Numerous experts in this period of history have published articles that would indicate that this claim is erroneous, but none of them is referred to by BeDuhn.

This is not the place to investigate this claim; I merely use it as an example of BeDuhn's technique. For a detailed critical analysis of this claim, I would recommend Howe, 2010, pp. 31-39 and 50-53. Howe quotes from the publications of various experts in this field, and gives the relevant bibliographical information.

This meaning is determined "on the basis of linguistics"

On page 99 he writes, "on the basis of linguistics, *ho theos* is more likely to mean 'God', as it does hundreds of times throughout the New Testament, than 'O God' " One should point out that this argument has nothing to do with *linguistics*. As his sentence goes on to indicate, his claim is based on *statistics*. However, "linguistics" sounds more impressive than "statistics".

To apply the argument that BeDuhn now invents, we would have to say, "In ninety percent of the New Testament the name "John" refers to John the Baptist¹¹¹, therefore in 100% of the New Testament the name "John" refers to John the Baptist." This is precisely the statistical argument that BeDuhn has used to justify the NWT mistranslation of Hebrews 1:8. It is, of course, not a linguistic argument, and it is patently an illogical claim.

BeDuhn's knowledge of what the Jews were thinking

Another example of BeDuhn's habit of presenting his personal opinions as though they were facts can be found on page 111, as part of his arguments to justify tampering with the tense of ἐγώ εἰμι (I am) in John 8:58. BeDuhn claims to know what the Jews were thinking at the time: "It is Jesus' claim to be superior to Abraham, and to have superhuman longevity, *not a claim to a divine self-designation*, that enrages his audience." (emphasis added)

BeDuhn is unperturbed by the fact that this contradicts the evidence, since the Jews do in fact tell Jesus what they were thinking, saying, "We are ... stoning you ... because you, a mere man, claim to be God" (John 10:33). However, this reason does not suit BeDuhn's argument, so he suppresses this information and substitutes his own opinion as though it were fact.

Likewise, on page 100 BeDuhn tells us what the translators of the Septuagint were thinking. And on page 130 he tells us what the author of the gospel of John was thinking: "John is leading his readers to what he regards as a new, more complete understanding of Jesus."

Such claims can at best be described as remarkable.

¹¹¹ The precise percentage might be more or less than 90%; I won't waste my time right now working it out, since the argument is so risible.

CHAPTER 12: BEDUHN THE NEUTRAL INVESTIGATOR

BeDuhn makes a pretence of being objective

Throughout his book, BeDuhn has great difficulty defending mistranslation after mistranslation and distortion after distortion in the Jehovah's Witness version of the New Testament. However, with a combination of the techniques described above and others that we shall see later in this review, he does his best to do so. Nevertheless, there are some errors or wrong decisions that he obviously realises that even he cannot justify or defend. Since he claims that his book is an academic evaluation of translations of the New Testament, he clearly cannot ignore or exclude all the mistakes in the NWT.

He states in his Preface that he is "a neutral investigator" (p. ix) and constantly claims that he alone is not biased, while everyone else is. To demonstrate his neutrality, he therefore occasionally includes the New World Translation in his criticisms. So how does he handle these serious translation errors?

He uses a series of techniques to hide this criticism in places where the average non-academic reader is unlikely to find it.

i) He hides critical references to the New World Translation within lists of abbreviations

When he is criticising a translation that he considers incorrect, if the New World Translation makes the same mistake, he does not draw attention to this, but slips the initials "NW" into the middle of a non-alphabetical list of abbreviations. Here are some examples:

"The KJV, NASB, NIV, NW, and AB, substitute "he" for one or other of the two ungendered Greek expressions" (p 70).

"The KJV, NASB, NIV, NW, AB, and TEV substitute "he" for one or both of the ungendered Greek expressions" (p. 70).

"The KJV, NASB, AB, and NW limit this promise to "he", while the NIV, NRSV, NAB, TEV, and LB more accurately convey the gender-neutral sense of the Greek" (pp. 71-72).

ii) He hides critical references to the New World Translation in a footnote that is printed on another page

Having chosen the tiniest possible font size for numbers referring to footnotes, BeDuhn relegates critical information to footnotes. These footnotes are then not even printed on the same page.

Here is an example. BeDuhn correctly states (p.72) that the name Junia, which is mentioned in Romans 16:7, is a woman's name. She is described in this verse as being "prominent among the apostles". Some people argue that this means that she "was well known to the apostles", but such an interpretation is hard to derive from the original, and I agree with BeDuhn that the most obvious meaning is that this means that she was "a prominent apostle" (my wording, but based on what BeDuhn says on p. 73).

He goes on to state that a male-dominated church [i.e., in subsequent centuries] has had difficulty coping with the idea that a woman could have been an apostle, and a common "solution" has been to convert the female name "Junia" into a purportedly-male name, "Junias", although BeDuhn correctly points out that "there is no name 'Junias' in the Greco-Roman world in which Paul was writing" (p. 72).

BeDuhn goes on to say (p. 73), "translators ... who find it inconceivable that a woman would be 'in (the group of) the apostles' simply write her out of the group by changing her to a man. *Such a move is not translation at all. It is changing the Bible to make it agree with one's own prejudices.*" (emphasis added)

This is very trenchant criticism indeed by BeDuhn, but to which translation or translations does it apply? Remarkably, he does not say! However, a tiny elevated numeral in the text refers to a footnote, inconveniently located on another page. If we locate that footnote, we discover to our amazement that of the translations that BeDuhn is considering, only two make this error: "The AB and the NW". AB is BeDuhn's abbreviation for the Amplified Bible, and NW is his abbreviation for the New World Translation.

BeDuhn has really gone to remarkable lengths to hide from the reader the fact that *this scathing criticism is in fact of the translation that he claims is the only accurate English version of the Bible*, from among all those that he has included in his study. He has stated that his target audience is the non-academic reader, and he will be aware that the average such reader does not normally read footnotes – especially if he or she can't find them! The lack of transparency and even-handedness here is most remarkable and unprofessional.

iii) He hides the criticism of the New World Translation in an appendix at the back of the book

Other criticisms are likewise buried, this time in an appendix, in the knowledge that the average non-academic reader is unlikely to read appendices either.

At the end of a paragraph that starts by talking about the Westcott and Hort Greek text and goes on to refer to most of the translations included in his study, all represented by capitalised abbreviations, BeDuhn writes (on page 39), "One systematic peculiarity of the NW is the substitution of 'Jehovah' for 'Lord' in well over two-hundred verses."¹¹²

The next paragraph takes us on to another topic, and so the use of the word "Jehovah" is dealt with and got out of the way in one and a half lines of well-submerged text, *without even saying what he thinks of this*.

The eagle-eyed may spot a tiny numeral at the end of the line. Or they may miss it. It obviously refers to a footnote, but where is the footnote? Not on the page in question of course. We find it on page 40. What does the footnote say? Here it is, in its entirety: "On this peculiarity, see the Appendix."

So the scarcely-visible footnote numeral refers to another page, and when we get there, we are referred to yet another page. No page numbers are given for the Appendix, but by following this "paper chase", the determined reader can eventually find the Appendix, which begins on page 169. Again, the reader may well have difficulty even finding the appendix!

Would it not have been more even-handed if BeDuhn had actually dedicated to the important issue of the NWT's use of the word "Jehovah" at least a paragraph of its own? In fact, it obviously requires a whole chapter in the main body of the book. We will return to this issue later in this review, when we look at the appendix in more detail.

iv) He hides his most telling criticisms of the New World Translation in footnotes to the appendix at the back of the book

Here is an example of this tortuous route:

- a brief reference in text (e.g., p. 39)
- to a footnote on another page (p. 40)
- to appendix (pp. 169-181)
- to footnote to appendix (e.g., p. 172 fn 7)
- to the actual critical comment (in this case on page 179).

In the footnote referred to in this particular example, BeDuhn reveals that one of the NWT's much-vaunted "J" sources, which it uses to support its insertion of the name "Jehovah" into the text of

¹¹² According to BeDuhn elsewhere in his book, 237 times

the New Testament is in fact “a copy of a 14th century work by a Jewish writer which includes a Hebrew translation of the Gospel according to Matthew.” He goes on to state that, “The source and date of this translation are highly uncertain” and adds that it is “highly derivative”, which apparently means that it is far from the original source text.

One should not be surprised that this evidence is so well buried. Nevertheless, BeDuhn bends over backwards to be gentle with the translators of the NWT: “With the value of J2 thus undermined, *it is not prudent to place too much weight upon its evidence*, particularly since it is not even a Greek manuscript of the New Testament” (emphasis added). Perhaps a more balanced academic conclusion would have been to have said, “Thus this document is totally irrelevant and should be disregarded completely”.

Feigned objectivity

Victor Klemperer writes of the technique that he calls “feigned objectivity”.¹¹³ (Klemperer, 2000) BeDuhn’s pretence of impartiality uses exactly the same techniques, although I do not doubt that he was unaware of the particular use of the method documented by Klemperer. However, the comparison is inescapable: the techniques are identical. The writer knows that the reader is likely to say, “Hold on a minute. What about *this* or *that*?”

So, in an attempt to avoid his credibility being completely undermined by the things that he himself has written, the writer concedes that there are exceptions, but they can be explained, and they are not very significant, anyway. The writer then does his best to avoid drawing the reader’s attention to the details.

BeDuhn uses the technique of intellectual intimidation to drive home his point

BeDuhn claims that this book is not for academics but for the lay reader (p. xi).

However, by using obtuse technical terminology, some of it apparently invented by him, he seeks to intimidate the non-technical reader into skipping over an unintelligible argument and accepting the conclusion without understanding why it is allegedly correct.

