

# **The Experts quoted by the Jehovah's Witnesses**

*Who are they? What do they really say?*

by Dr Trevor R Allin

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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 Resígaro".

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."<sup>1</sup>, the Spanish edition of the leading textbook on New Testament Greek, Jeremy Duff's "The Elements of New Testament Greek".<sup>2</sup> He has taught New Testament (Koiné) Greek to Spanish-speaking adult students in Spain and has delivered lectures in various places in England Spain on the most important early Greek manuscripts of the Bible, including Codex Sinaiticus.

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<sup>1</sup> CLIE, 2019 See <https://www.clie.es/curso-de-griego-biblico>

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

## **Introduction**

When the Jehovah's Witnesses seek to justify a phrase or verse in their version of the Bible, to justify their interpretation of history, or their doctrines and teachings, they give great prominence to quotations from experts in the corresponding field of knowledge, whether of history, seismology, Koiné Greek or something else.

Undoubtedly, some of these people are respected experts in the matter under consideration, and of course we would be entitled to expect that the quotations give a good indication of the thinking of the expert in question.

Unfortunately, in many cases an investigation of the quotation and of its author leads to one of two conclusions – or even to both of them at once!

- 1) The “expert” quoted turns out not to be an expert recognised by other scholars in that area of knowledge;
- 2) The “quotation” given does not correspond to what the expert really said.

Here we will give some examples of these two cases. This is not the result of a long and in-depth investigation of everything that the Jehovah's Witnesses have written and published, but simply the consequence of a short check of documents that I have to hand in relation to articles that have been given to me by Jehovah's Witnesses and publications of theirs that I have read recently. However, it appears to be representative of their use of quotations of experts.

This brief review is divided into three sections:

- I. Article in “Insight on the Scriptures”<sup>3</sup> on the word “Jehovah”
- II. Quotations from Scientists
- III. Quotations on experts in Greek concerning the Jehovah's Witness version of certain Biblical phrases.

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<sup>3</sup> This two-volume reference book was published in 1988. It replaced the book “Aid to Bible Understanding” (1969, 1971).

## **Part I:**

### **Article in “Insight on the Scriptures” on the word “Jehovah”**

The “Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania”, a Jehovah’s Witness body, has published a reference book on the Bible with the title “*Insight on the Scriptures*” and has translated it and published it in many languages. A local Jehovah’s Witness gave me a print-out of this article from the Spanish version of the book, “*Perspicacia para comprender las Escrituras*”. This book is one of the principal authorities used by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, along with other publications from the same organisation, and it is also available in electronic format, to make it easier to consult and to quote from.

In the article on “Jehovah” in this book, the authors make references to various “experts” and quote from some of them. Here are some examples.

#### **i) Aquila**

Three of the “authorities” quoted by this article turn out to be one and the same person, Aquila, a Greek who made a translation into Greek of the Jewish holy scriptures (The Old Testament) in the second century A.D. So these “three” justifications are in reality only one.

The scholar who is the most respected world-wide in matters of the Greek texts of the Old Testament, Alfred Rahlfs, who edited the definitive text of the Septuagint<sup>4</sup>, described<sup>5</sup> Aquila’s work as:

- 1) “perpetrating the most appalling outrages to the whole essence of the Greek language.” (p. XXXVII)
- 2) He then states, “Aquila’s translation of the Bible must on occasions have proved altogether incomprehensible to Non-Jews” (p. XXXIX)
- 3) He also tells us that “Aquila’s translation lost its authority” (p. XXXIX).

Rahlfs gives in the Introduction to the Septuagint much more information on the completely erroneous translation principles adopted by Aquila – the same Aquila whose “terrible” translation (to quote Rahlfs) forms the *principal* basis employed by the Jehovah’s Witnesses to justify their use of the word “Jehovah”.

#### **Aquila Conclusion**

Aquila is not an “expert” who deserves to be quoted – the first of the two problems indicated above: he is not an expert recognised by other scholars in this area of knowledge.

#### **ii) George Howard**

In an article entitled “1c The divine name in the ancient Greek versions”<sup>6</sup>, the author of the article in “Insight” makes reference to a “study” carried out by a certain George Howard, “The Oldest Greek Text of Deuteronomy”, published in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol XLII, Cincinnati, 1971, pp. 125-131. The Jehovah’s Witness author of the article in “Insight” does not even quote from the study by George Howard to which he refers, nor does he summarise its content, but the mere presence of the name of this academic gives the impression that an “expert” has published an academic article which – we would suppose – must have given some support to the argument presented by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

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<sup>4</sup> Rahlfs, Alfred, “Septuaginta Duo volumina in uno”, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006

<sup>5</sup> In no less a document than the Introduction to the Septuagint.

