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The Comprehensive New Testament

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The Comprehensive New Testament (*COM*) is essentially a cross-reference study Bible, a comprehensive one, as its name suggests. The *COM* is distinctive for its "study Bible" components: an apparatus and a cross-reference index. It is not, however, a study Bible in the more familiar sense of a text dominated by commentary from modern writers. A more accurate description of the *COM* would be an ancient bibliography for the New Testament. The text itself is a "formal equivalence" rendering, which generally avoids lapsing into "translation English." Overall it is hard to distinguish the English language expression of the *COM* from other modern versions. Like those versions, it aims at accessibility, not just accuracy. How the *COM* rates on both is discussed under "Text" below.

1. Apparatus

The most distinctive feature of the *COM* is its apparatus. This mainly works like a parallel Bible: it presents concisely the textual and translation decisions of the major English versions of the New Testament. In pride of place, however, is the Greek witness to the text of the *COM*, denoted by: "Alx" for Alexandrian (explained as "oldest"); "Byz" for Byzantine (explained as "majority"); and "Minor" for other significant readings where appropriate. The current edition of the *COM* follows Nestle-Aland (NA[27]) and the United

Bible Societies (UBS[4]), which is what is actually meant by "Alx" in the *COM* apparatus. A second, Byzantine edition of the *COM* is currently being compiled. The actual Greek is not supplied in the *COM*, which is in English throughout. The example below illustrates how the apparatus works.

Matthew 1:22–23 (*COM*)

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23   "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son,

and they shall call his name Immanuel,"

which means, "God with us."

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1:[22] Alx/Byz[**the prophet**], Minor[*adds* Isaiah].

1:[23] Alx/Byz[**they shall call**], Minor[you shall call (MRD, ~REB, ~RSV, ~TEV, ~TLB)]; **Isaiah 7:14, 8:8, 10 LXX/~DSS.**

The tilde (~) in the second note above indicates paraphrases in the Revised English Bible (REB) and other translations. Only versions with readings that differ from NA[27] and the *COM* are provided in the notes. The example also shows how the apparatus uses the same symbol to indicate that the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) approximate the Septuagint (LXX) in the relevant verses of Isaiah, rather than providing either a formal equivalent or an alternative reading.

The actual text in the example above is a little unrepresentative of the overall style of the translation. I would consider "the Lord had *spoken by* the prophet" and "they shall *call his name* Immanuel" more "black tie" formal equivalence than the *COM*'s usual "smart casual" (as discussed more thoroughly below). However, the *COM* is identical to the English Standard Version (ESV) in these verses, except for punctuation and "be with child" rather than the ESV's "conceive."

2. Cross-Reference Index

The apparatus is presented as footnotes, among which are occasional comments indicating that a more extensive note is available in the cross-reference index. However, the cross-reference index contains a great deal of information that is not noted in the main text. It is divided into sections, one for each New Testament book, and each entry is indexed to

the chapters and verses of the book. Again, examples illustrate the system better than prose.

Jude 14–15 (*COM*, pp. 399–400)

14 It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with ten thousand of his holy ones, **15** to execute judgment on all, and to convict everyone of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

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 1:14–15 Pseudepigrapha[**1Enoch 1:9** "Behold he comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon them, and destroy the wicked, and reprove all the carnal for everything which the sinful and ungodly have done, and committed against him."].

1:15 Alx[**to execute judgment on all**], Byz[*adds* the ungodly among them (KJV, NKJ)], Minor[*adds* the ungodly (ASV, DRA, ESV, MRD, NAS, NAU, NIV, NJB, REB, RSV)]; Alx/Byz[harsh things], Minor[harsh words (JNT, KJV, MRD, NAB, NET, NIV, ~NLT, REB, TEV)].