This approach is well-known in publications by the Watchtower Society, and I have documented it elsewhere.¹¹⁴

For instance, BeDuhn presents (and perhaps invents) the concept of “definitizing” in his arguments about John 1:1. (On this, see Howe, 2010, p. 152.)

A supreme example of BeDuhn’s use of this technique is chapter 11 of his book, where no less than twenty-two pages of convoluted arguments are presented to justify the NWT translation of John 1:1c as “the word was *a* god”. This muddled presentation is riddled with confused and misleading quotations from experts and references to verses that bear no resemblance to John 1:1, and I cannot believe that many of BeDuhn’s declared target audience of non-academics can possibly follow his arguments. That is, of course, not the intention.

¹¹³ “To the Bitter End, The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1942-1945”, Phoenix, 2000 (Translation by Martin Chalmers, p. 285) (Klemperer, 2000) German original: “Victor Klemperer, Tagebücher, 1943, Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 3. Auflage (3rd edition), 1999, p. 8 (Klemperer, 1999) See Klemperer’s assessment of the writing of an apologist who wrote Nazi propaganda against the Jews during the Second World War. On 29th May 1943 Klemperer records details of an article in the Nazi party newspaper. The title of the article is “The Jew is to blame” and its validity is enhanced by the indication under the heading that it is written by a certain “Professor Doctor”. After paragraphs of criticism of the problems purportedly caused by Jews, comes a little sentence that Klemperer calls “the most absurd sentence, perhaps”. Here it is, with Klemperer’s comments in brackets, “ ‘There were non-Jewish criminals also, unquestionably (pretence of objectivity) – the worst was Matthias Erzberger, a non-Jew, but from the old Jewish livestock dealers’ lair of Buttenhausen’ (so contaminated after all!).”

¹¹⁴ See my article on John 8:58, here: https://livingwater-spain.com/John8_58.pdf, page 7 of the version current on 27.1.18. (Allin, 2013)

The purpose of intellectual intimidation is to bombard readers with so much jargon and so many complicated arguments that they give up trying to follow the complexities, assume that it is their own lack of specialist knowledge that is the cause of the problem, and just accept the author's claims, imagining that a suitably-trained academic would have been persuaded by his arguments.¹¹⁵

However, this is not the case. There are two, simple, straightforward facts that are relevant to this topic:

- 1) those familiar with the Greek text of the New Testament know that the author's claims are shown to be false by the New Testament on page after page;¹¹⁶
- 2) even the New World Translation itself does not apply these so-called "rules" in its own translation of the New Testament, as has been demonstrated conclusively by Dr Robert H Countess in his book "A Critical Analysis of the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures"¹¹⁷, pp 54-55 and 105-131. (Countess, 1987)

¹¹⁵ I am indebted to "In Search of Christian Freedom" by Raymond Franz for drawing my attention to this technique in the publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses. As a former member of the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a former writer in their books and magazines, he was well-placed to be aware of the use of this technique. (Franz, 2007) (Publication details: Atlanta: Commentary Press, 2007, especially pp. 453-454.)

¹¹⁶ The same is naturally the case with the Koiné Greek of the Septuagint. For instance, the only possible translation of the Greek rendering of Psalm 22:8 (LXX 21:9) is "They trusted in *the* Lord", not "They trusted in *a* Lord", which is what it would have to be, if BeDuhn's "rule" were correct.

¹¹⁷ 2nd edition 1987: Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.

CHAPTER 13: THE SCOPE OF BEDUHN'S BOOK

BeDuhn's analysis of Bible translations

When we turn to BeDuhn's analysis of translations, we find the following:

- 1) BeDuhn is not making a study of Bible translations in general, reaching the conclusion at the end of his study that the New World Translation is the best; on the contrary, he has pre-selected the NWT in advance and contrasts it with all the other translations that he has chosen, seeking to justify it and to demonstrate that all other translations included in his study are wrong and only the NWT is right.
- 2) He is not looking at the NW translation of the whole of the Bible but only at the New Testament (though he justifies the NWT's use of the word "Jehovah" in the Old Testament).
- 3) He is not looking at the whole of the NW translation of the New Testament in general but only at how it handles one single doctrine, the deity of Christ. He tries to divert attention from this extreme limitation in the scope of his study by making passing critical references to minor points of detail in the NWT, while hiding some of its most obvious major faults by using the techniques detailed above.
- 4) He does not approach the doctrine that he has selected as a neutral observer to discover what the original New Testament text says, but with the pre-determined stance that Christ is not divine. He then seeks to demonstrate that certain original texts can be interpreted in such a way as to support this claim.
- 5) He does not look at the totality of what the Biblical texts say on the topic that he has chosen, but pre-selects only those texts that he can claim – through a series of complicated arguments – can be interpreted in such a way as to support the stance that he has taken. He ignores certain other key, relevant texts. One must assume that he has concluded that he would find it impossible to re-interpret those texts in such a way that they would no longer undermine his claims.

Definition or Interpretation

Dr BeDuhn is emphatic that his purpose is to understand the meaning of key Greek words used in the New Testament, not to interpret the theological implications. Thus on p 51 he says, "I will not attempt to settle here the interpretive debate". However, his conclusion in the same chapter (principally on page 61) is entirely based on *one* interpretation of theological issues – unsurprisingly based exclusively on the interpretations made by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The principles that BeDuhn claims that he will apply are laudable. Unfortunately, he does not apply them. He also does not carry out a balanced study of the main features of the Jehovah's Witnesses version of the Bible (the NWT).

CHAPTER 14: BEDUHN AND COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 1

BeDuhn's Defence of the New World Translation

The principal section of BeDuhn's book consists of a series of chapters in which he sets out to justify some of the NWT's most notorious mistranslations. Thus, he has a whole chapter that sets out to justify the NWT's addition of the word "other" four times in two verses in Colossians 1.

He starts by saying (p. 77), "It is a tricky passage". This is in fact not the case for the translator: the Greek text is simple and translation of it is easy.

Of course, it does turn out to be "a tricky passage" to explain away for the Jehovah's Witnesses, for reasons explained below, but these are all to do with doctrine, theology and interpretation, areas that BeDuhn had said that he would not touch on; his book is – he claims – about *translation*, not about *doctrine*.

BeDuhn's argument is this: when translating from one language to another, it is sometimes necessary to add words. Other translations add words, often without even admitting that they have done so. Therefore, the NWT is justified in adding the word "other" (no less than four times!) in its rendering of Colossians chapter 1.

Before tackling the difficult task of justifying the unjustifiable, BeDuhn subjects the reader to no less than six pages (pp. 78-83) in which he gives long quotations from other translations, showing at the end of each translation the total number of words it contains.

This is a truly pointless exercise that seems to reveal a lack of understanding on his part of the nature of language in general and of Koiné Greek in particular. Let me explain why.

As an example, the Greek perfect tense is rendered by one word, whereas the English perfect tense is rendered by two. Furthermore, Greek (like, Spanish, Russian and some other languages) frequently misses out the subject pronoun (I, you, etc) with verbs, since the verb ending shows clearly which person is meant. Thus, a one-word Greek perfect tense will usually require three words in English. For example, the Greek word *πεπίστευκας* [pepisteukas] (in John 20:29) is equivalent to the English "you have believed".

Exactly the same happens with the Greek Aorist participle. Thus, for example, the one Greek word *ἐλθοῦσα* ["elthousa"] (in Matthew. 15:25, and elsewhere) refers to an action completed in the past by a female subject. The shortest English translation is likely to be "having come up, she ..." or "when she had come up, she ..."

Thus it is inevitable that all English translations of most Greek passages of any length necessarily contain more words than the original. Of course, the key factor is that they should not introduce any new ideas that are not in the original text. However, BeDuhn uses this purely-numerical fact to justify the NWT's addition of an extra word that is not in the Greek, even though that additional word totally changes the meaning of the passage in question.

Colossians 1 is writing about Jesus. Here is what it says in verses 16-17, according to the NIV translation, which is very close to the original Greek text:

"by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

The meaning is so clear as scarcely to need commentary: all created things, whether on earth or in heaven, physical or spiritual, were created by Christ.

If all created things were made by Christ, then this can lead to only one conclusion: that Christ himself is not a created being. (After all, he could not, by definition, have "created himself", which is a meaningless phrase.)

So this simple, unambiguous passage shows that the Jehovah's Witness doctrine that Christ was a created being (the archangel Michael) must be false.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have therefore needed to add words, in order to change the crystal-clear meaning of the original Greek text. The New World Translation renders these two verses:

“... by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All [other] things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all [other] things, and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist.”

By the simple addition – *four times!* – of the one word “other”, the meaning is totally changed to the *opposite* of the meaning of the Greek text. This cannot be called a “translation”. On the contrary, the Jehovah's Witnesses ***have completely changed the meaning of the Greek original.***

The Greek text says that Christ is not a created being. The NWT translation says that he *is* a created being, just that all *other* created beings were created by him (after he had been created by God, according to Jehovah's Witness doctrine).

The meaning of the Greek text is clear. Translating it does not present any problems. BeDuhn, who said that he would not get involved in doctrine, theology or interpretation, spends 14 pages (pp. 75-88) arguing for the Jehovah's Witness interpretation of the text, and saying that this “understanding” justifies the addition of the word “other”, so that readers will get the meaning that the Jehovah's Witnesses claim for it.

What BeDuhn chooses to ignore is that the Greek language does have a word for “other”, but that it appears no-where in this text. In fact, Koiné Greek has two words for other:

- ἕτερος [“heteros”] means “other (different from)”
- ἄλλος [“allos”] means “other (another one the same as)”.