<sup>6</sup> Received from Spanish Jehovah’s Witnesses in Spanish with the title, “1c El nombre divino en antiguas versiones griegas”

Imagine our surprise when we discover that nothing could be further from the truth. In various articles in their publications, the Jehovah's Witnesses repeatedly refer to George Howard, and he responded to this in a letter written on 8th July 1988<sup>7</sup>, in which he says that:

- 1) what he had written about the name "Jehovah" was nothing more than a "suggestion" and a "theory";
- 2) subsequent research by another researcher "weakens my theory";
- 3) "The Jehovah's Witnesses have made too much out of my articles. I do not support their theories."

### **George Howard Conclusion**

In this case we see both of the problems indicated above:

- 1) Howard was at the very beginning of his professional career when he wrote something about a theory that he had which he subsequently recognised to have been erroneous.
- 2) He protested in writing about the use of his name by the Jehovah's Witnesses – but he did not succeed in getting them to stop using it.

### **iii) R B Girdlestone**

It is almost guaranteed that the reader of this article in "Insight" will not know the name of Girdlestone. The article says that he is a "former director" of Wycliffe Hall (Oxford), which may impress the reader. If we do a little research, we discover that Robert Baker Girdlestone was born in 1836 and that he had various jobs, one of them as vicar of an Anglican church in district that was at the time in the outskirts of London. At the age of 41 (in 1877) he took on the role of the first Principal of Wycliffe Hall, which had been formed by some Anglicans with the intention of training candidates for the ministry of the Church of England. He had a particular interest in the Old Testament.

There have been tens of thousands of vicars in the Anglican Church. Between them, they have preached millions of sermons, and countless thousands of these sermons have been published (sometimes in parish magazines). They have also written hymns, articles and books. One of these vicars – the one quoted here – said or wrote some phrases that the author of this article in "Insight" considers gives support to his argument concerning the use of the word "Jehovah".

In their authoritative guide to the use of quotations, known technically as "citations"<sup>8</sup>, Pears & Shields state that referencing "allows your reader to locate the source material easily so that they can verify the validity of your arguments."<sup>9</sup>

However, we do not know where or when Girdlestone might have said or written this, because the author of the Jehovah's Witness article does not give us the bibliographic data. For this reason, we do not know the context of these phrases, nor the conclusions that the Rev Girdlestone might have reached.

Before leaving this reverend gentleman, we ought to look more carefully at what he is reported to have said or written. These are the words quoted:

"If that version [the *Septuagint*]<sup>10</sup> had retained the term [Jehovah], or even if it had used the Greek word for *Jehovah* and another for *'Adônây*, doubtless such usage

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<sup>7</sup> A photocopy of this letter is to be found in "In Search of Christian Freedom" by Raymond Franz, an ex-member of the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Atlanta: Commentary Press, 2007, p.726.

<sup>8</sup> Pears, R, & Shields, G., "Cite Them Right: The Essential Referencing Guide", London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004, 13th edition published 2025

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 1

<sup>10</sup> Words in square brackets added by the author of the article in "Insight".

would have been retained in the discourses and discussions of the N[ew] T[estament]. Thus our Lord, on quoting Psalm 110, instead of saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord', would have possibly said 'Jehovah said to 'Adônây' ''<sup>11</sup>

Without any doubt, the most important word in this quotation is the first word "If". "*If*" something, *then* something else. In other words, this is a theory, a suggestion or a proposal about something that possibly might have happened. We do not know if Mr Girdlestone concluded that it had happened, that it had not happened, or that he did not know, because the author of the article in "Insight" does not tell us. Observe also the form of the verb employed by Girdlestone: "If that version [the *Septuagint*] had retained the term [Jehovah] ...". This is the form of the verb that introduces the maximum possible degree of doubt concerning the theory presented. The quotation continues with the words, "or even if it had used the Greek word for Jehovah". Again, in the space of a single sentence, the original writer uses the form of the verb that indicates that it is very improbable that this has been the case.

