

Did Jesus Quote the Apostles? The Possible Intertextuality and Significance of Revelation 2:24¹

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This article examines the significance of the phrase “no other burden” (οὐ . . . ἄλλο βᾶρος) in Rev 2:24, including its relationship to ὡς λέγουσιν shortly before it. A full analysis of these phrases has been mostly lacking in modern commentaries, which has not prevented many from taking dogmatic positions on whether or not Jesus might be alluding to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. This article defends the possibility that ὡς λέγουσιν is meant to point forward, thus making an allusion to Acts 15 highly probable. This article then explores the theological significance of such an allusion in light of the situation in Acts, and then closes by briefly discussing the practical significance of this thesis.

Key Words: Acts 15, Bible translation, intertextuality, Jerusalem Council, New Testament ethics, Revelation 2, Thyatira

Ἰμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ ὡς λέγουσιν οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βᾶρος.² (Rev 2:24)

A seemingly trivial phrase in Rev 2:24 has managed to polarize commentaries, despite the almost complete lack of technical analysis. Specifi-

cally, the issue centers around whether Jesus’s reference to “no other burden” is meant to allude to the Jerusalem Council (and the letter it produced) in Acts 15, essentially providing his audience with a rare type of intertextuality, Jesus citing the apostles instead of vice versa.³ Related to this question is the issue of whether or not ὡς λέγουσιν, “as they say,” could be taken to refer to what follows rather than what precedes.

A large number of commentaries are at least sympathetic to the idea that Jesus alludes to the Jerusalem Council. These range from the more recent German commentary by Gerhard Maier to the influential NIGTC by G. K. Beale to the classic one-hundred-year-old commentary by H. B. Swete.⁴ Unfortunately, most of these commentaries merely assume the

³ This writer acknowledges that the term “intertextuality” is fraught with problems, and its usage in biblical studies is far removed from its original meaning *vis-à-vis* literary studies, where “the intertextual relationship was primarily defined as the conflict where the new text was seeking to replace the old” (Kulli Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21–22*, LNTS 526 [London: T&T Clark, 2016], 21; Töniste’s discussion in this section is helpful, as is the article by Thomas R. Hatina, “Intertextuality and Historical Criticism in New Testament Studies: Is There a Relationship?,” *Biblical Interpretation* 7.1 [1999]: 29). However, words are notorious for taking on a life of their own, and as Töniste well notes, “There is nothing extraordinary about borrowing a methodology from a different field and appropriating it in a new fashion” (*Ending of the Canon*, 23). Consequently, I am following Stefan Alkier’s description that “*Intertextual* investigation concerns itself with the effects of meaning that emerge from the reference of a given text to other text” (“Intertextuality and the Semiotics of Biblical Texts,” in *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, ed. Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy A. Huizenga [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009], 3).

⁴ The reader should note the following: G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 266; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:74; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 404; E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Hengstenberg*, trans. Patrick Fairbairn (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack, 1851, reprinted 1972), 163–64; Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, International Theological Commentary (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 176; Gerhard Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Kapitel 1–11*, Historisch Theologische Auslegung (Brunnen, Germany: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2018), 194; Leon Morris, *Revelation*, rev. ed., TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 73; William R. Newell, *The Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1935), 59–60; Pierre Prigent, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, CNT 2nd series (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1981), 59; Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, 2nd ed., Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody

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² No significant textual variants impact this topic either way. In fact, most critical Greek texts (including the NA²⁷ and the SBL 2010), as well as the Byzantine text (Robinson-Pierpont 2005) and the Majority text (Hodges-Farstad 1985), all perfectly agree (not counting a solitary movable *nu*). I have deliberately omitted punctuation here.

allusion (some dogmatically so) without defending it. On the other hand, a significant number of commentaries express skepticism or disagreement with the possibility, though Isbon T. Beckwith is almost unique in discussing the issue from a syntactical perspective.⁵

What has been neglected in this discussion is the role that *ὡς λέγουσιν* might play in resolving the ambiguity, specifically whether or not the phrase refers to what precedes or what follows. Arguably the phrase may point backward and yet still allow for an allusion to Acts 15.⁶ If the phrase

1996), 31; Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977, reprint of the 3rd ed. [1911] by London: Macmillan), 46; Frederick A. Tatford, *The Revelation* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1985; reprint of the 1983 edition), 169; and John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 76 (interestingly, the posthumously revised edition does not discuss the issue; see John F. Walvoord, *Revelation, The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries*, rev. and ed. Philip E. Rawley and Mark Hitchcock [Chicago: Moody, 2011], 73).

⁵ The reader should note the following: David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1997), 207–8; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), 92 (to be fair, Beasley-Murray does not even mention the possibility of an allusion to Acts 15. However, he clearly sees a different referent to “no other burden”); Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1919), 469–70; Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Regensburg, Germany: Friedrich Pustet, 1997), 121–22; F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John I–III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), 31; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 301 (Koester sees “similar concerns” but rejects the idea of a direct allusion); Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, HNT (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1926), 27; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 163–64; and Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 229–30. Finally, some significant commentaries do not discuss the issue at all. These include G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: A&C Black, 1966), 45; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 53; and Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 95.

⁶ One can see this, e.g., in Beale, *Book of Revelation 256–56*; Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 193–94; and Morris, *Revelation*, 72–73. On the other hand, Hort (*Apocalypse of St. John I–III*, 31) seems to be unique in arguing that *ὡς λέγουσιν* points forward but that “no other burden” is *not* a reference to the Jerusalem Council. For Hort, *ὡς λέγουσιν* refers to how “these teachers professed the deliverance from superfluous burdens.” Yet this is utterly inexplicable, since it is Jesus, not the false teachers, who is promising freedom from any “other burden.”

points forward, however, it virtually guarantees that “no other burden” would have to be understood as an allusion to the Jerusalem Council, as will be demonstrated.

Consequently, there are two interrelated questions at play here. First, can an exegetical case be made that *ὡς λέγουσιν* points forward, thus alluding to the Jerusalem Council? Second, if “no other burden” were an allusion to the Apostolic Council, what is the point that Jesus is making? What would be the theological significance of such an allusion? Very little has been written regarding these questions.⁷

In light of those two questions, the goals of this essay are as follows: (1) provide a strong case for why *ὡς λέγουσιν* probably points forward in the sentence; (2) discuss why this matters theologically; and (3) briefly discuss the practical ramifications of the previous two points in regard to both Christian ethics and Bible translation.