Neither of these words appears in Colossians 1:16-17, but the English word “other” has been added ***four times*** by the NWT translators, who object to the clear meaning of the passage, which tells us that Christ is not a created being.

BeDuhn justifies this perversion of the original by the irrational argument that all translations add extra words, so the NWT is no different from any other translation, even describing the addition of the word “other” as “innocuous” (p. 84).

Yet two pages later he writes, “we discover a shocking willingness of translators to freely add words and ideas not supported or in any way implied in the Greek.” So adding words is roundly condemned by him, but this is precisely what the NWT does with this passage. It would be hard to think of a more outrageous example of “double-speak”.¹¹⁸

A paragraph later, ignoring his condemnation of the “shocking willingness of translators to freely add words”, he writes with reference to the NWT's addition of words in Colossians 1, “what the NW translators have done is certainly necessary” (p. 86). It is difficult to believe that the same person can have written these two paragraphs.

BeDuhn's argument may be summarised as follows:

- when other translations add words, it is wrong;
- when the New World Translation adds words, it is right.

¹¹⁸ George Orwell introduced the concept of “doublethink” in his book *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, 1949) and in other essays he writes that “unscrupulous politicians, advertisers, religionists, and other doublespeakers of whatever stripe continue to abuse language for manipulative purposes”. cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doublespeak> , downloaded on 21.10.12.

Perhaps one would be justified in quoting from BeDuhn and using one of his own terms of criticism for those who disagree with him. The indefensible nature of his logic at this point is indeed “absurd”, although I would prefer to state that it is simply impossible to justify.

We should not be surprised that there is no evidence that his book has been taken seriously by the academic community.

BeDuhn's claim

BeDuhn's claim is that except in the case of the New World Translation, all other Bible translators and Bible translations have been guilty of theological bias when translating the Bible and have therefore produced translations all of which have been inaccurate. All the evidence given by BeDuhn himself and by his university indicate that he is in fact not a Bible translator. Until 2012, the only publication of his concerning Bible translation is this book. It is not backed up by learned articles written by him and published in specialist journals (or anywhere else). In fact, even in this book he only translates isolated words and phrases, not even whole Bible verses.

BeDuhn's claim is that he alone – along with the Jehovah's Witnesses – is not affected by bias and that therefore the version of these words produced by the Jehovah's Witnesses is the only one that is accurate.
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CHAPTER 15: BEDUHN AND THE SPIRIT

BeDuhn applies double standards in his analysis of Bible translations and uses different criteria for the "New World Translation"

Thus, where he detects the slightest deviation in other translations from a literal, word-for-word rendering, he repeatedly refers to "bias", which must be one of his most frequently-used words in this book. (He does, after all, include the word "bias" in the subtitle of this book.)

However, when the NWT departs *radically* from the Greek text of the same verses, BeDuhn uses phrases like "this is basically correct". This partisan approach fundamentally undermines his credibility.

As an example, in chapter 12 of his book he is writing about translation of the word for "spirit" or "spirits". As an example, on page 155 he selects 1 John 4:1-3 and 6.

Here is my own, unpolished translation, keeping as close as possible to the Greek original but changing the word order minimally to be a closer match to normal English word order.

“¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits if they are of God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² In this you know the spirit of God: every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ having come in flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God, and this is the Anti-Christ, which you have heard comes, and now is already in the world. ... ⁶ We are of God, the one knowing God hears us, he who is not of God does not hear us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error [or “deception”].”

BeDuhn roundly condemns the TEV translation for capitalizing the first letter of the word "spirit" "no less than five times", and describes this as "false" (p. 157). He goes on to say, "The TEV engages in extremely tendentious interpretation" (p. 158). Looking further at the TEV rendering, BeDuhn concludes (p. 158), "The TEV's translator has been at very least careless in his handling of this passage and, in my opinion, has displayed a lack of integrity in his role as a mediator of the biblical text to the reader."

In fact, the earliest extant manuscripts of the New Testament do demonstrate a technique for distinguishing between "spirit" (written without an initial capital letter in English) and "Spirit" (written with an initial capital letter in English), even though the manuscripts had been written entirely in what we would call "capital letters".

Where the "Spirit of Christ" or the "(Holy) Spirit" is referred to, these manuscripts use an abbreviated form that is called "*sacred name*". "Sacred name" forms were used for words such as "God" and "Lord", and in the New Testament also for "Jesus" and "Christ". Scholars usually refer to "sacred names" with the Latin title "*nomina sacra*", even when referring to texts – such as the New Testament – that were not written in Latin.¹¹⁹

In contrast, where the human spirit or evil spirits are referred to in these early New Testament manuscripts, they have the non sacred name form. That is to say, they write out in full the word πνεῦμα ("pneuma").

However, modern printed texts of the Greek New Testament do not use any of the *sacred name* forms, instead always writing the corresponding Greek word out in full, so this difference will not

¹¹⁹ The designation "sacred name" comes from the Latin "*nomen sacrum*" (plural: "*nomina sacra*"). However, in spite of the Latin title given to this phenomenon, it should be emphasised that I am here referring to the earliest extant *Greek* manuscripts of the New Testament. There is a very detailed analysis of *sacred names* in "Encountering the Manuscripts" by Philip Comfort, referred to above in chapter 4. On the use of the *nomen sacrum* for "Spirit", contrasted with its non-use for "spirit", cf. especially pp. 231-239.

be obvious to the translator or commentator on the text who does not consult the early manuscripts themselves or facsimiles of them.

If we compare the TEV renderings with the early manuscripts, it would appear that their use of "Spirit" and "spirit" is based on this difference between the use and non-use of the "*sacred name*" form in the manuscripts. As such, they have been far from "careless" in their translation, they have not been "tendentious" at all and they have in fact demonstrated *considerable* integrity and care.

In stark contrast with the TEV, the NWT's rendering is a *radical departure from the original Greek text*. Here is what it says, taken unchanged and unedited from my copy of the NWT:

¹ Beloved ones, do not believe every inspired expression, but test the inspired expressions to see whether they originate with God, because many false prophets have gone forth into the world.

² YOU gain the knowledge of the inspired expression from God by this: Every inspired expression that confesses Jesus Christ as having come in the flesh originates with God, ³ but every inspired expression that does not confess Jesus does not originate with God. Furthermore, this is the antichrist's [inspired expression] which YOU have heard was coming, and now it is already in the world. ...

⁶ We originate with God. He that gains the knowledge of God listens to us; he that does not originate with God does not listen to us. This is how we take note of the inspired expression of truth and the inspired expression of error."¹²⁰

These are no mere changes in capitalization. Here are some of the changes introduced by the NWT:

<i>The Greek original for</i>	<i>becomes</i>
"know God"	"gain the knowledge of God"
"of God"	"originate with God"
"we know"	"we take note of"

Moreover, "no less than seven times" (to adapt BeDuhn's phrase about the TEV) the NWT eliminates the words "spirit" and "spirits" completely, substituting their interpretation: "inspired expression"¹²¹. Plus they add the phrase "inspired expression" an eighth time (after the word antichrist), where it does not correspond to any word at all in the Greek text:

<i>The Greek original for</i>	<i>becomes</i>
"spirit(s) (7×)"	"inspired expression" (8×)

Does BeDuhn refer to "bias" in the NWT? Does he condemn the NWT for being a "false" translation? Does he say that this rendering is an "extremely tendentious interpretation"? No. None of these. He spends a large part of three pages (pp. 154-156) preparing the reader for the NWT translation, starting at the top of p. 154, where the title makes the word "spirits" equivalent to the word "inspired". Lower down on that page we find a paragraph that claims:

"Perhaps the best known example of this kind of positive bestowed spirit is that given to prophets enabling them to know things others do not, something for which we still use the word 'inspiration.' "

¹²⁰ I note that (on page 156) BeDuhn misses out some phrases from the above, thus minimising the impact of the obvious differences between the Greek original and the NWT version. He also adds in brackets alternative renderings that are closer to the Greek. I don't know if these alternative renderings are printed in notes in some other edition of the NWT Bible. They do not appear in the copy that I obtained from the Jehovah's Witnesses.

¹²¹ Since in their translation the final phrase of verse 6 speaks of "the inspired expression of error", one would have to ask the question, "Inspired by whom or by what?"

This is of course *interpretation*, or "a theological opinion" by BeDuhn, something he constantly criticises in others. And it is given to justify a version that fundamentally changes the clear, linguistic meaning of the original text.

Dr BeDuhn then takes us to Revelation 22:6, the Greek of which can easily be translated. It says

"the Lord the God of the spirits of the prophets"¹²²

However, before showing us what the NWT actually says, he prepares us further for it by saying, "The 'spirits' spoken of are the individual inspirations which prompted the prophets to speak" (pp. 154-155).

This of course has nothing to do with *translation*; it is again pure *interpretation* – BeDuhn's *opinion* of what the text means, even though he had said that he would limit himself to the actual Greek text and not get involved in interpretation or theology.

Putting off still further the moment when he has to show the reader how the NWT actually renders this, he says, "The NW translators have opted for a dynamic equivalence approach to this verse" (p. 155).

Finally, we get to see the NW translation, which is

"the God of the inspired expressions of the prophets"

There are now no spirits here at all, whether with capital letters or lower case letters.