Having read this, we do not need to go any further. Girdlestone wants us to see very clearly that the possibility that the Jews of the time of Christ might have used the word "Jehovah" is so remote that he believes that it didn't happen. He does not even consider that they might have used an equivalent Greek word.

But the person who rapidly reads this lengthy 16-page article will not in most cases stop to reflect in such depth on what he or she has just read. He or she will draw the conclusion that the argument presented by the Jehovah's Witnesses is supported by a famous scholar of the present day or the recent past. *All* of these conclusions would be incorrect:

- he is not a famous scholar;
- he is not of the present day or the recent past;
- and when we read the quotation, we realise that he does not even support the argument presented – in fact, he rejects it!

## **R B Girdlestone Conclusion**

In this case we again see *both* of the problems indicated above:

- 1) Girdlestone, a nineteenth-century Anglican vicar, had a special interest in the Old Testament, from which we must conclude that he did *not* have specialist interest or knowledge concerning the text of the New Testament.
- 2) When one analyses what he seems to have said or written on some occasion (the "quotation" given by the Jehovah's Witnesses), it does not even remotely indicate any support for the allegations made by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

## **Conclusion to Part I, the "experts" quoted in "Insight" to justify the use of the word "Jehovah"**

Thus, looking no further than the article in "Insight" on "Jehovah", the three main academic or historical "witnesses" (or *five*, according to the Jehovah's Witnesses, since they count Aquila three times!) do not give any support at all to the argument presented.

## **Articles on the word "Jehovah"**

For more information about the word "Jehovah", see the article "What is the real meaning of Matthew 6:9? Should we call God "Jehovah"?" on this website, here:

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

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<sup>11</sup> Given the absence of any bibliographical data, it has not been possible to find the original text. I have therefore translated from the Spanish back into English for this quotation.

*The Experts quoted by the Jehovah's Witnesses*

For more information on the supposed use of the Hebrew word “Yahweh” in ancient Greek manuscripts of the Jewish Scriptures (our “Old Testament”), see the article ““God’s Sacred Name in the Bible” Was the word for “God” written in Hebrew letters in the ancient Greek manuscripts of the Jewish Scriptures?” on this website, here:

[https://livingwater-spain.com/Heb\\_in\\_LXX\\_MS.pdf](https://livingwater-spain.com/Heb_in_LXX_MS.pdf)

## **Part II: Quotations from Scientists**

Having seen the misuse by the Jehovah's Witnesses of quotations about the text of the Bible, we should not be surprised when we discover exactly the same problem when the Jehovah's Witnesses quote from scientists and other specialists.

First, it is necessary to explain the context. When their predictions that Christ would return to the earth in 1874, and then in 1878, failed, they made a new prediction, promoted in millions of copies of their books and magazines, that He would return to the earth in the autumn of 1914. This, in spite of the fact that Christ Himself had said, "No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven."<sup>12</sup>

When it didn't happen, they alleged that He had indeed "returned" – but that no-one had seen Him. This goes – of course – completely contrary to the words of Jesus Christ Himself, who said: "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it."<sup>13</sup> and "if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."<sup>14</sup> In other words, Christ predicted that there would be people who would say that He had "come" *secretly* or *invisibly*, and He warned His followers not to believe such claims.

### **A seismologist**

Given these problems created for the Jehovah's Witnesses if they take the words of Christ Himself into account, they turn to "scientists" and "experts" in an effort to demonstrate that since 1914 there has been an enormous increase in earthquakes, illnesses, famines, etc., which they claim are "evidence" of the "coming" of Christ.

For the sake of brevity, we will limit ourselves to the matter of earthquakes, and the evidence from a seismologist quoted in a magazine published by the Jehovah's Witnesses. In their issue of 15 May 1983 they wrote that the seismologist Keiiti Aki "speaks of 'the apparent surge in intensity and frequency of major earthquakes during the last one hundred years'."<sup>15</sup> Certainly, this quotation appears to support the claim presented by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

But if we read the entire statement made by Professor Aki, we will draw the opposite conclusion! Here is what he wrote:

"The apparent surge in intensity and frequency of major earthquakes during the last one hundred years is, in all probability, due to improved recording of earthquakes and the increased vulnerability of human society to earthquake damage."<sup>16</sup>

In the same paragraph of the letter quoted from by the Jehovah's Witnesses, in the following sentence, Professor Aki wrote:

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 24:36 New International Version, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society. See also Mark 13:32.