The Role of *ὡς λέγουσιν* in Rev 2:24

Introductory Considerations

Revelation 2:24 contains a number of ambiguities. First of all, the expression “have not known the deep things of Satan,” though clearly parallel with the phrase “this teaching” that precedes it, raises the question as to whether or not this was an actual slogan of the heretics (e.g., something like “We are learning the deep things of Satan, of which we need not be afraid!”) or, rather, Jesus’s own “parody of the expression ‘deep things of God.’”⁸

⁷ Though an unsurprising exception (given the theological focus of his commentary) is Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 176–77.

⁸ Koester, *Revelation*, 300. In defense of the idea that this was the false teachers’ actual slogan, see Ignaz Rohr, *Der Hebräerbrief und die Geheime Offenbarung des heiligen Johannes*, HSNT (Bonn: Pter Hanstein, 1932), 85; Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 228; Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches*, 154. In defense of the idea that this is a parody, see Koester, *Revelation*, 300; Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2012), 117; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of St. John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (London: SPCK, 2005), 76. A thorough comparison of the two views is given by Prigent, *L’Apocalypse*, 59–60. In addition, one should note that a number of commentators see a gnostic or proto-gnostic background to “the deep things of Satan” (e.g., Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 27; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 76; Sales Tiefenthal, *Die Apokalypse des hl. Johannes* [Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1892], 192). Hort (*Apocalypse of St. John I–III*, 31) makes note of what

Second, and central to this essay, the expression “no other burden” needs clarification: no other burden than what? Some commentators see the next verse as key: no other burden than to hold on to what they already have, though this still begs the question: what is it they “have”?⁹

Third, and closely linked to the second point, what exactly does the expression ὡς λέγουσιν refer to? One cannot deny the possibility that it refers to a slogan of the heretics (“deep things of Satan”). Indeed, a case can be made that the third person plural referents of λέγουσιν are the same as τοὺς μοιχεύοντας . . . μετανοήσωσιν . . . τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς in vv. 22–23,¹⁰ though it should be noted that the closest third person plural verb before v. 24 is v. 23’s γινώσκονται, where the expression “all the churches” is the subject.

If, on the other hand, Jesus meant ὡς λέγουσιν to point forward to the subsequent clause, then one is forced to consider an older background to “no other burden.” In other words, who, exactly, said “no other burden” before Jesus did? At this point the answer becomes obvious, simply because no other candidates exist: The Jerusalem Council is the only entity in the entirety of Scripture, within a context discussing abstinence from idolatry and immorality, to declare that the church should not place a “burden” on its members (Gentile Christians). This point is amplified by the rarity of βάρος in the Greek Bible: only 6x in the NT (Matt 20:12; Acts 15:28; 2 Cor 4:17; Gal 6:2; 1 Thess 2:6; and Rev 2:24) and 3x in the LXX, all in the apocryphal books (Jdt 7:4; 2 Mac 9:10; Sir 13:2).

A neglected corollary of this question is that if ὡς λέγουσιν actually does not refer to the “deep things of Satan,” then one is forced to question whether or not any of the Thyatira heretics were actually saying something like that (either “deep things of God,” which Jesus parodies, or actually “deep things of Satan”). Could not Jesus simply be making a derisive comment about the content of their teachings without reference to one of their slogans? To claim that somebody is going after “the deep things of Satan” is, after all, an obvious rebuke, regardless of whether or not

“later Gnostics” believed but is careful to avoid anachronism. Similarly, Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Morrill, and Wardwell, 1845), 2:83 notes the possible link between “deep things of Satan” and “the Gnostic μυστήρια, the leaven of which sect [Gnosticism] would seem to have already begun its fermentation.” That a form of “proto-gnosticism” was developing amongst some of the churches Jesus speaks to is certainly within the realm of possibility.

⁹ E.g., Giesen, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 122; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 89; Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 230.

¹⁰ As noted by one of the anonymous peer-reviewers.

Jesus is quoting Jezebel or her minions. Furthermore, one must also not ignore the possibility that ὡς λέγουσιν might have been meant to simultaneously point forward and backward, a deliberate ambiguity that would simultaneously contrast what “they (the false teachers) say” with what “they (the apostles) say.” Space prohibits an examination of this third possibility, however, and this writer is not aware of any commentator who defends that position.

The Positioning of ὡς λέγουσιν and Its Referent

In general, is ὡς λέγουσιν more likely to refer to that which precedes or that which follows? This question will be explored in the following manner: (1) A general examination of the NT, LXX, and Josephus via *Accordance* with the following command line: “ὡς <FOLLOWED BY> <WITHIN 2 Words> λέγω”¹¹; and (2) A more specific examination of the exact phrase ὡς λέγουσιν within the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (an examination which will, of necessity, be more selective).

In the New Testament, running this search yields thirteen hits across sixteen verses. Ignoring those hits where ὡς has no clear relation to λέγω, we end up with the following results: Mark 14:72; Luke 20:37; 22:61; John 18:6; Acts 11:16; 1 Cor 10:15; 2 Cor 6:13; and Heb 7:9.¹²

Out of those relevant texts, both 1 Cor 10:15 and 2 Cor 6:13 seem to deal broadly with what the author is speaking of throughout the general context, simultaneously pointing forward and backward. Of the remaining texts, however, not a single time does ὡς + λέγω point backward; rather, it always points forward. For example, in Acts 11:16, ὡς ἔλεγεν points forward to the next phrase, which refers to what Jesus had said in the past, a close parallel to what we are suggesting might be the case in Rev 2:24.

In the LXX, that same search surprisingly garners only one hit, LXX Gen 44:10. In this text, ὡς λέγετε does not introduce a direct quote as does Acts 11:16, but it does introduce the general content of something

¹¹ *Accordance* 11.2 (Oaktree Software, 2016). I have deliberately set the command line to “within 2 words” rather than “within 1 word” to allow for the possibility of an article or noun or post-positive δέ being positioned before the verb. Also, it is important with such command lines in *Accordance* to specify the search across “book” instead of “verse,” since otherwise relevant hits may be omitted due to the verse divisions.