How does BeDuhn assess this major departure from the Greek text here by the NWT? To judge from what he says about minor changes in other translations, we would expect the most resounding condemnation. Does he say, as he said of the TEV, that the NWT's "translator has been at very least careless in his handling of this passage and, in my opinion, has displayed a lack of integrity in his role as a mediator of the biblical text to the reader.?" (p. 158)

Of course not. This is what he writes – and I have not slipped up and accidentally copied something from another page; this is the next sentence in his book:

"This is an *accurate* dynamic equivalent of what the Greek has, but shifts the emphasis *ever so slightly*". This statement by BeDuhn really is quite astounding, as it is the total opposite of the sorts of statements that Dr BeDuhn makes when he disagrees with any detail, however small, in other translations.

This is what BeDuhn writes when the NWT fundamentally changes the wording in the Bible. How can he claim that the NWT is "accurate" when it changes the words and the meaning, while he describes other translations as "false" and guilty of "extremely tendentious interpretation" for the mere use of capital letters? A more remarkable example of double standards would be hard to find.

BeDuhn eventually returns to his much-delayed assessment of the NWT's radical departure from an accurate translation of the Greek text of 1 John 4:1-3 and 6. Does he speak of "bias", "extremely tendentious interpretation", "a lack of integrity" or "theological influence"?

Of course not. Again, he won't just "come out with it", and give us without delays and asides an evaluation of the accuracy (in fact, of the total inaccuracy) of the NWT text. He takes time, preparing the reader for his comments, and lessens the impact by comparing the NWT text favourably with a paraphrase that he roundly condemns elsewhere in his book, the Living Bible.

Criticising earlier the Living Bible's paraphrase of John 6:63, he had written, "The LB also changes the meaning of the verse ... *Where does the translator get all this? Not from the original words of the Gospel of John!*" (emphasis his, p. 146)

¹²² Translation by the author of this article

But we must remember that the man who produced the Living Bible said that he was *not* making a *translation* but a *paraphrase*. That is to say, he was writing in his own words his *interpretation* of the meaning of the original¹²³. Criticising it for not producing a literal translation is unjustified, when its declared aim was *not* to produce a literal translation. As such, the Living Bible should never have even formed part of Dr BeDuhn's study of Bible *translations* in the first place, since – not being a translation – it does not meet the criterion for inclusion.

However, it now suits BeDuhn to call upon the support of the Living Bible's *interpretation*, to justify a total change of the meaning of the text of 1 John 4 by the NWT, which claims to be a *translation*, not a paraphrase. After paragraph after paragraph of procrastination and diversionary tactics, BeDuhn eventually writes this:

"Both the NW and the LB transfer the reference of these verses from inspiration itself to the vocal expression of inspiration" (p. 157 – emphasis added).

So with the help of three pages of text we have "*transferred*" (!!) the meaning from "spirit" (or "Spirit") to "inspiration" and from "inspiration" to "the vocal expression of inspiration" – and we *still* haven't discovered Dr BeDuhn's evaluation of the NWT text. To be fair to BeDuhn, perhaps I should not use the word "meaning", but the word that he uses here, the "reference" – another term that he has "slipped into" his text (to use his words when condemning other translations), without defining it.

At last, we get to his evaluation of this NWT interpretation: "To a certain degree, this shift is accurate".

So this *total transformation* (or, in BeDuhn's euphemisms, "transfer" or "shift") of what the biblical text actually says is "accurate"! "To a certain degree." To what "degree"? Dr BeDuhn does not say. Which parts of this "shift" are "accurate" and which parts of it are inaccurate? Well, apparently *no part* of it is inaccurate – since BeDuhn does not use the word with reference to the NWT.

What he does say is that if we compare the NWT's *interpretation* of these verses with someone else who has given a similar *interpretation* (in the Living Bible), then they are similar. But that is circular reasoning: *it is saying, if we compare the NWT with something that is similar, they are similar*.

The implication is that if someone else has made this change, then the NWT is justified in making this change, too. Even if the other person is elsewhere described by BeDuhn as being wrong. But he does not leave us to deduce implications; he prefers to state explicitly, "this shift is accurate".

He obviously realises that he is on shaky ground here, as he follows up with yet another a justification: "because John is indeed talking about people speaking at the prompting of inspiration." But here we are again back at BeDuhn's *interpretation* of what he *thinks* that the passage is about. That might be acceptable for a Bible *commentary* – provided, of course, that it was balanced by other statements. But *it has nothing to do with translation*.

This is a blatant example of overwhelming bias both by the NWT in its translation and by BeDuhn in his evaluation of it. To apply here the words that BeDuhn chose for the title of his book, there is in fact "*no truth*" in the NWT "translation" of key words in 1 John 4:1-3, 6 and yet Dr BeDuhn supports their fundamental mistranslation of this passage.

¹²³ See the Preface to "The Living Bible – Paraphrased", Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971. (K. N. Taylor, 1971) In contrast, the *New Living Translation* is a translation from the original languages. It was published in 1996, but BeDuhn in fact chooses to refer to the much older *Living Bible* in his study.

This is a remarkable example of the double standards applied by him in this chapter, and indeed in his book as a whole: almost total support for the NWT, regardless how extraordinary their version of a given passage may be; almost total condemnation for all the other translations in his study, even when he disagrees with the most minor detail, such as capitalization.

And yet he writes in his conclusion (p. 165) of “the greater accuracy of the NW as a literal, conservative translation of the original expressions of the New Testament writers.” ***Nothing could be farther from the truth.***

As we have seen in relation to 1 John 4:1-3,6, the NWT interpretation has no actual, possible basis in the text itself. No unbiased, objective observer could possibly call the NWT interpretation here “literal”. To claim this is to disregard the facts. To allege, as Dr BeDuhn does, that “the NW [is] a literal, conservative translation of *the original expressions* of the New Testament writers” contradicts the very words that he himself has just quoted in the preceding chapter of his book.

CHAPTER 16: USE OF THE WORD "JEHOVAH" IN THE NEW WORLD TRANSLATION

BeDuhn has problems dealing with the erroneous use of the word "Jehovah" by the NWT and realises that he is going to have to be critical, so he buries his criticism as cleverly as possible in a place where it is unlikely to be seen. The insertion by the Jehovah's Witnesses of the word "Jehovah" into the New Testament text is a major problem area for BeDuhn and certainly requires a whole chapter in a book that compares the NWT with other modern translations, since it is one of the most important features that differentiates the NWT from all the other translations considered by BeDuhn. He must have realised that any credibility that he might still have would be totally destroyed if he ignored the issue.

However, he goes to remarkable lengths to reduce the chances that readers of his book will even find his handling of this major translation error. To our amazement, it is not covered in the main text of the book at all, but is relegated to an "Appendix". Worse, this Appendix is hidden *after* a chapter that has the title "A Final Word"! Readers might reasonably assume that when they have read "A Final Word" they will have finished the book. This is not the case, but many readers are likely to stop at that point.

BeDuhn spent no less than twenty-two pages to justify the NWT's translation of *one phrase* in John 1:1c (i.e., the last phrase in the verse). He tells us that the word "Jehovah" occurs over 6,000 times in the Old Testament and 237 times in the NWT New Testament, but he manages to address this major issue in a mere 12½ pages – in an appendix. Do we see balance here, or do we in fact see bias by Dr BeDuhn?

As we have seen above when he has had to try to justify the unjustifiable, BeDuhn prepares his readers carefully. He starts his "Appendix" on "Jehovah" with the assertion, "the NW is one of the most accurate English translations of the New Testament currently available" (p. 169). He thus presents his conclusions before he considers the evidence.

BeDuhn makes a passing reference to the Old Testament, stating " 'Jehovah' (or 'Yahweh' or some other reconstruction of the divine name consisting of the four consonants YHWH) is the personal name of God used more than six thousand times in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament" (p. 169). The underlining here is mine, but the brackets are from BeDuhn.

By putting the most probable original pronunciation of the word, 'Yahweh', in brackets, he is implying that it is less important. He then denigrates the word 'Yahweh' further by lumping it together with "some other reconstruction".

In this way, he makes the most likely correct pronunciation appear to be insignificant, whereas the version that is demonstrably wrong but has been chosen by the Jehovah's Witnesses is presented unchallenged as though it were correct. This is a complete reversal of the facts, which are well-known.

For a careful study of the origins of the word "Jehovah", see "What is the real meaning of Matthew 6:9? Should we call God "Jehovah"?"¹²⁴ (Allin, 2024)

BeDuhn's allegation "Jehovah ... is the personal name of God" is presented as though it were an undisputed fact, but without any evidence to support it and ignoring the overwhelming historical evidence that this is not the case. Is this really the writing of "a neutral investigator" (p. ix)? On the contrary, it is a claim that one is only likely to hear from a Jehovah's Witness or someone who is quoting from their publications.

¹²⁴ <https://livingwater-spain.com/yhwh.pdf>

Hundreds of pages have been written on this theme. I will limit myself to just one expert, the highly-esteemed specialist in the original biblical texts, the late Dr Bruce M Metzger, who wrote,

“The word ‘Jehovah’ does not accurately represent any form of the Name ever used in Hebrew.”¹²⁵

Yet BeDuhn goes on to write, “the NW is the only accurate translation of the nine we are comparing” (p. 169).

