

THE TEXT OF REVELATION 22.14

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There are two well-attested readings of Rev 22.14, the seventh and final blessing in the book. The reading accepted in the UBS 4th edition is $\text{Μακάριοι οὐ ἴδοντες τὸς στολὰς αὐτῶν}$, 'Blessed are those who wash their robes' (RSV). Most twentieth-century NT editions, including Nestle-Aland, and most commentators agree with the UBS.¹ But, in my view, the original text is the other well-attested reading, $\text{Μακάριοι οὐ ποιοῦντες τὸς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ}$, 'Blessed are those who do his commandments' (footnote in RSV). The manuscript attestation and versional evidence is not decisive for either reading, but patristic references, literary analysis, and consistency with the worldview in Revelation all favour the reading $\text{ποιοῦντες τὸς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ}$.

There are not many early text copies of Revelation; no papyrus attestation of Rev 22.14 has yet appeared. Rev 22.14 appears in only three uncials. Lectionaries provide no help, as Revelation played no widespread early liturgical role. In part because Revelation entered the canon late, the available texts of Revelation do not closely correspond to the categories sometimes found helpful in some other NT books. Though 'do his commandments' is supported in most minuscules, both readings have much manuscript and versional support.² Of the three uncials, two (including the influential Alexandrinus) attest the usually-accepted reading; but, on the other hand, the Syriac versions support the reading preferred here. The scholars who support the text with 'wash their robes' have disagreed as to whether the other reading would have arisen as an early example of an inadvertent error or as an intentional change.³

Early patristic citations of Revelation, therefore, have the potential to be particularly useful in this case. Tertullian (a conservative writer),⁴ Cyprian,

¹ In this century, the few exceptions to this near-consensus view include H. von Soden, *Griechisches Neues Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913) and H. C. Hoskier in the introduction (L.xl-xli) to his massive 2 vol. work, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1928). Examples of the many twentieth-century commentators who accept the reading of 'wash their robes' include, e.g., R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 2:370 and J. P. M. Sweet (WPC), Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) 316-17, which describes the 'wash their robes' reading as 'less obvious but more pointed, and almost certainly original' (316).

² B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1971) 767.

³ See J. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes 2 Teil: Die Altensätze* (München: Karl Zink, 1955) 83. Schmid took the former position. B. Weiss the latter, in *Die Johannes-Apokalypse. Textkritische Untersuchungen und Textherstellung* (TU 71; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1891) 10. Given Schmid's deep knowledge, his discussion of Rev 22.14 is disappointingly brief.

⁴ *De Pudicitia* 19.9, *beati qui ea praeceptis agunt*: E. Dekkers, ed., *Tertulliani Opera* (CC, Series Latina, 2; Turmholt: Brepols, 1954) 1321.

and several commentators on Revelation (including Andrew of Caesarea) attest to the reading 'do his commandments'. In the *UBSGNT* 3rd edition the earliest patristic source cited⁵ for 'wash their robes' was Athanasius. However, the text in question does *not* use the verb ἵδων (wash) but ἴδοντες (make broad).⁶ Furthermore, it is now generally recognized that the text cited as being written by Athanasius, from the so-called *Four Orations against the Arians* (4.28), was in fact not written by Athanasius. For instance, Johannes Quasten observed of the Fourth Oration that it 'has no connecting link' with the first three orations and that its 'style and phraseology contrast so strikingly that Athanasius cannot be considered its author'.⁷ Berthold Altaner concluded that 'a fourth oratio by an anonymous author was added later'.⁸ This reading, 'those who broaden their robes', then, was not properly cited as support for the *UBSGNT* 3rd edition choice, unless it had been put in parentheses and cited as Pseudo-Athanasius. Without Athanasius, the earliest writer noted there as using the version with ἵδων is Fulgentius, a sixth-century writer – in other words, a writer who lived more than 300 years later than Tertullian.

Now, in the 4th edition of *UBSGNT* in the revised apparatus Ps-Athanasius is listed as supporting two different readings, with Ps-Athanasius mss supporting the reading in the selected text. But it is quite likely that these Ps-Athanasius manuscripts were harmonized with other known texts, so they provide only a very weak support. The 4th edition also adds Ambrose to support their text selection. Ambrose merely makes an uncertain biblical allusion, which, however, does not precisely match any known variant of either Rev 7.14 or Rev 22.14: *... quoniam beati qui lauerunt stolas suas in sanguine suo*.⁹ Despite the lack of substantial new evidence, the editors now grade their reading as (A), whereas in the 3rd edition it was (B).

In brief, the usually-rejected reading has better patristic attestation. If, as appears probable, the manuscript transmission of these citations by Tertullian and Cyprian is reliable, it is notable that these citations predate any extant manuscript of Rev 22.14. Though by itself not sufficiently decisive, this would favour the reading suggested here.

A pervasive, basic theme in Revelation is the exhortation to keep the commands and testimony of Jesus; Jesus *and* commandments are both emphasized (see especially Rev 12.17 and 14.12). One may ask what these commandments include (e.g., circumcision is not mentioned, whether because it is neglected or assumed), but Revelation clearly differs from Pauline Christianity.¹⁰ These commandments at any rate excluded the assimilating, go-along attitude moderately counselled by people such as Celsus. Origen was not wrong to see that his ἀνοκάρκωτος contradicted John's unforgiving Apocalypse. And Luther did not misread, when, from his point of view, Revelation,

⁵ By *UBSGNT* 3rd edition, 1983. See also Hoskier, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse* 2:635.

⁶ Migne, PG 25, col. 512, ἴδοντες .

⁷ *Patrology* (Utrecht/Antwerp: Spectrum, 1975) 3:28.

⁸ *Patrology* (trans. H. Graef; New York: Herder and Herder, 1961) 315.