¹² For Mark 14:72, a textual variant (the replacing of ὡς with a relative pronoun) means that not all Greek editions will contain this reference.

Joseph's brothers had just said. Nonetheless, rhetorically ὡς λέγετε still points forward—the reiteration of the general content of Judah and company's statement follows ὡς λέγετε in the discourse structure.

In Josephus, however, the situation becomes more complicated. There are clear examples of both backward-looking and forward-looking ὡς + λέγω clauses.¹³ For the former, *Antiq* 7.91 (alt. 7.4.4) has ὡς Μωυσῆς εἶπε, “as Moses said,” clearly referring to the previous clause (the topic of building a temple for God). Similarly, in *Antiq* 16.182 (alt. 16.7.1) ὡς ἐλέγετο points backwards to the previous clause, detailing what happened to two of Herod's guards when they intruded on the sepulcher of David and Solomon.

Yet in *War* 7.134 (alt. 7.5.5), the expression ἀλλ'ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις clearly points forward to a proverbial expression ῥέοντα ποταμόν (“but rather as certain people say, ‘flowing [like] a river’”).¹⁴ Similarly, in *Antiq* 8.97 [alt. 8.3.9] Josephus uses the expression ὡς δὲ εἰπεῖν to introduce the idea that that the beauty of Solomon's temple exceeds even what could be believed if one saw it for themselves, with their own face (καὶ τῆς ὄψεως, though note that the μείζον precedes the ὡς δὲ εἰπεῖν; however, the essence of the point Josephus is making occurs after the expression we are examining).

Next, we will briefly consider the exact expression ὡς λέγουσιν within broader first-century usage via the *TLG*.¹⁵ The results support both possibilities. We will provide here a few examples that demonstrate that ὡς λέγουσιν can point either forward or backward, depending on the context.

First, ὡς λέγουσιν can point forward. Ptolemaeus the Grammarian, in his dictionary, when distinguishing between the terms ἀποκήρυκτος and ἐκποίητος, closes out his entry by stating, “ὡς λέγουσιν «εἰσποίητος γέγονεν».”¹⁶ Additionally, in Plutarch's *Themistocles* 1.1, Plutarch begins the

¹³ The relevant hits are: *Antiq* 7.91 [alt. 7.4.4], 8.97 [8.3.9], 15.387 [15.11.1], 16.182 [16.7.1], 16.313 [16.10.3], 18.17 [18.1.4], 19.123 [19.1.15]; *War* 7.134 [7.5.5], 7.404 [7.9.2]; *Life* 355 [65]; *Apion* 1.7 [1.2], 1.167 [1.22].

¹⁴ All translations from primary Greek sources and secondary German sources are this author's own, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵ Utilizing the online *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (University of California, 2013), <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/index.php>. I performed a “textual search” for the specific string “ὡς λέγουσιν,” and then focused more narrowly on texts in the first century AD.

¹⁶ Ptolemaeus, *De differentia vocabulorum* 32. It is not certain exactly when Ptolemaeus the Grammarian wrote; *TLG* lists a range of second century BC to second century AD.

book with a reference to Themistocles's mother and what was commonly known about her,¹⁷ indicated by ὡς λέγουσιν and followed immediately by a quotation: Ἀβρότονον Θρήισσα γυνὴ γένος ἀλλὰ τεκέσθαι τὸν μέγαν Ἑλλησὶν φημι Θεμιστοκλέα (“[I am] Abrotonon, a woman of the Thracian race, and yet I give birth to the great Greek called Themistocles!”).¹⁸ This second example is key since it demonstrates that ὡς λέγουσιν can refer to a saying that is, at least in theory, well-circulated and accessible to the author's audience.

On the other hand, as evidence that ὡς λέγουσιν can point backward, we see that Plutarch, in *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat*¹⁹ 15.C, when discussing the effects of eating the octopus (or cuttlefish), states, “. . . φαντασίας παραχῶδεις καὶ ἀλλοκότους δεχόμενον, ὡς λέγουσιν,” where clearly the words before ὡς λέγουσιν refer to the negative effects one can receive from eating the octopus, negative effects which are quite well known, “as they say.” Similarly, in *Pericles* 13.13 (alt. 13.7), when discussing how Pericles set up a statue of Athena Hygieia near the altar of the local goddess, Plutarch notes that the local goddesses' altar was there first, “ὄς καὶ πρότερον ἦν,” followed by ὡς λέγουσιν, indicating that this was common knowledge.

As we have seen, the specific expression ὡς λέγουσιν (with no intervening words) in *Koine* Greek can definitely refer to a well-known expression or piece of knowledge, but structurally can point either backward or forward. When examining the broader construction of ὡς + λέγω within the New Testament and LXX, however, it is more likely to point forward.

The Case for οὐ βάλλω ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος as an Allusion to Acts 15:28

Having discussed ὡς λέγουσιν, we can now examine the lexical and contextual links between Jesus's letter to Thyatira and the Apostolic Council. Here, in order to avoid “parallelomania,” we will use Samuel Sandmel's classic article as a guide.²⁰ Sandmel, concerned with the rise of

¹⁷ Interestingly, Bernadotte Perrin's old Loeb translation attributes the quote to “her epitaph,” though that is not explicitly stated in the Greek text.

¹⁸ Author's translation.

¹⁹ In English, *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*.

²⁰ Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81.1 (March 1962): 1–13. Note that Sandmel popularized, but did not coin, the term “parallelomania.”

“extravagance” when it came to positing literary parallels to Scripture, argued that one must be able to demonstrate specificity and context.²¹ In other words, overly-generic parallels are not true parallels, and supposed parallels must contain similar contexts.

Consequently, we begin by noting the specific lexical links between Rev 2 and Acts 15 in chart 1, while acknowledging that this will not be enough to establish an allusion without studying the context. Nonetheless, the lexical links alone are significant, especially once the reader is reminded of the rarity of *βάρος* in the NT and LXX.