He then complains in the same paragraph that “all the other translations replace the personal name of God, in over six thousand passages, with *the euphemistic title ‘Lord’*.” (p. 169) Disregarding the claim about “the personal name of God”, which we have already indicated is unfounded, Dr BeDuhn seems to have misunderstood the meaning of the word “euphemistic”. Longman’s English Larousse¹²⁶ defines this word as follows:

“**euphemism** n. the use of a pleasant, polite or harmless-sounding word or expression to mask harsh, rude or infamous truths, e.g. ‘to pass away’ for ‘to die’ |the word or phrase so used **euphemistic** *adj.* **euphemistically** *adv.* [fr. Gk *euphemismos* fr. *eu-*, good + *phēmē*, speech, fame]”

I am sure that Dr BeDuhn never intended to imply that the word “Jehovah” is a “harsh, rude or infamous truth”. One must assume that here there is a slight gap in his command of an English word (or in his awareness of the meaning of the Greek morphemes from which it is derived?). Or a slip-up? But he does use “euphemistic” again, with the same mistaken understanding of its meaning, on page 170, there describing the Hebrew word *adonai* as a “euphemistic title”, and a third time on page 171, where he writes of “the accepted euphemism ‘Lord’ (*kurios*)”. When we are reading a book that argues about the precise meaning and translation of individual words, we are entitled to look at the accuracy or otherwise of the writer’s own use of words. In this case, he would be advised to find a more appropriate English word to describe what he actually has in mind.

The use of capital letters for “LORD”

Dr BeDuhn then comments on the use by many translations of capital letters for “LORD” to indicate when it translates the Hebrew “Yahweh” (or “Jehovah”, to use his word). He objects to this, stating that it is a usage “which my students invariably misunderstand as some sort of emphasis” (p. 170). However, inexplicably, he fails to criticise the similar use of capital letters throughout the NWT, both Old and New Testament, for the word “YOU” when referring to a plural pronoun in the original language, or their use of capital letters for some plural verbs.¹²⁷

He likewise voices no criticism of the NWT’s use of capital letters for a whole series of phrases in Exodus 3:14, even though in the very same section he refers repeatedly to the NWT’s translation of the Old Testament. Here is Exodus 3:14 in the NWT:

At this God said to Moses: “I SHALL PROVE TO BE WHAT I SHALL PROVE TO BE.”
And he added: “This is what you are to say to the sons of Israel, ‘I SHALL PROVE TO BE has sent me to YOU.’ ”

The use of capital letters here does not reflect any linguistic feature of the original Hebrew. However, the NWT’s translators appear to have been influenced by the Authorised Version’s rendering of this verse:

¹²⁵ In “To the Reader” in “The Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version”, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, on page xv in the edition that I have. See (*The Bible New Revised Standard Version*, 1989)

¹²⁶ Harlow and London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1968 (*Longmans English Larousse*, 1968)

¹²⁷ See the note after the Foreword to the “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, p. 6 in the edition that I have. (*New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, 1961)

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

In fact, the evidence is clear that the NWT translators paid little if any attention to the Hebrew, apparently working instead from the text of the English Authorised Version of 1611 or from the American Standard Version of 1901, which has "I AM WHO I AM" in capital letters. (American Revision Committee, 1901)

The American Standard Version (ASV) was popular with Jehovah's Witnesses because, as Metzger reports (Metzger, 2001) it "substituted the name Jehovah for Lord and God wherever *YHWH* (the Tetragrammaton) occurs in the Hebrew text"¹²⁸.

The Jehovah's Witnesses performed two operations on these English-language texts:

- they modernised the style of the English ("unto" becomes "to", etc);
- in Exodus 3:14 they eliminated "I AM" from the original (as they had to in order to hide the source of the quotation by Christ in John 8:58) and replaced it with an extremely convoluted phrase that departs far from the original Hebrew and adds many extra words – something which had merited strong condemnation by Dr BeDuhn *when done in other translations*.

In a section where BeDuhn is condemning the use by other translations of capital letters for just one word – and that with a very specific, precisely-defined and openly-declared purpose –, it is quite remarkable that he fails to make any comment whatsoever on the use of capital letters in the NWT. Here again, we see a lack of even-handedness and balance in his comparative study of translations.

However, on the use of the word "Jehovah" in the NWT New Testament, BeDuhn writes: "to introduce the name "Jehovah" into the New Testament, as the NW does two-hundred-and-thirty-seven times is not accurate translation *by the most basic principle of accuracy: adherence to the original Greek text.*" (p. 169)

One must wonder by what *other* "principle of accuracy" this use of the word by the NWT might be considered "accurate".

In the discussion that follows, it becomes clear that Dr BeDuhn believes that the use of the word "Jehovah" in the NWT's translation of the New Testament is not justified. He has read Robert Countess's "A Critical Analysis of the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures"¹²⁹ and has been persuaded that the case presented there is valid. A superscript numeral on page 175 takes us to a footnote on page 181, where he refers his readers to the book by Countess for a fuller explanation of one point.

BeDuhn even shows that the "J" texts cited by the translators of the NWT do not provide valid support for their use of the word "Jehovah" in the New Testament. He writes, "What the NW editors are actually doing in these notes is citing *other translations*." He later says, "This kind of citation of another translation does not *prove* anything" (both quotations from p. 172, emphasis his on both occasions). However, he immediately seeks to compensate for this criticism by saying in the next sentence that the NWT use of such texts "supports the choice [made by the translators of the NWT] without decidedly settling the translation issue".

It is not immediately clear exactly what Dr BeDuhn means by this last statement. It certainly does not follow on logically from the earlier part of the paragraph. It appears that he is stating that when the NWT translators refer to the use of the Hebrew four letters designating God in certain translations *into Hebrew* of selections from the New Testament, they are thus providing evidence that supports their decision to use the word "Jehovah" in their translation *into English*. However, in translating the New Testament into English, supposedly from the original Greek, any reference

¹²⁸ Metzger, 2001, p. 103

¹²⁹ (Countess, 1987)

to a translation by someone else into Hebrew is irrelevant. Furthermore, not a single Greek manuscript of the New Testament contains the Hebrew word for God.

If we re-state explicitly in this way what BeDuhn appears to be saying, it becomes clear that the argument is illogical: how can translators justify using a Hebrew word in their translation into English, just because other translators used a Hebrew word in their translation into Hebrew? This is even more unjustifiable when we remember that "Jehovah" is in any case a mistranslation of the original Hebrew word to which the NWT translators refer.

It thus becomes clear that the references by the NWT translators to their much-vaunted "J" texts do not in reality even support the translation choice that they made, and the previous statements by Dr BeDuhn do make this very point, so that in fact in his final sentence of this paragraph he contradicts what he had written earlier in the same paragraph.

Throughout most of his book, Dr BeDuhn goes to the most remarkable lengths to avoid criticising the NWT. Nevertheless, just once on page 175 he does use the word "bias" with reference to only three verses in the New Testament¹³⁰:

"the NW translators have deviated from the principles by which they would normally use 'Jehovah', and they have done so quite obviously because of bias."

In the next paragraph he writes,

"The inconsistency of the NW translators in not using 'Jehovah' in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, 1 Peter 2:3, and 1 Peter 3:15 shows that interpretation rather than a principle of translation is involved in deciding where to use 'Jehovah'."

This is the strongest criticism that he makes of the NWT, and he is to be commended for making these statements – even though they are well buried in an appendix.

In fact, Philippians 2:10-11 should be added to this list, as it is clearly based on Isaiah 45:23-24, a passage that is also quoted in Romans 14:11. In the verse in Romans, the Jehovah's Witnesses replace the Greek word for "Lord" with "Jehovah", justifying its use on the basis that this verse in Romans quotes the two verses indicated from Isaiah. However when the same verses from Isaiah are quoted in Philippians 2:10-11, which is talking about Jesus, the NWT does not use "Jehovah", but "Lord", instead, to eliminate the reference to the deity of Christ – another clear case of the same bias.

However, in the most stark contrast possible with his descriptions of all the other translations that he refers to, all the other conclusions by Dr BeDuhn that are critical of the NWT are presented in the most supportive way possible. In fact, he is extraordinarily resourceful in finding euphemisms (using this word with its correct meaning) for terms such as "error" and "wrong translation". Among other words and phrases that he uses in his appendix while dealing with this difficult issue (for him) are: "denominationally preferred expressions for God" (p. 170), "inconsistency" (p. 170, repeated p. 175), "harmonize" (p. 170), "harmonizing" (p. 177), "innovation" (p. 176) and "unnecessary" (p. 176). He even concludes one paragraph with the words, "their decision presents certain problems that they have not dealt with fully" (p. 174).

Perhaps BeDuhn's most remarkable euphemism is "conjectural emendation" (p. 171 and following pages). Although this term does not originate with him, he takes a whole paragraph to prepare the reader for it and to explain its meaning – but then misuses the phrase.

In fact, "conjectural emendation" is a term used by scholars to describe suggested reconstructions of the original form of incomplete or defective copies of "ancient writing for which we have few and poor manuscripts", to quote from Jobes and Silva¹³¹. (Jobes & Silva, 2000) This is the case

¹³⁰ 2 Thessalonians 1:9, 1 Peter 2:3, 1 Peter 3:15.

¹³¹ "Invitation to the Septuagint", Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000, p. 136

with some texts from antiquity, such as some writings by secular classical Greek authors. However, Jobes and Silva point out that conjectural emendations are rarely necessary with Biblical manuscripts such as the Septuagint, in consequence of the “large number of witnesses [i.e., manuscripts], some quite excellent” (op. cit., p. 136). This applies even more so with regard to manuscripts of the New Testament, which are extremely numerous, and many of which are excellent, making conjectural emendations superfluous. The term has nothing to do with translation.

But Dr BeDuhn changes the meaning of this technical expression (without telling his readers), and once he has introduced it, “conjectural emendation” becomes one of his favourite ways of avoiding words like “error”, “bias” and “wrong translation” in his references throughout the rest of the Appendix to wrong decisions by the NWT translators.