<sup>13</sup> Mark 13:21, NIV

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 24:26-27, NIV

<sup>15</sup> In the English version of their magazine, "The Watchtower".

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Professor Keiiti Aki to the Watch Tower Society in Brooklyn, on 30 September 1982. A photocopy of this letter was made available by Professor Aki to the authors Carl Olof Jonsson and Wolfgang Herbst, who published it with his permission in the book "The Sign of the Last Days – When?", Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1987.

“The main reason is the well established plate tectonics which indicates a very steady fault motion over the past many millions of years.”

By making a very selective quotation of *one part of one sentence* written by this expert, the author of the article published by the Jehovah's Witnesses managed to give the impression that Professor Aki supported the claim made by the Jehovah's Witnesses, when he had clearly said the opposite of this! It is not surprising that after the publication of this article with its deceitful quotation, Professor Aki wrote:

“it is clear that they quoted the part they wanted, eliminating my main message.”<sup>17</sup>

This deliberate and brazen distortion of the statements of a scientist is completely unacceptable according to all criteria: intellectual, academic and moral – without taking into account the “spiritual” perspective of people (the Jehovah's Witnesses) who claim to be “*God's only representatives on the earth*”.

In their book on citations referred to above, Pears and Shields state:

“The influential International Center for Academic Integrity (2021) identified six factors in academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage:

- ▶ We should be honest about our contribution to our subject, and clearly distinguish our work from that of other contributors
- ▶ We should show that we can be trusted to make informed and well-intentioned contributions that do not distort [the sources quoted] or mislead our audience
- ▶ We should be fair in providing our audiences with a range of evidence, alternative ideas and perspectives about a topic
- ▶ We should respect the work of other contributors to represent it accurately (even if we disagree with them)
- ▶ We should take responsibility for our actions and words and the effect these may have on others
- ▶ We should have the courage to support these principles in our academic community”<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that in their use of quotations as shown above, the Jehovah's Witnesses fail to meet every one of the points of academic integrity that have been stated by the International Center for Academic Integrity.

## **Conclusion to Part II, Quotations from Scientists**

- 1) Dr Keiiti Aki is indeed an expert recognised in his special field of research.
- 2) But the “quotation” made by the Jehovah's Witnesses says the opposite of what he in fact wrote!

It is not surprising that in scientific and academic circles, university researchers do not take seriously the statements and claims made by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

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<sup>17</sup> Letter from Keiiti Aki dated 16 June 1986 to the same authors. A photocopy of this letter is reproduced on page 243 of the same book.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.1

**Part III:  
Quotations from experts in Greek  
on the Jehovah's Witness version of certain Biblical phrases**

It goes without saying that the Jehovah's Witnesses use the same deceitful methods to justify their inaccurate version of certain Biblical texts – either by quoting phrases taken out of context from Biblical verses or by quoting from translators, to give an appearance of support where none exists.

Once again, the quotations given are very selective, so that sometimes the scholars quoted seem to support the Jehovah's Witnesses' argument, when in reality they do the exact opposite.

**Dana & Mantey**

Thus, for example, in the Appendix of the first English edition of the “New World Translation”, and in the Appendix of their interlinear text (“The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures”)<sup>19</sup> they quote from the book “A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament” by Dana and Mantey<sup>20</sup> to justify their addition of the word “a” in their version of John 1:1 (“the Word was with God and the Word was a god”, according to their version). They quote some phrases from page 148 of Dana and Mantey's book. The phrases quoted seem to support their translation. But they cut the quotation precisely before the conclusion given by Dana and Mantey: “As it stands, the other persons of the Trinity may be implied in θεός,” (p. 149)

In other words, Dana and Mantey say that the use of the word θεός with reference to Christ can indicate that He is God, whereas on reading the incomplete quotation given in the Watchtower document, one would think that they were saying the opposite of this! This lack of accuracy and of academic honesty only damages the Jehovah's Witnesses amongst the experts who know the real statements of the documents that the Jehovah's Witness claim to have support from, when in reality such documents do not offer them any support at all.

**Dana & Mantey Conclusion**

- 1) Dana and Mantey are experts in the Koiné Greek in which the New Testament was written.
- 2) But the “quotation” made by the Jehovah's Witnesses of *one part* – taken completely out of context – of one paragraph of one of their books gives an impression that is the opposite of what they had written and the conclusions that they had reached in the very next sentence.