Chart 1²²

The Apostolic Council	Letter to Thyatira
Acts 15:28—μηδὲν πλέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βάρος, πλήν τούτων τῶν ἐπάναγκες	Rev 2:24b–25a—οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος, πλήν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε

Yet in order for Jesus’s statement to make sense as an intertextual allusion, the contexts must be similar. Significantly, both Jesus’s letter to the Thyatira Christians and the Apostolic Council are concerned with Christian ethics. Furthermore, the Apostolic Council prohibits immorality and idolatry (the latter is narrowed a bit in v. 29 as *εἰδωλοθύτος*, food offered to idols), the two issues that Jesus himself focuses on in Rev 2:24. In addition, both the Apostolic Council and Jesus himself in his letter see their message as mediated through the Spirit. Thus, we have three points of contact within the broader context of each text, of which the first two are especially significant.

Chart 2

The Apostolic Council	Letter to Thyatira
Acts 15:20—ἀλλὰ ἐπιστεῖλαι αὐτοῖς τοῦ ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ τῆς πορνείας καὶ τοῦ πνικτοῦ καὶ τοῦ αἵματος. [cf. 15:29 and 21:25, εἰδωλοθύτων . . . καὶ πορνείας and εἰδωλόθυτον . . . καὶ πορνείαν, respectively]	Rev 2:20b–21—καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἐμούς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα. καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.

²¹ Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” 2.

²² Text taken from the Nestle-Aland 27th ed. (*Novum Testamentum Graecae*, eds. Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993]).

Acts 15:28a—Ἐδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν, . . .	Rev 2:29—Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.
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Based on these parallels, it is inexplicable that Osborne could argue, “. . . there is no hint in the context [of Rev 2] of apostolic teaching.”²³

In summary: the following points can be made in defense of an allusion to Acts 15: (1) at least a significant likelihood exists that *ὡς λέγουσιν* points forward rather than backwards in Rev 2:24, which would necessitate looking for somebody or some group that had previously made a similar point to that which Jesus made;²⁴ (2) it cannot be proved conclusively that “the deep things of Satan” is either a statement by the heretics or Jesus’s parody of the statement, since this assumes precisely the point under consideration, whether or not *ὡς λέγουσιν* points forward or backward; (3) key points of Rev 2:24–25 resemble Acts 15:28 lexically; and (4) the activities that Jesus wishes the Thyatira Christians to avoid are identical to two of the four practices that the Apostolic Council wishes Gentile Christians to avoid.²⁵

Counter Arguments

A thorough lexical argument in support of “no other burden” as a reference to Acts 15:28 has hitherto been lacking. For those skeptical of the idea, however, Isbon T. Beckwith’s argument takes pride of place and has clearly influenced others (most prominently Osborne and Thomas). Beckwith states,

After *ἄλλος* with a negative, instead of the usual construction *i.e.* the gen., *ἢ, πλήν* with the gen., etc., an independent clause is sometimes found introduced by *πλήν, . . .* That gives the simplest explanation of the present case; *i.e. other than* that contained in the clause introduced by *πλήν*. *Burden*, then, is not the proper rendering of *βάρος*, which, like its adj. *βαρύς*, does not always denote something to be burdensome, but often what is *weighty*, or *important, . . .*²⁶

Regarding the use of *πλήν*, Beckwith gives key examples from older literature, to which might be added both Mark 12:32 and Josephus, *War* 1.451 [alt. 1.23.2] where we see examples of *πλήν* introducing a word or phrase

²³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 163.

²⁴ As noted earlier (see n5), one can believe that the phrase points backward and yet still hold to the idea that “no other burden” is an allusion to Acts 15.

²⁵ And, as noted below, “things strangled” and “blood” are probably both closely linked to *εἰδωλόθυτος*.

²⁶ Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 470.

(though not a clause) that interacts directly with ἄλλος a few words earlier. The function of πλὴν, however, is not being disputed here.

Beckwith's argument must not be glossed over quickly, and it is a pity that in the nearly one hundred years since his comments, it is difficult to find commentators that have considered the Greek syntax here as closely as he has. Nonetheless, Beckwith's argument cannot overturn the strong possibility of an allusion to the Apostolic Council for two reasons. First, granting Beckwith's syntactical argument that πλὴν probably, or at least possibly, introduces a clause to contrast with ἄλλο βάρος does not exclude the possibility of an intertextual allusion. In other words, as we shall argue, "no other burden" may simultaneously evoke memories of the Apostolic Council's decision (that Gentiles are not under the Torah) while at the same time reminding the Christians at Thyatira that they are nonetheless under Jesus's and the apostles' teachings ("what you have").²⁷ A reminder of the Apostolic Council would be very relevant at multiple levels, as will be argued in the next section.

Secondly, Beckwith does not at all consider whether ὡς λέγουσιν is more likely to point forward or backward, which should certainly factor into one's interpretation. If it points forward, then as noted one has no other option but to suggest that Jesus is referring to the Apostolic Council. Once again, there is no reason then why "no other burden except" cannot simultaneously function as an allusion to Acts 15:28 while linking to "what you have" (i.e., Apostolic doctrine); after all, Acts 15:28 is "Apostolic Doctrine."²⁸

Third, Beckwith's argument that βάρος should be understood as "that which is important" is certainly a possibility, though this use occurs only once in the NT (2 Cor 4:17) and never in the LXX. Practically speaking, for Jesus to declare "I will put on you no weightier [more important] thing

²⁷ Regarding this latter point, see Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 92; Morris, *Revelation*, 73; and Maier, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 195.

²⁸ I feel that Beasley-Murray goes a bit too far when he sees in the phrase "the traditions they received in their baptismal instruction (cf. Rom. 6:17, 1 Th. 4:1, 2 Th. 3:6ff., and the common tradition reflected in the New Testament letters" (*Book of Revelation*, 92). Nonetheless, that "what you have" refers to the broad category of apostolic teaching seems a likely suggestion, since the context of Jesus's letter to Thyatira deals with teaching (v. 20, διδάσκω; v. 24, διδαχή). As Meier (*Offenbarung des Johannes*, 195) well states, "ὃ ἔχετε [ho echete], was ihr habt, ist eben die Ablehnung der Irrlehre und die Treue zur Lehre Jesu and der Apostel" ("[The phrase] 'What you have' is simply the rejection of the false teaching and faithfulness to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles").

than these . . ." differs very little from "no other burden," and the supposed difference in usage between, e.g., 2 Cor 4:17 and Gal 6:2 may merely be a matter of modern sensibilities. It is doubtful that the apostles in Acts 15:28 intended βάρος with negative connotations, as if abstaining from fornication was a "burden" akin to a child's cleaning up their room.²⁹ The potential allusion functions quite effectively regardless of how one wishes to translate ἄλλο βάρος into English.