⁹ *Explanatio Psalmorum XII, Sancti Ambrosii Opera* (CSEL 64; ed. M. Petschenig; Vienna: F. Tempky, 1919) 180.

¹⁰ Contrast Rom 7 on commandments.

along with James and Jude, were his least favourite portions of the NT canon. In brief, Revelation is fairly characterized as Jewish Christian. Therefore, a theological motive existed for the change in the text of Rev 22.14 from 'observe his commandments' to 'wash their robes', whereas no theological motivation is apparent for a converse change. In other words, it is unlikely that any early Christians would be offended by an image of clean robes, whereas it is certainly the case that various early Christians differed on the relative centrality of observing commandments, particularly various Jewish commandments.¹¹ Such a suggestion is not entirely new; C. Wordsworth proposed that 'some transcribers might perhaps have been embarrassed by the other reading ["who do his commandments"]', though he posited a later setting than here, during concerns with Pelagians.¹²

Henry B. Swete in his Revelation commentary wrote that 'perhaps it is slightly more probable that ΠΑΥΝΟΝΤΕΚΤΑΚΤΟΑC arose out of ΠΟΙΟΥΝΤΕΚΤΑΚΤΟΑC than that the reverse occurred'.¹³ But then Swete also claimed that 'the prepossessions of the scribes' would have favoured the reading with *roía*, suggesting that the scribes created this reading. Rather, I suggest we may have a question here of the presuppositions of the modern scholars who reject the reading 'do his commandments', the reading which is more characteristic of Revelation both on theological and literary grounds.¹⁴

In terms of literature, the author of Revelation, most will agree, did not shy away from dramatic language. Yet a blessing on those who launder their robes is something less than dramatic. Earlier in the book (Rev 7.14), indeed, robes are washed, but dramatically and paradoxically in the blood of the Lamb. The Sixto-Clementina edition of the Vulgate version of Revelation added 'in the blood of the lamb' to Rev 22.14, presumably in order to fix the perceived weakness of this text version. This Latin addition evidently was a response to a reading seen as inconsistent with the rest of the book.

Furthermore, the reading 'observe his commandments' is part of a chiasmic structure in chapter 22. Those who do his commandments may *enter in* to eat of the tree of life, whereas those *outside* are various rejects, everyone who practices – using *roía* – falsehood. Before this passage, Rev 21.27 and 22.11 both also use the verb *roía*. The fact that elsewhere (12.17 and 14.12) Revelation uses *εἰρολόγ* with the verb *τρύφω* hardly qualifies as evidence against the reading supported here – both combinations are also used synonymously, for

¹¹ My article, 'The Exclusion of Ephraim in Rev. 22:14 and Essene Polemic Against Pharisees', *Dead Sea Discoveries* 2 (1995) 80–5 argues that echoes of intra-Jewish polemic, between Essenes and Pharisees, are evident in Revelation, with the author of Revelation favouring Essene viewpoints. I further explored this issue in a paper read at the second meeting of the International Organization of Qumran Studies (held July, 1995 in Cambridge, England), 'Essene Polemic in the Apocalypse of John'.

¹² C. Wordsworth, *The New Testament* (London, 1877) 276.

¹³ *Apocalypse of St John* (3rd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1911) 307.

¹⁴ Some manuscripts at Rev 22.15 also omit one or both verbs from the phrase 'those who love and do falsehood', as indicated in Nestle-Aland 26th edition and in Hoskier, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, 2.636–7.

¹⁵ *In sanguine agni: Biblia Sacra Vulgatae Editionis Sixti Quinti iussu recognita* (Rome, 1592). Compare the text of Ambrose, above. See J. Wordsworth, *et al.*, *Nouum Testamentum Domini nostri Iesu Christi Latinae* (Oxford, 1944) 3.593, for the textual basis of the addition, which includes Cod. Ardmachanus (9th century).

example, in the accepted text of 1 John – but rather reinforces the theological consistency of Revelation. In the canonical gospel most concerned with torah (in Matt 19.17) we also find the association of life and commandments: 'If you would enter life, keep [τρίψω] the commandments.'

Other ancient texts parallel the blessing of those who do commandments. For example, *1 Enoch* 99.10 (Greek version in Chester Beatty papyri) has, 'blessed are all those who have heard . . . so as to do the commandments (*ροίφοι τὰς ἐντολάς*).'¹⁶ Among other parallels which could be mentioned, perhaps the most interesting is found in *2 Clement* 4.5, which claims to present a saying of Jesus condemning those 'who do not carry out my commandments (*ροίτη τὰς ἐντολάς μου*).'¹⁷ This early Christian sermon, pseudepigraphically assigned to Clement of Rome, is thought to preserve this saying either as a paraphrase or as an instance of *agrapha*.¹⁸ But perhaps, instead, it records an allusion, in negative form, to the original text of Rev 22.14.

In conclusion, the text of Rev 22.14 probably originally contained a blessing on 'those doers of his commandments'.

¹⁶ Text and translation from C. Bonner, *The Last Chapters of Enoch in Greek* (London: Christophers, 1937) 44–7 and 90, respectively. For other similar texts (e.g. from *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*) see A.-M. Denis, *Concordance Grecque des Pseudépigraphes d'Antien Testament* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1987).

¹⁷ Text from J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* 1; *Clement of Rome* 2 (London: Macmillan, 1890) 218.

¹⁸ For bibliography, see R. Warns, *Untersuchungen zum 2. Clemens-Brief* (Marburg: Phillips-Universität, 1985) esp. 325–8. Warns compares *2 Clem* 4.5 with Matt 7.21 and 23, and with the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*. For the latter reference (Gospel of the Nazarenes from Codex Novi Testamenti 1424), see A. F. J. Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992) 56–7.