

**SBL Annual Meeting, Denver, 20 November 2018**  
**Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism Section Review Panel**  
**M. David LITWA, *Refutation of All Heresies (Writings from the Greco-Roman World, 40)*, Atlanta, Georgia, SBL Press, 2016.**

### **Response to Reviewers**

I would like to thank both Prof. Barry and Prof. Poirier for their thoughtful reviews of the *Refutation of All Heresies*. They join with at least six other scholars whose published reviews have been an immense help and encouragement. Both Profs. Barry and Poirier performed independent research for their reviews and show a clear grasp of the topics addressed.

Yet there is so much to talk about. The *Refutation* is the gift that keeps on giving, and has cast its spell not just on philological and heresiology experts, but on scholars of early Christian social history, magic, mystery religions, ancient philosophies, astrology, Egyptian religions, Persian religions, early Jewish sects, and Logos theology—*among several other topics*.

Given the amazing contents of this work, I am regularly stunned at its consistent underuse or simply supplemental use by scholars. But the tides are turning. It is a hope and has always been my hope that the present translation will facilitate renewed and diligent attention to the *whole* of this work, insofar as we have it.

I have never claimed that my edition is anything more than a manual edition useful for students and scholars who wish to familiarize themselves with this fascinating text—our clearest window into early third century Roman

Christianity. And I can't agree more with Prof. Barry that—given the kind of work that it is—the price should be made affordable to *all* students interested in this text, in both paper and pdf.

I never claimed that my edition was a critical text and never intended it to be so because I knew in 2013 that there was already a dedicated team working on an updated critical text—and once that would replace Marcovich once and for all. I myself eagerly wait for this critical text, because it will allow me to include a working apparatus in my own edition.

In the meantime, I wish to emphasize two things. First, the single manuscript for books 4-10 is now available digitally so that anyone with philological expertise can check the MS for themselves (simply google *Supplément grec* 464 or go to <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52503788x/f1.image>). Second, in my own footnotes I have signalled what I think are all the major emendations that significantly affect the meaning of the text. If I have missed something, I am always ready and willing to be corrected.

In addition, I never claimed that all the emendations that I don't signal in my notes are my own. If memory serves, I made no more than three personal emendations, and each time I signalled this clearly. (I have also published a separate article justifying my major emendation regarding the goddess “Phikola” in book 5. Please see the second volume, issue 2 of *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 2016). Readers of my notes will also see that I cite other

emendators when I think that their emendations, which I accept, significantly change the meaning of the text. (Thus Miller, Duncker and Schneidewin, Wendland, and Marcovich are all cited regularly).

Marcovich more or less adopted all the emendations made by previous editors—most of them stylistic. I myself have not systematically attempted to change these stylistic emendations because (1) they don't significantly alter the meaning of the text, and (2) they actually make it more readable. Marcovich was right that the text of our only MS for books 4-10 is "plagued with huge textual gaps, countless word omissions, displacement of words and even entire clauses, intrusive marginal glosses, and above all many scribal errors" (*Refutatio* 6-7).

So everyone agrees that the text needs to be repaired. Wendland was conservative enough to leave nonsensical phrases in the text. (And by the way, when something *does not make sense*, that is what I call "illogical.") Marcovich made his own sense of the text *even when it did not require change*—and he was universally and sometimes bitterly criticized.

Thus I have attempted to "undo" most of the non-stylistic changes of Marcovich, approximately 95 percent of the time. When I have done so I have basically returned to the text of Wendland so that, if compared, my text looks much more like Wendland's than Marcovich's. But in the end, my text is a mix of Wendland and Marcovich. I have followed this procedure because I think

that Marcovich, despite his many faults and excesses, was a gifted philologist and an expert emendator.

So it is wrong, in my opinion, to follow the procedure of the 2012 Italian translation and simply return to the text of Wendland. As I said in my introduction, some of Marcovich's emendations are good, and every time they significantly change the meaning of the text, I signal this to the reader. This procedure will not satisfy the exacting scholar (in part because a cloud of suspicion has settled around virtually every Marcovichian emendation); yet let me emphasize again that this is a *manual* edition plus translation designed for those wishing to familiarize themselves with this text. An apparatus, given the willingness of SBL press, will follow in the coming years.