From a different angle, Osborne brings up the objection that ". . . one must wonder what the 'no other burden might be'—the other two elements of the apostolic decree, abstaining from blood and the meat of strangled animals?"³⁰ Oddly enough, some have indeed argued this very point.³¹ This would, however, bring up the odd situation of Jesus saying, "Do not fornicate or go after idolatrous perversions, but you may eat food with blood in it and eat things strangled," thus undermining both the Apostolic decree and the Noahic covenant. However, this is by no means a necessary interpretation.³² To the contrary, one could make a strong case that both "blood" and "that which has been strangled" are subsumed under the expression "that which has been offered to idols," and left out for the sake of conciseness.³³ If so, then there is no reason to assume that Jesus's "what you have" would not also include James's "these necessary things" from Acts 15:28. In the end, "Christ is placing on them no other burden (βάρος) than what was placed on gentile Christians in general by the apostolic decree of Acts 15:28."³⁴

²⁹ This is not to deny that βάρος can have negative connotations, as seen a couple decades later in Lucianus's *Dialogi mortuorum* (*Dialogue with the Dead*) 20.10, when Hermes states, ". . . καὶ τὰ ἄλλα βάρη τῶν λόγων" (" . . . and other burdens of words"). The point is merely that since it is unlikely the apostles meant for βάρος to be viewed negatively, then obviously neither would Jesus if he were alluding to them.

³⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 163.

³¹ E.g., Swete (*Revelation*, 46) states, "The rest of the prohibitions imposed in the year 49–50 (ἀπέχεσθαι . . . αἵματος καὶ πνικτῶν) are not reimposed. . . . Contrast this wise concession with the exacting spirit of the Pharisees: Mt. xxiii. 4 . . ."

³² Cf. Thomas who argues that if "no other burden" is a reference to Acts 15 (a point which he contests), then "With this identification of *baros*, the adjective *allo* ('another') points to the other two parts of the apostolic decree, . . ." (*Revelation 1–7*, 229).

³³ On the link between the three, see Bock, *Acts*, 505–6.

³⁴ Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 266.

Thomas further argues, “Similarities to the earlier Jerusalem decree could be accidental. (Hort; Beckwith; Mounce). The fact is, the faithful in Thyatira were not perplexed because of a restriction of their Christian freedom by the earlier conciliar action. This was probably the furthest thing in their minds (Beckwith).”³⁵ Yet what is at stake in Jesus’s letter to the church at Thyatira is the boundaries of Christian behavior. Since Jesus has had to forcefully remind them that all forms of immorality and idolatry are off limits, surely it makes sense to additionally remind them that, for Gentile Christians, the limits are set by the teachings of Jesus and the apostles (“what you have [received]”), rather than the Torah.³⁶ Thus, a reference to Acts 15 fits well both with Jesus’s point and the experiences of his audience.

Finally, David E. Aune objects against the idea that Rev 2:24 alludes to Acts 15 because “. . . the letter in Acts 15:23–29 is part of Luke’s editorial work, and it is extremely doubtful that John of Patmos knew and used the Acts of the Apostles (Räsänen, *ANRW* II, 26/2:1611), . . .”³⁷ In response to Aune, if the Jerusalem Council was a real significant event, it is hard to imagine how John of Patmos (whoever he might be) could not have heard of its decision and even some of the terminology utilized in it (even if John was not actually there himself). To what extent the letter of Acts 15 depends on “Luke’s editorial work” is, of course, a matter of critical methodology and presuppositions, and space does not permit further discussion here.

The Background of the Apostolic Council and Its Relevance for Rev 2:24

To further explore that question of why the Apostolic Council is relevant for Jesus’s letter to Thyatira, a brief examination into the background and theology of the Apostolic Council is necessary. The Council originated in reaction to what appears to be two different groups in Acts 15:1 and 5 united by a similar message: the necessity of the Torah for Gentile

³⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 1–11*, 229.

³⁶ Interestingly, Colin J. Hemer sees all this theological debate as taking place against the backdrop of the guilds in Thyatira: “But I think the point is that membership necessarily involved contradiction of the Apostolic Decree and the needed repentance must necessarily involve repudiation of the guilds” (*The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, The Biblical Resource Series [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 123).

³⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 208.

Christians.³⁸ “Those from Judea . . . apparently meant that one *cannot* be a Christian without first becoming a Jew because the Kingdom of God is inseparably bound to Israel as a race, culture, and religion.”³⁹ Circumcision (as a synecdoche for the entire Torah) was being demanded both for salvation and for sanctification. Consequently, what was at stake is precisely what it means for a Gentile to be in a right relationship with God.

In response, the Apostolic Council clarified and solidified the true nature of how Gentiles can be right before God. James spoke on how “God is doing something new in raising up the church; it is an event of the last days and therefore the old rules of the Jewish religion no longer apply.”⁴⁰ The Apostolic Council, with its central place in Acts, “forcefully highlights a theological message, that God’s purpose for the Gentiles is salvation without circumcision.”⁴¹ Thus, “When Acts 15, and the Apostolic Decree in particular, are examined in relation to the whole of Luke-Acts, it becomes apparent that for Luke another ethic, one based on the messianic status of Jesus, has replaced the Mosaic law as the imperative which is incumbent on both the believing community and the world at large.”⁴²

Luke assigns the Apostolic Council a pivotal role in his narrative, and its significance for Gentile Christianity as a whole must not be minimized. Furthermore, the decrees of the Apostolic Council “were not merely suggestions.”⁴³ To the contrary, “The form of the words that is used, ‘it has been resolved,’ [Acts 15:9] is authoritative enough: it was a form widely used in the wording of imperial and other government decrees.”⁴⁴ F. F. Bruce’s statement here is further supported by the use of the first person

³⁸ For the point that there are two different groups in view, see, e.g., Hyung Dae Park, “Drawing Ethical Principles from the Process of the Jerusalem Council: A New Approach to Acts 15:4–29,” *TynB* 61.2 (2010): 275.