He repeatedly refers (pp. 169 (twice), 176) to other translations being “inaccurate” “over six thousand times”, by not using the word “Jehovah” in the Old Testament. He says that all the other translations in his study do this “with no justification whatsoever” (p. 176). When it comes to his assessment of the NWT’s “conjectural emendation” (inserting the word “Jehovah” into the text of the New Testament), he repeatedly points out that this only occurs 237 times (p. 169, pp. 172-3 [167 + 70 “occurrences”]).

Would one be right to assume that he hopes that by doing a little mathematics (6,000 divided by 237), his readers will realise that all the other translations are more than twenty-five times *more* at fault than the NWT? Even without doing the mathematics, it is clear that he condemns other translations for being wrong “over six thousand times”, while, according to him, the NWT is wrong only 237 times.

However, BeDuhn *does* conclude unambiguously that the NWT is wrong in its use of “Jehovah” in the New Testament (although “wrong” is, unsurprisingly, not a word that he uses). One can see why he wanted to place these comments in an appendix. But even after having presented his critical conclusions, he continues to defend the NWT, saying, for instance:

“The zeal of the NW editors to restore and preserve the name of God against an obvious trend towards expunging it in modern translations of the Bible, while *comendable* (*sic*) in itself, has carried them too far, and into a harmonizing practice of their own.” “Their principle of ‘emendation’ does not seem to work.” (Both quotations from page 177.)

Yet even after all of this, he continues to demonstrate his unflinching support for the publishers of the NWT by writing, “The God of the New Testament writers is the Jehovah (YHWH) of the Jewish biblical tradition. ... These facts remain true.” (p. 177)

CHAPTER 17: REACTIONS TO BEDUHN'S BOOK

Academic reactions to Dr BeDuhn's book

We have already seen the reaction of BeDuhn's own University to this book. They do not support the opinions that he expresses, they call the book "controversial" and they seek to disassociate themselves from it.

Scholars who are genuine specialists in Biblical languages have failed to support the stance taken by Dr BeDuhn in his book "Truth in Translation".

It may be precisely the remarkable claims that BeDuhn makes about Bible translations (especially about the New World Translation), and the remarkable claims that he makes *about himself* that have made many other academics reluctant to review this publication, being themselves aware of the unjustifiability of BeDuhn's claims *about himself* and being reluctant to state this in print.

An academic peer review of BeDuhn's book "Truth in Translation"

Dr Thomas A Howe, who holds the post of Professor of Bible and Biblical Languages at Southern Evangelical Seminary, has published a detailed study of BeDuhn's book. Dr Howe's review, which was published in 2010, is over 350 pages long and is entitled "Bias in New Testament Translations?" (Howe, 2010)

Howe goes into great technical detail concerning the Koiné Greek text of the New Testament, repeatedly demonstrating errors in BeDuhn's knowledge of Koiné Greek and his understanding of the original text, as well as errors in his use of linguistic and philosophical terms.

Howe also brings to the discussion a wealth of historical and cultural evidence that is relevant to the claims made by BeDuhn. His review of "Truth in Translation" includes detailed linguistic analysis of the original Greek text, and of the Hebrew text on which the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) was based. He also discusses in detail the theological arguments employed by Dr BeDuhn. Dr Howe's book requires (and merits!) careful study. His conclusion is unambiguous:

"BeDuhn is simply wrong" (p. 279).

What has been the reaction of the Jehovah's Witnesses to Dr BeDuhn's book?

Not surprisingly, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society makes repeated reference to Jason BeDuhn's book to justify their version of the Bible, (*Is the New World Translation Accurate?*, 2015) claiming that his book demonstrates that the NWT has "support from an academic who is not a Jehovah's Witness." Naturally, they do not quote from his criticism of the use of the word "Jehovah" nor his comments on other errors in the NWT, such as that referred to above in Romans 16:7. Nor do they quote from other academics – the overwhelming majority! – who are critical of the NWT.

Indeed, the evidence seen so far indicates that the Jehovah's Witnesses appear to have been the only ones who have been convinced by BeDuhn's arguments, in fact, the only ones who have even taken them seriously, since (except for the detailed study carried out by Dr Howe), other academics have not even commented on this book, nor have they quoted from it, to judge from the results of my own research.

I have indicated in an article¹³² that the experts used by the Jehovah's Witnesses (whether concerning Bible translation, seismology or other areas of knowledge) tend to fall into one of two categories, or even into both of them:

¹³² "The Experts quoted by the Jehovah's Witnesses" Available here: <https://livingwater-spain.com/experts.pdf> (Allin, 2022b)

- either 1) they are not experts in the area on which they are quoted;
or 2) what they actually said or wrote, when the whole sentence, paragraph, article or book quoted from is read, does not in fact support the claims made by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

However, in the case of Dr BeDuhn's book, it has been easy for the Jehovah's Witnesses to find quotations that are supportive of their doctrines and their version of the Bible. In him they have found a writer who has been prepared to support them consistently in a series of controversial renderings of Bible verses. They have therefore been able to quote from him accurately – even though highly selectively! – to their own benefit.

However, I have not seen quotations in their publications of his critical conclusions concerning their use of the word "Jehovah" in the New Testament.

Unfortunately for the Watchtower organisation, BeDuhn is not an expert in Bible languages nor in Bible translation, and he has failed to demonstrate that he alone is free from bias and therefore that his assessment of the NWT is the only one that is valid.

CHAPTER 18: HOW DID BEDUHN'S BOOK COME ABOUT?

BeDuhn himself tells us (p. xi) that "This book ... grew out of extensive correspondence I have had ... with a large number of earnest, serious students of the Bible who approached me with the questions I attempt to answer in the pages that follow."

But who would write to him to ask him for his opinion on the "New World Translation?" Why would they write to someone who was not a linguist to ask questions about linguistics? Why would they write to someone who was not a published Christian theologian to ask him questions about Christian theology? Why would they write to someone who was not a Bible translator to ask him questions about Bible translation? And why were all their questions focussed on the New World Translation (which must have been the case, as all the answers are about it)?

BeDuhn gives a clue on the same page, in the Acknowledgements, by using a phrase that will have immediately been understood by his Jehovah's Witness readers, while other readers will not have noticed its significance. He describes those who had written to him as having an "aggressive pursuit of the truth" (p. xi). On reflection non Jehovah's Witness readers might recognise the adjective "aggressive" as being a particularly appropriate description of members of the Watchtower Organization. But only Jehovah's Witnesses are likely to have recognised BeDuhn's hidden reference to *them*, describing them as those who pursue "*the truth*" (emphasis added), as Jehovah's Witnesses describe themselves as being "in The Truth". Thus BeDuhn uses coded language at the beginning of his book to signal to other Jehovah's Witnesses that he is one of them, or at least, that those who contacted him were Jehovah's Witnesses.

A highly-credible hypothesis

The following scenario appears to me to be highly probable. It is the conclusion that I have reached on the basis of the clues that Dr BeDuhn gives us in his book. It does not arise out of trawling the internet. It is not based on rumours. In fact, I have never heard this scenario referred to by anyone else. However, it seems to be a likely answer to the above questions and it fits in with the clues that Dr BeDuhn gives us and helps us to understand the stance that he takes and the arguments that he uses. But I may have reached an erroneous conclusion and so this reconstruction may be totally wrong. If so, I apologise unreservedly and would welcome further information to enable me to correct it.

On the basis of BeDuhn's decision to dedicate this book to "my Bible ladies: my mother and grandmothers", it seems extremely probable to me that Jason BeDuhn grew up in a Jehovah's Witness (or half Jehovah's Witness) household, as a third-generation Jehovah's Witness. As such, he would have heard Jehovah's Witness teachings from his youngest childhood, and the only Bible translation he probably saw or heard would have been the New World Translation. If he was typical of children of Jehovah's Witnesses, from the age of ten or even younger he will have been trained in the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses. He will at least occasionally have accompanied his mother or one or other of his grandmothers going door-to-door with "Watchtower" and "Awake" magazines, and will have sometimes taken the lead role in arguing for their doctrines on the doorstep. He will have been present at hundreds of the weekly training sessions that Jehovah's Witnesses are required to attend, in which they are taught how to counter the arguments that they hear on doorsteps. Many of these arguments centre on rejecting the deity of Christ, and all of them are based on the New World Translation of the Bible. As an intelligent child with academic potential, young Jason BeDuhn would have assimilated well the training in which he participated and the arguments that he heard.

How else would he have become familiar with the writings of Jehovah's Witness apologists like Furuli and Stafford, who are not well-known outside Jehovah's Witness circles and not recognised

as authorities in those academic circles with proven specialist linguistic knowledge of the ancient biblical texts?¹³³

However, it seems reasonable to conclude from the available evidence that during his teenage years, BeDuhn decided to go against official Jehovah's Witness policy, which advises members of the organisation not to continue their education beyond the minimum required by the law. In spite of this strongly-emphasised recommendation, he decided to continue with his studies and get a college education. Eventually he went to university, graduated, and in due course got a job teaching in a university. Like most Jehovah's Witnesses, he will in all probability have been hard-working, conscientious, disciplined and used to spending hours reading and undergoing training. Unlike them, he decided to get a "worldly" education (their terminology, used to deride such studies). Perhaps he was influenced in his decision by a non-Jehovah's Witness father or grandfather. (After all, unlike his mother and both grandmothers, they don't get a mention in the dedication of this book that defends the Jehovah's Witness translation.) But by dedicating his book to his mother and grandmothers, Jason BeDuhn showed them that their "prodigal son/grandson" had not abandoned the faith in which they had raised him.