A word about *authorship*. What amazes me as a student of the *Refutation* is how good scholars in the English-speaking world still instinctively refer to the author of this work as "Hippolytus." This theory has been undermined for well over a generation by French and Italian scholars. Thus I consider it basically irresponsible for scholars to *unthinkingly* cite this work under the name of Hippolytus or even "pseudo-Hippolytus," because the author never *claims* to be Hippolytus. To persist in calling him this is a distortion, and I have made clear why I think so in my introduction. If the introduction does nothing else, it familiarizes anglophone readers with the newer debates about authorship that have been going on for over forty years.

If we are really going to advance our knowledge of early third-century Rome and especially of the Roman church, then we need to revisit the topic of *who this author is*. I suspect that the name of the author was intentionally buried in the mid- to late third century because he was probably well-known and represented a threat unparalleled in the Roman church. This author was not an anti-pope, but something much worse: a rival Christian bishop whose orthodox credentials were basically impeccable by the standards of his time. In fact, this author set himself up as the greatest defender that orthodoxy had ever seen. He quite explicitly intended his book to be the *summa* of all heresiographies. And the culminating point of this *summa* was his attack on the orthodoxy of the reigning and recognized *Christian bishop* of the time—a former slave and apparent modalist by the name of Callistus. Yet it is Callistus's name that survives in inscriptions, cemeteries, and squares in Rome, while the name of our author was obliterated from memory. This is quite astounding because our author considered himself to be the *only legitimate bishop of Rome at the time*.

His story is thus distinctive in the annals of heresiography. Of course, it is common that heresy hunters sometimes turn into heretics. But our author never became a named heretic; he was simply forgotten. Yet his works were too important to ignore; so they circulated anonymously or under different names such as Josippus—a form of Josephus—and Origen. The *Refutation* itself was quoted, fragmented, and cribbed for the next millennium because it was recognized as the most thorough heresiography of the time—and it is still

distinctive for its lengthy, systematic, and word-for-word quotations of earlier texts.

Likely the author intended to update and replace Irenaeus *Against Heresies* book 1 (note that Irenaeus and our author refer to their works under the title of *Elenchos*). But the Refutator did more. He wrote what he thought was an exhaustive library of heresiography that would replace all previous attempts; in short—a *heresiography to end all heresiographies*. But again, this author never became a heretic. Rather, he became a ghost whose work barely got to us in the form of a single moth-eaten manuscript.

It is our duty now to give this ghost some flesh. And why? Because what the author says in book 9 of the *Refutation* still has the power to revolutionize our understanding of early Roman Christianity. In putting flesh on this ghost, we need not give him a name. But we do need to give him a history and find out what kind of community he actually led, and how it was possible for Roman Christianity, during his time, to be in nothing short of *civil war* over ritual, ethical, and theological concerns. If we want to talk about early Christian diversity in the center of the empire, we need to study this text more deeply.

I emphasize this because—as much as I love the Nag Hammadi library—the *Refutation* does something which most Nag Hammadi texts can't do, namely put us in a definite place and time with a lengthy (if scorchingly biased!) description of what was occurring socially on the ground. This is distinctive. And when we combine it with the massive, word-for-word quotations of

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original texts in Greek (not Coptic or some other translation language), we realize that the *Refutation of All Heresies* is an irreplaceable resource for early Christian Studies, and one that should no longer be underestimated and misattributed by the great scholars of our time.

Again I would like to thank Profs. Barry and Poirier for their thoughtful reviews and in particular Prof. Nicola Denzey Lewis for helping to organize this session. My sincerest apologies for not being present with you. I eagerly welcome any email correspondence with anyone interested in the *Refutation* (David.litwa@acu.edu.au). Thank you again, and safe travels home!