³⁹ J. Julius Scott Jr., “The Church’s Progress to the Council of Jerusalem according to the Book of Acts,” *BBR* 7 (1997): 219.

⁴⁰ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1980), 253.

⁴¹ Timothy Wiarda, “The Jerusalem Council and the Theological Task,” *JETS* 46.2 (June 2003): 245.

⁴² M. A. Seifrid, “Jesus and the Law in Acts,” *JSNT* 30 (1987): 40.

⁴³ Charles H. Savelle, “A Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15,” *BibSac* 161 (Oct–Dec 2004): 466.

⁴⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 299 (note that Bruce clearly sees this passage referred to later by Jesus’s letter to Thyatira); cf. also Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1–23:35*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 3:2259.

κρίνω in Nebuchadnezzar's decree of LXX Dan 3:96 [English 3:29].

Yet despite declaring Gentile Christians to be free from the Torah (at least in regard to the minutia of regulations), James added four behaviors that they are to avoid. The four prohibitions in Acts 15:20 are "idolatrous pollutions, fornication, that which is strangled, and blood." These are reiterated in v. 29 with two changes: (1) the substitution of εἰδωλοθύτων ("things offered to idols") for τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων ("things polluted by idols") and (2) the alteration of the order so that "fornication" comes last.⁴⁵

A divergence of opinion exists on what, precisely, the four prohibitions are based on. Most scholars either argue the Noahic covenant of Gen 9:4 or rules for Jewish proselytes given throughout Lev 17:7–19:26.⁴⁶ In addition, of those four prohibitions, πνικτός ("that which is strangled") has especially caused difficulty for interpreters.⁴⁷ The best solution, however, sees this is as somehow linked to both "blood" and pagan cultic ritual, since an animal killed via strangling retains its blood.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The list occurs a third time in Acts 21:25 when James expresses concern over the rumors that Paul may be teaching Jews to abandon the Torah (v. 21); "fornication" is kept in the last position, but "blood" now precedes "that which has been strangled."

⁴⁶ For the former position, see Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 296; Keener, *Acts*, 3:2263 (Keener notes the strong Rabbinic tradition that Gentiles would be held accountable for the "Noahic laws"); Zachary K. Dawson, "The Book of Acts and *Jubilees* in Dialogue; A Literary-Intertextual Analysis of the Noahide Laws in Acts 15 and 21," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 13 (2017): 25, 39–40 (and assumed throughout the article); and Todd R. Hanneken, "Moses Has His Interpreters: Understanding the Legal Exegesis in Acts 15 from the Precedent in *Jubilees*," *CBQ* 77 (2015): 705 (interestingly, Hanneken argues that Acts 15 draws on the Noahic prohibitions as further "explicated by *Jubilees*"; however, Dawson's article pushes back at Hanneken's thesis). For the latter position, see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 506; Stewart Custer, *Witnesses to Christ: A Commentary on Acts* (Greenville, SC: BJU, 2000), 222; and thoroughly defended by Terrane Callan, "The Background of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25)," *CBQ* 55.2 (April 1993): 284–97.

⁴⁷ A. J. M. Wedderburn states, "In any consideration of the purpose and meaning of the Decree the vexed problem of the meaning of πνικτόν looms very large" ("The 'Apostolic Decree': Tradition and Redaction," *NovT* 35.4 [1993]: 379).

⁴⁸ See *Acts*, 505–56; Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 296; Savelle, "Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15," 456–57. Also, Wedderburn ("Apostolic Decree," 387–88) helpfully discusses how, in light of ancient Greek magical texts "the soul of

Charles Savelle has provided a helpful survey of the strengths and weaknesses of both the "Noahic" view and the "Leviticus" view of the prohibitions, as well as the view that "rabbinic teaching" may have formed the background of the prohibitions.⁴⁹ Savelle ultimately concludes, "Rather than seeking a single source of the prohibitions, it seems preferable to see each of them as contributing something to the origins of the prohibitions."⁵⁰ In addition, Savelle argues that ultimately all four prohibitions are linked to pagan cultic activity, with the result that "Gentile Christians were being asked to refrain from activities that even *resembled* pagan worship, thereby avoiding even the appearance of evil."⁵¹ This interpretation is supported by the fact that in each list (Acts 15:20, 15:29, and 21:25), despite other variations, either τῶν ἀλισγημάτων τῶν εἰδώλων or εἰδωλοθύτων always comes first.

If Savelle is generally correct, then one can understand why "blood" and "that which has been strangled" are not mentioned in Jesus's letter to the church at Thyatira. It is not that Jesus is repudiating two out of the four apostolic prohibitions; it is simply that both are subsumed under the broader term εἰδωλόθυτα (Rev 2:20), of which Jesus disapproves (after all, the pagan cultic offerings are the most likely settings that one would eat an animal with blood still in it). It was simply not necessary to mention them specifically once the broader category of "things offered to idols" was condemned. One may reasonably assume that Jesus's reference to "what you have" in Rev 2:25 may include the Apostolic teaching regarding "these necessary things" (Acts 15:28).

We cannot, of course, discount the original context of the Apostolic Council's decree nor fail to consider how the state of the church might have changed in forty-five to fifty years (assuming a 90s date for Revelation); the issue of food offered to idols becomes less important in the

an offering strangled is offered to demons intact." In other words, there is demonic association in the act of strangling an animal. However, for a minority position that "things strangled" refers to the pagan practice of smothering babies that had been exposed to die, see David Instone-Brewer, "Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15," *JETS* 55.2 (June 2009): 301–21. For a measured critique of Instone-Brewer's thesis, see Charles H. Savelle Jr., "Infanticide in the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 Revisited," *JETS* 62.3 (2019): 533–42.

⁴⁹ Savelle, "Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15," 461.

⁵⁰ Savelle, "Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15," 461.