Next, it would be logical to conclude that some Jehovah's Witnesses who had known BeDuhn from his years back home when he was well known in his local Kingdom Hall, and who in their door-to-door work had repeatedly been challenged about the accuracy of the New World Translation, said to themselves, "Hey, we know someone who has been to university and has studied religions. Let's write to Jason and see what he says about the New World Translation and the deity of Christ." Perhaps they were beginning to have doubts about some of the claims of the Watchtower organisation and sought reassurance and support from him. In all probability, he was the only university graduate that most of them knew, since Jehovah's Witnesses are constantly discouraged from continuing their education beyond school.

What leads me to conclude that these people were Jehovah's Witnesses? BeDuhn calls them "earnest, serious students of the Bible" (p. xi). One of the names used by the Watchtower organisation is "International Bible Students Association". It appears on many of their publications, including on the back of the title page of their New World Translation of the Bible. No-one can doubt that practising Jehovah's Witnesses are "earnest" and "serious", and they define themselves as "students of the Bible". No doubt this was his code, which would be recognised by Jehovah's Witnesses who read his book.

Of course, there are many other earnest and serious people who study the Bible but who are not Jehovah's Witnesses (although the Jehovah's Witnesses themselves might doubt – or even deny – that such could be the case), so I could be wrong, but my conclusion is well founded on the information provided by the author.

In any case, BeDuhn replied to these enquirers (he tells us so, p. xi). Naturally, he used the arguments that – the same as all Jehovah's Witnesses – he had apparently been trained by the organisation to use. They would probably be the only arguments that he knew well, and his understanding of the nature and beliefs of mainstream Christianity could well have been largely limited at that time to the caricature of such beliefs that is taught by the Watchtower organisation.

¹³³ At this point, the reader is entitled to ask how I have heard of such people. Am I a former Jehovah's Witness? No, I am not. Do I match the profile that I have suggested for Jason BeDuhn? No, I do not. Then how come I know about these Jehovah's Witness arguments and writers? I was a teenager the first time that two Jehovah's Witnesses called at our home and I had my first lengthy discussion with them. Over the many years since then, I have frequently been visited by Jehovah's Witnesses, and whenever it has been possible, I have spent time with them on my doorstep. In recent years I have regularly invited them into my home for longer discussions and at one point they visited me each week for many months, each visit lasting approximately two hours. Given my own background (1st class honours degree in languages and theology, Ph D in linguistics, experience working with Wycliffe Bible Translators, years of study of Koiné Greek and years studying the Bible in various languages, teaching Biblical Greek to adults), I have become very familiar with many of the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the "authorities" that they quote from, and the fundamental weaknesses of their arguments.

In his answers, he resolutely applied over and over again the same Jehovah's Witness arguments to many of the verses used by mainstream Christians to challenge "Witness" teachings (we can see this in the book), and he tells us that in time his answers "were copied and spread around" (p. xi), although he does not say by whom they were copied or to whom they were "spread around". It is reasonable to assume that many of those who received these answers that were supportive to Jehovah's Witnesses were in fact Jehovah's Witnesses themselves, who in turn copied them to other Jehovah's Witnesses. Eventually, BeDuhn acquired a reputation among Jehovah's Witnesses for presenting an argument that was convincing to them, and they were impressed by his qualifications. His answers became a sort of reference guide to the standard Jehovah's Witness answers that are given to the questions that they are asked during their door-to-door work. His name began to be known in Jehovah's Witness circles. He was quoted from by Jehovah's Witnesses.

He had an academic background that by Jehovah's Witness standards was exceptional. No wonder he was asked to publish his answers as a book. No wonder the Jehovah's Witnesses recommend it and quote from it so frequently. No wonder professional linguists, theologians and Bible translators ignore it.

This is my conclusion. I may be reading more into the evidence than is justified, but it is clear that BeDuhn has carefully selected those aspects of the information about the origins of his book that he has decided to share with us.

It is also reported¹³⁴ by Robert Hommel¹³⁵ that BeDuhn uses the Jehovah's Witnesses' "Kingdom Interlinear Text" (frequently referred to by the initials "KIT") in classes that he teaches at Northern Arizona University. This Jehovah's Witness text of the Greek New Testament uses the 1881 Greek text prepared by Westcott & Hort with an interlinear translation into English produced by the Jehovah's Witnesses and also contains the New World Translation text of the New Testament in a parallel column.

This is a quite remarkable choice of both Greek and English texts for use in a non-sectarian university, not even being based on the standard Greek text¹³⁶ that includes the results of the over 130 years of research on the papyri and other manuscripts that have come to light since Westcott and Hort's Greek text was published.

It is difficult to believe that anyone other than a Jehovah's Witness (or a former Jehovah's Witness) would choose this text for their classes. It has not been possible to discover any other university lecturer world-wide who has made this choice.

One is also entitled to ask why the Jehovah's Witness organisation decided to produce its own interlinear text of the New Testament, when other interlinear texts were already available. One must conclude that both the Greek and the English of the other texts did not say what the Jehovah's Witnesses wanted them to say.

¹³⁴ https://www.forananswer.org/Top_JW/Scholars%20and%20NWT.htm#Barclay originally accessed on 25.5.14, last accessed on 3.7.24. (Hommel, 2024b) A search for "BeDuhn" within this lengthy article will bring up the reference. See also the next web reference.

¹³⁵ https://www.forananswer.org/Mars_Jw/JB-RH.Jn1_1.Index.htm Originally accessed on 25.5.14, last accessed on 3.7.24. (Hommel, 2024a)

¹³⁶ Nestle-Aland 27 or 28

CHAPTER 19: CONCLUSION

The reasonably detailed study that I have carried out and present here reveals an overwhelming weight of evidence that undermines both BeDuhn's credibility and the validity of his arguments. I have sought as far as possible not to engage in theological arguments or discussions of doctrine, focussing instead on the text of the New Testament from a linguistic point of view and examining some of BeDuhn's arguments on the same basis. Even so,

this study demonstrates BeDuhn's fundamental bias in favour of Jehovah's Witness doctrines and the New World translation, and his equivalent but opposite bias against translations and doctrines that do not support the Jehovah's Witness view. In fact, his book is less a review of Bible translations and more a sustained attack on the concept of the deity of Christ as described in the original Greek texts.

It totally ignores other major issues affecting the translation of the Bible, such as difference between the text used by the translators of the Authorised Version of 1611¹³⁷ and the NA27/UBS4 text used by all modern translations except the NWT. It likewise ignores the implications of the Watchtower Society's choice of the Westcott & Hort text.

BeDuhn's claim at the beginning of the book (p. ix) to be "a neutral investigator" has turned out to be totally unsubstantiated by the facts.

Even the most cursory reading of BeDuhn's book will have been sufficient for others to see that it does not present a credible, academic argument that holds water. Out of a sense of professional solidarity, most of BeDuhn's colleagues may have decided not to take public issue with him, to explain the weaknesses of his arguments. Others have no doubt recognised that there were more profitable uses of their time in other avenues of research, and other publications more worthy of their attention. Most have just ignored him and his book.

A careful reading of Dr BeDuhn's book enables us to see why his own university has sought to distance itself from this publication. It certainly does not withstand scholarly scrutiny and does not attain the level of academic rigour that an educational institution of any standing would wish to see in the published work of its academic staff.

For those seeking a detailed refutation of the interpretations made by the Jehovah's Witnesses in the NWT and by BeDuhn, Dr Thomas A Howe's book of 2010 (Howe, 2010), which is referred to more than once in this review, has much to commend it. He and I inevitably reach some of the same conclusions and my indebtedness to him will be obvious at some points. I have done my best to give him the credit in the appropriate places. However, the brief that he set himself was different from the one I set myself, so the overlap between his book and this book is less than might be expected. His book of 2015 (Howe, 2015) also merits careful study.

Jehovah's Witnesses have clearly welcomed BeDuhn's book enthusiastically, even if they have not necessarily read it in full themselves¹³⁸. But as Jehovah's Witnesses have been for decades instructed by their organisation not to undertake higher education, there are probably few Jehovah's Witnesses who are university graduates in any discipline, and there are likely to be none other than Dr BeDuhn who have studied theology at university level. Likewise, there will be few

¹³⁷ That text, nowadays commonly referred to as the "Textus Receptus" (occasionally also called the "Majority Text"), was prepared by the Dutch scholar Erasmus from the Greek manuscripts to which he had access, and published in 1516. (Erasmus, 1516) Because some of the Greek manuscripts that he consulted were incomplete, he occasionally translated into Greek certain phrases and verses from Jerome's 4th century AD Latin Vulgate. In contrast, the editors of the Nestle-Aland and Bible Society texts in the 19th to 21st centuries had access to many more numerous and much more ancient Greek manuscripts.

¹³⁸ I draw this conclusion from my discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses, whose familiarity with Dr BeDuhn's book appears to be limited to the references made to it in Watchtower publications and on the organization's web page.

if any with professional training as linguists. Thus many might find even following some of Dr BeDuhn's arguments difficult.

Nevertheless, "Watchtower" and "Awake" magazines quote regularly from BeDuhn's conclusions. In fact, they quote very selectively, avoiding his criticisms of their use of the word "Jehovah". They state that in him and in this book there is reliable, independent, academic endorsement of the New World Translation.¹³⁹ They also say the same things about BeDuhn on their English-language website. Unfortunately, this proves not to be the case.

"Truth in Translation" uses the techniques of the Watchtower organisation and in fact looks as though it had been written to order at the organisation's request, for it to use as propaganda. Even if this is not in fact the case, BeDuhn is so clearly influenced by Watchtower terminology and doctrine that he even refers to the need for "further light" (p. 94), echoing the Jehovah's Witness doctrine that enables them to change doctrines that may have been taught for decades as being "the truth", and to introduce new doctrines from time to time. At the very least, he has been deeply influenced (perhaps subconsciously) by the methods and style of Watchtower publications.