Cross-Reference Index: Jude (*COM*, pp. 711–712)

01:14 Genesis 5:21–24; Deuteronomy 33:2; Zechariah 14:5; Pseudepigrapha[1Enoch 60:8, 93:3; 2Enoch 71:32; Jubilees 7:39; Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah (3:13–4:22 = Testament of Hezekiah) 4:14]

01:14–15 Pseudepigrapha[**1Enoch 1:9**]; Dead Sea Scrolls[4Q Enoch (4Q204[4QENAR]) COL I 16–18]; Anonymous[Treatise Against the Heretic Novation 16]; Tertullian[On the Apparel of Women Book I.3]

"Behold, he comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon them, and destroy the wicked, and reprove all the carnal for everything which the sinful and ungodly have done, and committed against him." (Pseudepigrapha – 1Enoch 1:9)

"I am aware that the Scripture of Enoch, which has assigned this order (of action) to angels, is not received by some, because it is not admitted into the Jewish canon either. I suppose they did not think that, having been published before the deluge, it could have safely survived that world-wide calamity, the abolisher of all things. …" (Tertullian – *On the Apparel of Women* Book I.3)]

I have truncated the *COM*'s full quotation from Tertullian, since the first two sentences establish how relevant and useful Tertullian's commentary is on these verses. It is this feature of the *COM* that recommends it to me personally. The *COM* cannot compete with NA^{27} for my own study of the New Testament; however, the way the cross-reference index provides ready access to translations of the most pertinent paracanonical literature and commentary in the church fathers allows me to research details that would normally require trips to specialist libraries.

NA^{27} cross-references Jude 14–15 to Matt 25:31, which can be observed not to be included in the *COM* cross references; this oversight is easily forgiven, however, when provided with the wealth of relevant information not available even in NA^{27}.

3. Text

The COM claims 100 percent textual accuracy, 100 percent formal equivalence and a grade-6 reading level. These are impressive statistics. The first may raise eyebrows until it is pointed out that the claim is relative to the NA^{27} text, *not* the autographs.

(a) Textual accuracy. The current edition of the *COM* is actually an "Alexandrian edition," in other words, a translation of NA^{27} with no text-critical judgments of its own. The textual accuracy statistic is simply a measure of divergence away from NA^{27}. The *COM* does not diverge because it is deliberately designed as an Alexandrian edition, hence it receives the nominal 100 percent accuracy simply by definition.

On the other hand, there are many places where minor variants are adopted by other translators, even when they are basing their work on this same Greek text. For example, the manuscript evidence suggests there was a tendency over time for scribes to augment the name Jesus with the title Christ. Some translations prefer to drop, others to retain these titles. Such decisions result in good translations receiving less than 100 percent textual accuracy (against the NA^{27} text). A few more substantial and theologically significant decisions are typical in translation work, where the aim (as with NA^{27}) is to be accurate to the text of the *autographs*, but the translators consider themselves to be as competent as the editors of NA^{27} in making such judgments.

When Cornerstone produces its Byzantine edition, the King James Version (KJV) will rank above the New American Standard Bible (NAS) for accuracy in that edition, since the KJV is based on Byzantine texts. The Alexandrian version of the COM, however, will be *less* than 100 percent accurate *relative to the majority Byzantine textual tradition.*

(b) Readability. Regarding the *COM*'s claim of a grade 6.2 reading level, this was obtained using the Coleman-Liau methodology, which rates the KJV at grade 7.1. I cannot argue

with Coleman and Liau, but most people would say they find the Good News Bible (or Today's English Version, TEV) considerably easier to read than the KJV. Indeed, the *COM* reports that the Coleman-Liau formula ranks all established English Bible versions somewhere between the KJV and the TEV at 6.3. The ranking seems right, but the spread of grade levels seems wrong to me, especially the absolute values of the less readable versions. The almost Elizabethan English of the KJV, like Shakespeare, is not suitable until senior high school.

The simplest explanation for the discrepancy would seem to be that the Coleman-Liau index does not include a measure of complexity of vocabulary. The KJV includes a considerable number of obsolete English words, whereas the TEV deliberately aimed at restricting the vocabulary utilized in the translation to well-known words. This leaves open the question of where the *COM* fits with regard to vocabulary. I would venture that it benefits in precision of translation by utilizing wider lexical selection than the TEV, while, like other modern translations, it also benefits by dropping the obsolete terms of the KJV. So the *COM* uses comprehensive contemporary standard English vocabulary, whereas genuine children's Bibles, for example, sacrifice a little precision for the sake of simplicity.