⁵¹ Savelle, "Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15," 464–65 (emphasis original); cf. 468.

writings of the Apostolic Fathers⁵² (though Did. 6.3 does briefly mention εἰδωλόθυτος). In Acts 15, “The idea seems to be that keeping the prohibitions would be spiritually and relationally beneficial. By keeping the prohibitions, Gentile Christians would be in harmony with the Holy Spirit, the Jerusalem church, and other Jewish believers.”⁵³ Most likely Jew-Gentile relations within the church were less of an issue in AD 90 than earlier, since by then the church was most likely predominantly Gentile and quickly approaching the tragic “parting of ways.”⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the significance of the Apostolic Decree (including the prohibitions) for the later church must not be downplayed. At stake is not merely cordial relations between Christian Jews and Gentiles, but rather the ethical boundaries of Gentile Christian conduct. James and the council decisively declared that for Gentiles such boundaries are not set by the Torah, but rather by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The four prohibitions remind Gentile Christians of the fact that anything linked to immorality and idolatry is off-limits.⁵⁵ The Gentile Christians did not resist James’s prohibitions and they did not consider them “overly burdensome”; to the contrary, they “rejoiced” (15:31) and embraced them.⁵⁶

Decades later, the church at Thyatira faced its own issues that necessitated a reminder of the Apostolic Council.⁵⁷ The strong presence in Thyatira of guilds may especially explain the pressure that would have

⁵² As noted by one of the reviewers.

⁵³ Savelle, “Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15,” 467.

⁵⁴ The fact that the Apostolic Decree was concerned with relations between Jews and Gentiles is reinforced by James’s odd statement in Acts 15:21 (see Marshall, *Acts*, 254). Interestingly, a textual variant arose in v. 20 in later manuscripts, demonstrating that the later church forgot the original Torah-oriented context of the four prohibitions (by interpreting “blood” as a reference to murder, for example). See the helpful discussions in Marshall, *Acts*, 253–54n1 and Savelle, “Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15,” 450.

⁵⁵ One should also remember that, years before the Torah was given to Moses, the Lord himself established a reason for not eating blood: the blood contains the life of the flesh (Gen 9:4).

⁵⁶ Savelle, “Reexamination of the Prohibition in Acts 15,” 466–67.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the background of Thyatira, the reader should begin with W. M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1905) and Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 116. Of more recent works, Maier (*Offenbarung des Johannes: Kapitel 1–11*, 181–82) and various points in David A. deSilva (*Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009]) are helpful.

been felt by many Christians to theologically compromise; guild feasts were not neutral from a religious standpoint, but rather the place where syncretism dominated.⁵⁸ This was a syncretism which Jezebel strongly encouraged, mimicking her OT namesake.⁵⁹ Consequently, one must not be surprised by the appearance of εἰδωλόθυτος in Jesus’s rebuke (since “the feasts of such bodies as trade-guilds” would have naturally included food offered to idols).⁶⁰ Mixed in with all this would be the constant specter of the imperial cult.⁶¹

One may suggest, then, that Anatolia in general and Thyatira specifically offered a truer test of the Gentile Christians’ ability to cling to the Apostolic Council’s decree than Antioch or Syria (Acts 15:23). While Jew-Gentile relations within the church were no longer as significant an issue, the council was about more than that: it “also determined the limits of participation in Greco-Roman culture and worship,” limits that Jezebel was determined to stretch.⁶² Hemer aptly summarizes the significance of Jesus’s response to Jezebel:

Presumably Jezebel argued that a Christian might join a guild and participate in its feasts without thereby compromising his faith. He was initiated into a superior wisdom. He knew the idol was nothing and he could not be defiled by that which did not exist. Pauline phrases insisting on the Christian’s liberty from the law might be pressed into service: our letter replies in the terms of the Apostolic Decree to which Paul, according to Acts, had assented. This was just such a *modus vivendi* as was required, but Jezebel’s version contravened its accepted principles. The local situation favoured the accommodation of incompatible beliefs and practices: the letter

⁵⁸ Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 111, 120.

⁵⁹ Allan J. McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation*, LBTS 438 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 107–8.

⁶⁰ Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 120; cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 156–57.

⁶¹ David deSilva notes how “by the end of the first century CE,” every city in Rev 1–2 possessed a “cultic site” (of emperor worship); though Thyatira did not have a temple, it was one of the cities that “had imperial altars and priests” (*Seeing Things John’s Way*, 41–42). Also noteworthy is the fact that in just a few short years, Pliny the Younger (governor of the region of Bithynia and Pontus in Asia Minor) will utilize worship of the emperor’s image as a test of whether or not one was a true Christian (see *Letters* 10.96–97). Significantly (as one of the reviewers pointed out), Antipas was killed in Pergamum (Rev 2:13), one of the most significant and earliest locations of the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor.

⁶² Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 176.

insists on individual devotion to a Lord who searches the hearts of men and demands a consistency of life.⁶³

In other words, contra the libertines, the Apostolic Council had already set the boundaries of what was acceptable for Gentile Christians; as far as Jesus is concerned, those in Thyatira would do well to remember it.

Practical Considerations: Ethics and Translation

If *ὡς λέγουσιν* does indeed refer to what follows, thus solidifying an allusion to the decision of the Jerusalem Council, this opens the door for further discussion on the practical relevance of such an interpretation. Two points will be briefly discussed here.

First, it has been suggested that Revelation “names surprisingly few specific sins to be avoided or virtues to be cultivated, and even these are usually expressed so metaphorically or so generally that almost any known moral rule could be included” (and, to be fair, Wayne Meeks does note this verse as an exception to the above statement).⁶⁴ Yet if Rev 2:24 is an allusion to the Apostolic Council, then we have a clear example of a concrete, specific ethical rule from Jesus to the churches, namely that both fornication and meat offered to idols are outside the boundaries of accepted Christian behavior.⁶⁵ Such an ethical principle is reinforced by Jesus’s rebuke of the church of Pergamum for tolerating *φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι* (2:14; see also 21:8, *πόρνοις . . . εἰδωλόθυταις*). Consequently, Revelation offers a robust exhortation to avoid immorality and associations with idolatry, even in the face of external social pressure (or, sadly in the case of Thyatira, internal social pressure). The student of Scripture has no choice but to assert that both in the formative years of the church and at the end of the canon, both sexual immorality and idolatry in a broad sense, which included *eidōlothuton* (“food offered to idols”), are emphasized as off-limits for the faithful Christian.⁶⁶ Those concerned

⁶³ Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 123.