Whatever the background and circumstances behind the writing of this book, it is clear that it is not part of Dr BeDuhn's professional academic work and is not based on his areas of specialist knowledge. That is perhaps why he starts his Acknowledgements by saying, "This book took me by surprise" (p. xi). And so we can understand some of the basic errors that he makes. As a person who is not recognised in the academic world for expertise in Biblical languages, it was not natural for BeDuhn to write a book on this topic.

In the final paragraph of the appendix, BeDuhn optimistically surmises, "It may be that some day a Greek manuscript of some portion of the New Testament will be found, let's say a particularly early one, that has the Hebrew letters YHWH in *some* of the verses listed above. When that happens ..." (p. 178). My comment: "when" – not "if"? – so BeDuhn is saying that it *will* happen. What has happened to his alleged position as a "neutral, unbiased" writer? What manuscript or other evidence does he have to lead him to conclude, as an independent academic, that this *will* happen? He doesn't tell us.

This really is wishful thinking on his part with no factual or scholarly basis, a forlorn hope that one day "a manuscript" will turn up to support the NWT version published by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

BeDuhn implies that *one single manuscript* would be enough for him. It would not even need to be of the whole New Testament; a fragment "of some portion of the New Testament" would be enough to overthrow the evidence of the tens of thousands of manuscripts that we already have that demonstrate that the NWT is wrong.

To continue with the quotation from Dr BeDuhn: "When that happens, when evidence is at hand" – i.e., evidence currently is *not* at hand – "biblical researchers will have to give due consideration to the views held by the NW editors." "Editors"? Not "translators"? "Until that day, translators must follow the manuscript tradition as it is currently known." Here is a covert criticism of the NWT translators, who have not followed that "manuscript tradition". However, this claim by BeDuhn implies that the evidence that *will* support them *is* there, somewhere; we just haven't found it yet. But we *will*, "when that happens".

However, it is the final clause of this sentence that is perhaps *the most revealing of the whole book*. It is the final clause of the penultimate sentence of the final paragraph *of the appendix*. (One might wonder how many readers who have skimmed through the book will have got this far.) First, it expresses the perplexity of Jehovah's Witnesses at the lack of documentary manuscript evidence to support their claims about the use of the word "Jehovah" in the New Testament: "translators

¹³⁹ Information provided by statements from Jehovah's Witnesses, and on the organisation's website.

must follow the manuscript tradition as it is currently known, *even if some of its characteristics appear to us puzzling*".

But the key word in this clause is "us". Here is the whole of the clause: "even if some of its characteristics appear to us as puzzling, perhaps even inconsistent with what we believe"!

It seems to me that BeDuhn here reveals two things:

- that he is a Jehovah's Witness and believes that their claims are right
- that his intended audience is other Jehovah's Witnesses.

We must also note precisely the import of what Dr BeDuhn is saying here about the New Testament, which he obliquely calls "the manuscript tradition":

"some of *its* characteristics appear ... *inconsistent with what we believe.*"

In other words,

there is a mismatch between what "we" believe and what the New Testament actually says. Simply put, what BeDuhn and his target audience believe is contradicted by the actual New Testament manuscripts that we have. This is a most remarkable admission by Dr BeDuhn.

When there is such a contradiction between people's beliefs and what the New Testament really says, something must give. Those who call themselves Christians should be prepared to change what they believe, to bring it into line with the teaching of the Bible.

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society has chosen an *alternative* solution to eliminate the "inconsistency": they have changed the text of the Bible to bring it into line with their doctrines.

And in his book Dr BeDuhn has gone to extraordinary lengths to support them in this action, criticising only one detail. He has then done his utmost to bury that criticism as best as possible, while repeatedly describing other obvious errors and mistranslations by them as "accurate".

The importance of this review is that it does not just present a private difference of opinion between the present author and Dr BeDuhn; it is not just my word against his; most of the claims presented by BeDuhn are refuted in this review by reference to the published statements of well-known experts in the fields of linguistics, Koiné Greek and the Biblical texts, many of whom have spent a lifetime researching these subjects and teaching them at some of the most prestigious universities in the world.

These detailed references and quotations demonstrate to some extent the virtually world-wide consensus of expert opinion, knowledge and analysis on these matters. The reader is encouraged to consult the Bibliography at the end of this study.

It is just not an option to retort that "they are all wrong", the response that the present author received from one Jehovah's Witness recently.

Writing in 1943 about those who produce propaganda during a war, George Orwell stated, "The truth, it is felt, becomes untruth when your enemy utters it."¹⁴⁰ (Orwell, 1966) The scholars who are experts in the Biblical texts are not normally considered enemies of anyone. However, they are viewed as such by the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose reaction in response to evidence that demonstrates the unreliability of their "New World Translation" matches exactly Orwell's comment. Significantly, Orwell went on to state, "[but] however much you deny the truth, the truth goes on existing, as it were, behind your back." (ibid, p. 237) The same applies with regard to the statements of the real specialists in the Biblical texts, whose judgements, conclusions and even categorical statements of fact are ignored by Dr BeDuhn in his book.

¹⁴⁰In "Looking back on the Spanish Civil War", printed in one volume with "Homage to Catalonia", Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966, p. 229.

In contrast with this review, BeDuhn has not been able to quote from academics and specialists in support of his opinions, other than quoting the standard references by Jehovah's Witnesses to random verses in other translations that can be claimed to support their interpretation, and repeating Jehovah's Witness statements claiming the alleged support of two or three academics, all of whom sadly deceased many years ago, most of whose supposed statements were never independently published.

I regret that, unavoidably, much of the focus of this review has been on the lack of expertise of Dr BeDuhn and that it has therefore not been possible for it to be written in the dispassionate style that characterises much academic writing. This has been due to various reasons:

- 1) The Watchtower Society claims that Dr BeDuhn is in no way associated with the sect. The evidence from BeDuhn's book indicates that this is almost certainly not the case.
- 2) The Watchtower Society has constantly – and unjustifiably – emphasised Dr BeDuhn's status as a leading academic and a recognised expert in the Biblical texts.
- 3) In his book, Dr BeDuhn repeatedly promotes himself as such, boasting of his standing as a historian, a theologian and a neutral investigator (see references throughout this review).
- 4) BeDuhn's own style fails to conform to normal academic standards, lambasting those with whom he disagrees as "absurd", without presenting evidence to support his criticism of them.
- 5) In his book, BeDuhn ignores all relevant evidence and professional opinions that do not agree with his claims, instead of engaging with the evidence and explaining why contrary opinions are not valid.
- 6) BeDuhn makes remarkable claims that contradict the principles that he states will guide his study.
- 7) Ultimately, BeDuhn's arguments are unconvincing because they are not supported by the evidence. On the contrary, they go against the overwhelming mass of evidence on virtually every point.

Dr BeDuhn will be aware that any academic who wishes to be taken seriously cannot just ignore, misrepresent or reject the facts and learned opinions stated by virtually all the other experts in the field. Unfortunately, this is what he has done in his book. It is therefore easy to see why most other academics have not taken it or him seriously.

Thus it becomes clear that his book is not the result of the research of an autonomous academic who in the course of his professional investigations has independently come to the conclusion that the New World Translation is right. "Truth in Translation" does not appear to be any part of Dr BeDuhn's professional research and he appears to have "no training or demonstrated expertise in ... any of the subjects relevant to the book in question".

Here I quote from Hurtado, writing on 15th August 2013 (Hurtado, 2013) *not with reference to BeDuhn* but on "Zombie claims" in his blog "Comments on the New Testament and Early Christianity (and related matters)": <https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2013/08/15/zombie-claims-and-jesus-the-zealot/> Last accessed on 3 July 2024.

Hurtado defines "zombie claims" as follows: "One of the things variously amusing and annoying is the re-appearance of ideas and claims in my own area of expertise as if something new, something suppressed (e.g., by us scholars supposedly) and reeeeally racy and sensationally important but that are in fact simply re-hashings (or re-packagings) of previous claims that were quite adequately and convincingly discredited years (or even decades) ago. I call these "zombie claims": No matter how often you kill 'em off with the facts, they come back again ..."

This quotation is doubly relevant here, since in BeDuhn's book we have a defence both of a translation and of various doctrines that have in the past been studied in detail by scholars and "convincingly discredited years (or even decades) ago".

We must with regret conclude that at the time when Jason BeDuhn wrote his book he had not yet reached the level of knowledge and expertise in linguistics, theology and translation techniques –

nor even in Koiné Greek! – that such a study required. Thus, his claims about himself were at best premature. Consequently, his judgements in his book are unreliable. They are also biased by his personal religious beliefs, which reflect those of the Jehovah's Witnesses. If he were now to examine all of the relevant data – and in an unbiased way --, he would certainly arrive at quite different conclusions, and I hope that he will have the opportunity to do this.

However, in his book BeDuhn unfortunately gives the impression of being no more than a mouthpiece for the Jehovah's Witnesses. "Truth in Translation" appears to be a work commissioned by the Jehovah's Witnesses, whether formally or informally,¹⁴¹ in order to fabricate a source that they could turn to in their claims of independent scholarly support for their translation. BeDuhn has believed their doctrinal claims, imitated their methods and repeated their arguments, while constantly claiming that he alone in all the world is not biased. I regret that this is a claim that does not withstand objective examination. The reliability of the claims that he makes in his book is thus totally destroyed, and with it, the reliability of the "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures".

¹⁴¹ BeDuhn implies as much on page xi

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