(c) Translation precision. It is one thing to note that lexical selection, in general terms, is broad enough to allow for adequate precision; it is another to assert specifically that such precision is actually achieved consistently across the rendering of all the phrases translated in a version. I have not reproduced all the translation work to confirm every rendering; however, I have sampled the *COM*'s readings according to literary genre: in the narratives of the Gospels and Acts, the Pauline and Catholic Epistles and in the apocalyptic of Revelation. I have also scrutinized famous passages such as Matt 1 and 5, John 1 and 3, Rom 3, 1 Cor 13, and Eph 1 and 2. Finally, I have scrutinized prooftexts important to Christology, the Trinity, and the doctrines of grace, and also passages controversial in gender theology. My findings are typified by what has already been said regarding Matt 1:22. The *COM* is almost indistinguishable from other modern translations in its precise handling of the Greek; however, examples will serve to show the sort of analysis I conducted and provide an idea of what a reader can expect from the *COM*.

Christology, Trinity and grace: Phil 2:6: ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ. The issue in Phil 2:6 is the noun *harpagmon*. Most modern translations have "something to be grasped," where the KJV has "robbery" and a different understanding of the syntax of the Greek. I prefer the *COM* rendering: "a thing to be seized." It is potentially theologically contentious as it relates to Jesus' equality with God. "Grasped" is conveniently ambiguous, permitting the intuitive interpretation that Jesus did not contemplate *retaining* equality with God, while actually intending the accurate

but counterintuitive interpretation that he did not contemplate *obtaining* equality with God. According to a traditional theological analysis, this verse actually contrasts the ontological Trinity—Jesus equally in the form (*morphē*) of God—with the economic Trinity—Jesus not functionally equal (*isa*) with God the Father. The word *harpagmon* is attested in Plutarch (*Moralia* 12a and 644a), where it refers to the *act* of robbery. BAG does not consider this possible in Phil 2:6, where it suggests that the word refers, by extension, to a *prize* obtained by bold action. This fits the overlapping adversative parallelisms of verses 6 and 7, which contrast preincarnate Jesus "[already] being in divine form" (*morphē theou hyparchōn*) against his later "having taken the form of a slave" (*morphēn doulou labōn*) in the incarnation. Regarding "being equal with God" (*to einai isa theō*), Jesus "did not judge it a prize worth obtaining" (*ouch harpagmon hēgēsato*) "but emptied himself" (*alla eauton ekenōsen*) instead—he laid things aside rather than taking something up.

(ii) Gender: 1 Corinthians. Two tiny details in 1 Corinthians seem worthy of comment. The *COM* reads the foundationally controversial clause κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνήρ at 11:3 as "the man is the head of a woman." The Greek syntax here is intricate, and Bruce Winter (*After Paul Left Corinth*) has offered external evidence to support the interpretation of this verse as a reference to the New Testament view of the family, rather than a more general statement on gender roles. In this verse, it is the *COM* that is conveniently ambiguous, in contrast to the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and ESV that follows it—the husband is the head of his wife—and the New International Version (NIV) and Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)—man is the head of woman. It is somewhat refreshing to find a viable reading of this verse that does not "take sides" in what is often presented as a black and white issue in commentaries on this verse and its context.

In a similar irenic vein, the *COM* contrasts nicely at 6:9 with the NIV, for example, which has the rather confronting and interpretative "male prostitutes" and "homosexual offenders" for μαλακοί (soft ones) and ἀρσενοκοῖται (sleepers with men). The *COM*, however, understands these words as a merism: "dainty and dominant homosexuals." The Corinthians were very familiar not only with the Greek language but with homosexuality as a social norm. Although the *COM* in no way compromises Paul's disapproval of homosexuality, I think it goes beyond mere etymology to provide a rendering of conspicuous quality, sensitive to the actual usage of the words in their original context.

Conclusion

The *COM* is a careful but readable modern translation of the New Testament and an outstanding ancient bibliography. It is also an accessible introduction to textual criticism

for the nonspecialist. While it providentially supplies a de facto parallel Bible, its readability does not make it a genuine children's Bible. English is very well supplied with excellent translations of the New Testament, but the *Comprehensive New Testament* goes an extra step by also placing ancient sources in the hands of readers.