⁶⁴ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 146.

⁶⁵ I am indebted to one of the reviewers for stressing this point and pointing me to the quote by Meeks.

⁶⁶ In an earlier issue of this journal, Andrew David Naselli has argued that, according to Paul’s logic in 1 Cor 8–10, there could be times when a Christian could eat meat offered to idols in a temple with a clean conscience (“Was It Idolatrous for Corinthian Christians to Eat *εἰδωλόθυτα* in an Idol’s Temple? (1 Cor

with living out the commands of Jesus and the apostles would do well to grapple with the proper application of these commands in modern society.⁶⁷

Second, the expression *ὡς λέγουσιν* exemplifies the difficult decisions that face Bible translators. Since *ὡς λέγουσιν* could either point forward or backward, a translator is faced with four possible options: (1) interpret it as pointing forward; (2) interpret it as pointing backward (so most modern English translations, e.g., the ESV—“what some call the deep things of Satan”⁶⁸); (3) retain the ambiguity (the CSB is almost unique in this last category: “. . . the deep things of Satan—as they say—I do not put any other burden . . .”); or (4) choose one interpretive option while offering the other in a footnote.⁶⁹ There is no clear-cut “right” answer here, and often times the receptor language itself will dictate the result. In addition, to a certain degree, the decision will depend on the *skopos* (“goal”) of the translator.⁷⁰ In other words, does the goal of the translator place more emphasis on clarity, readability, or on presenting multiple interpretational options when possible? Any critique of a translation, then, must take into account the translator’s *skopos* and how consistently he or she follows that stated *skopos*.

8–10),” *STR* 9.1 [Spring 2018]: 23–45). Space prohibits an interaction with Naselli’s article, but the reader concerned with application of Scripture *vis-à-vis* “food offered to idols” should at least be aware of it.

⁶⁷ Having grown up in Japan, this writer can attest to the relevance of this second command today for many (perhaps the majority) of Japanese Christians. It is worth noting that in my father’s opinion (who served in Japan as a missionary for 30+ years), the Japanese Christians that he was familiar with would not have been able, in good conscience, to enter a Buddhist temple for a meal, even if it were (hypothetically) a non-religious setting.

⁶⁸ See also the RSV, NASB, NET, NIV, the French Louis Segond (1910, *les profondeurs de Satan, comme ils les appellent, je vous dis*), the German Gute Nachricht (1997, *und die so genannten ‘Tiefen des Satans’*) and the Japanese Shin-kai Yaku (3rd ed., 2004, *karere no iu satan no fukai tokoro* [this is the Bible that the present writer grew up with in public worship]).

⁶⁹ I am grateful to one of the reviewers for reminding me of this option.

⁷⁰ *Skopos* is Greek for “goal” (Phil 3:14) or “purpose” (Josephus, *War*, 1.7 [0.3]). Katharina Reiß and Hans J. Vermeer write, “The highest rule of a theory of translational action is the ‘*skopos* rule’: any action is determined by its purpose, i.e., it is a function of its purpose or *skopos*” (*Towards a General Theory of Translational Action: Skopos Theory Explained*, trans. Christiane Nord [Manchester, UK: St. Jerome, 2013], 90).

Furthermore, it is not at all clear to what degree the potential referential ambiguity of *ὡς λέγουσιν* can be retained in any language, including English, without sacrificing some element, such as clarity. Translation often involves a tradeoff between clarity and precision; i.e., if one emphasizes a more precise rendering of the source text, this may be less clear or smooth in the translation, but if one emphasizes smoothness and clarity in the translation, one may lose some of the nuances of the source text.⁷¹

In regard to Rev 2:24, if ambiguity is impossible, then obviously an interpretive decision must be made (though, as noted earlier, the other interpretive option may be placed in a note).⁷² Yet even if ambiguity is achievable, one must still ask whether or not stylistic smoothness should trump interpretational ambiguity. In other words, is retaining both interpretive options preferable if the result is a slightly more awkward style? In this way Rev 2:24 provides a helpful test-case to introduce students to the difficulties of Bible translation.

Conclusion

A strong case can be made that *ὡς λέγουσιν* in Rev 2:24 points forward to “no other burden.” This would mean that Jesus cites the Jerusalem Council both in continuity with his own teaching and as a rebuke to those straying into syncretism under Jezebel. To such people in Thyatira, Jesus declares, “This issue has already been dealt with. Pay attention to church history!” In other words, one can appreciate the powerful link between what the apostles said (*λέγουσιν*) and what Jesus says (*λέγω*) in Rev 2:24, a theological message that continues to be relevant 2,000 years later.

If taken this way, Rev 2:24 opens up the door to further discussion in two areas: (1) Rev 2:24 offers a very specific ethic, in continuity with the

early stages of the church (Acts 15), which then demands careful consideration and modern application; (2) the occurrence of *ὡς λέγουσιν* in Rev 2:24 provides an interesting test-case for any discussion of ambiguity and interpretive options in Bible translation. Regardless of what position one takes, however, the point of the passage is clear: the One with flaming eyes will tolerate no syncretic compromise of the faith which has been delivered to his church.

⁷¹ As Reiß and Vermeer state, “[I]f a translator emphasizes *one* aspect of the source text, he will have to suppress others” (*Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*, 38). Indeed, Cicero famously bemoaned the fact that “If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator” (trans. H. M. Hubbell and cited in Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 4th ed [London: Routledge, 2014], 54).

⁷² An example of this elsewhere in Scripture, where an interpretive decision must be made, would be Jas 4:5, where whether or not one capitalizes “Spirit/spirit” will determine which interpretation one favors. It is impossible to translate this in modern English in a way that preserves ambiguity (the same problem also occurs in Rev 19:10, as a reviewer pointed out). Finally, for a lighter look at the possible consequences of trying to translate an ambiguous statement, see the discussion in [Author redacted], “Mokusatsu: One Word, Two Lessons,” *NSA Technical Journal* 13.4 (1968): 95–100.