**William Barclay**

William Barclay was one of the main British theologians of the twentieth century, Professor of Religion and Biblical Studies of the University of Glasgow, as well as the author of many commentaries on Biblical books, in which he included his own translation of New Testament passages.

The magazine *The Watchtower* quoted in their issue of 15 May 1977<sup>21</sup> from a book written by William Barclay<sup>22</sup>, claiming that he supported their translation of the last phrase in verse 1 of John chapter 1: “the word was *a* god” (with the addition of the word “a”, which does not occur in the original Greek).

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<sup>19</sup> Appendix p. 1158 “John 1:1 – “a god”

<sup>20</sup> © Tommie P Dana & Julius R Mantey, 1955, Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955

<sup>21</sup> Page 320

<sup>22</sup> *Many Witnesses, One Lord.* SCM Press, 1966

This is not the place to go into a discussion of the translation of this verse, since we are focussing our attention on the use that is made of quotations from experts in publications of the Jehovah's Witnesses. When Dr Barclay saw what had been published in *The Watchtower*, he wrote a reply,<sup>23</sup> in which he said:

“The Watchtower article has, by judicious cutting, made me say the opposite of what I meant to say.”<sup>24</sup>

And so we see – once again – the same principle used by the organisation of the Jehovah's Witnesses in all the quotations from experts studied in this article: the principle of selecting *even parts of phrases*, to give an impression of support by academics and experts, when an honest and truthful quotation of the *whole* phrase, sentence or paragraph in question would have demonstrated that all these experts had said the opposite of what the authors of the Jehovah's Witness articles claimed.

It is clear that this is not due to an error by the author of an isolated Jehovah's Witness article. Even after Dr Barclay sent them his complaint, the Jehovah's Witnesses organisation *continues publishing their “quotation” that twists what he in reality wrote!*

### **William Barclay Conclusion**

- 1) William Barclay was an expert in the New Testament.
- 2) The “quotation” in which the Jehovah's Witnesses made “judicious cuts” gave the opposite meaning to that which had been expressed by Dr Barclay.

### **Detailed Analysis of John 1:1**

For a detailed analysis of the verse John 1:1, see the article “What is the Correct Translation of John 1:1?” on this website, here:

[https://livingwater-spain.com/John\\_1\\_1.pdf](https://livingwater-spain.com/John_1_1.pdf)

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<sup>23</sup> In a letter dated 26 August 1977.

<sup>24</sup> A part of this letter is quoted in “Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John” by Robert M Bowman, Jr, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989. A photocopy of the whole letter can be seen in *Thus Saith ... the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses* by Randall Watters, Manhattan Beach, CA: Bethel Ministries, 1984, pp 72-74.

## **What conclusions can we draw from all of the above?**

With reference to “Finding academic sources to use”, Pears & Graham state<sup>25</sup> that for information to have “academic credibility”, it must be:

- ▶ Accurate: evidenced by references that substantiate the author’s findings or opinions. ...
- ▶ Current: depending on the subject, this could be medical information that is up to date, or use an older source that provides an insight into earlier historians’ views on a topic
- ▶ Objective: think about why the author created it. ... Is the information balanced, avoiding bias and informing you of different opinions even if these disagree with the author’s views? ...
- ▶ Relevant ...
- ▶ Named: it has named authors or organisations that you check for their authority to write or speak on this subject, such as the author’s experience, where they work and their scholarly or professional qualifications.”

By these criteria, the use of quotations by the Jehovah’s Witnesses fails all tests of academic credibility.

With particular reference to the internet, Pears & Graham state<sup>26</sup>, “people can write whatever they want and are often unaccountable for what they publish. The author may give an opinion on a topic, even if they have no expertise or academic knowledge of the subject. They may omit information that contradicts their opinions ... to mislead or change your views.” This can also be found in published books, as demonstrated in these claims by the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

All this deception by the Jehovah’s Witnesses when using “quotations” in their publications over a period of decades demonstrates two things:

- 1) The organisation does not mind lying; the policy is *to persuade the reader by all methods, including deception.*
- 2) *There are no experts* who support most of the doctrines and supposedly scientific claims made by the Jehovah’s Witnesses – because *if they had existed, the organisation would have quoted from them*, and would not have had to turn to distortion and deceit.

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<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 10

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 11