

## GRANVILLE SHARP'S RULE: A REJOINDER TO STAN PORTER

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When a book review is particularly harsh and, in the view of the editors, perhaps unjustified, normal editorial policy is sometimes set aside, and the author may be invited to offer a response. The *Journal of Theological Studies*, for example, recently published a review of Chris Keith's *The Pericope Adulterae: The Gospel of John, and the Literacy of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) by J. K. Elliott.<sup>1</sup> The review was so harsh and unlike any other review of the book<sup>2</sup> that the editors invited Keith to write a response. It seems that the same situation has happened here. Porter complains that “[t]he editor has invited my further response, but, in what I consider to be a further violation of their own editorial policies, is allowing Wallace the final word.”<sup>3</sup> Again, this is not entirely unprecedented. In 1978, a four-part exchange between Gordon Fee and Zane Hodges took place in the pages of *JETS* regarding NT textual criticism. Fee wrote first, to which Hodges responded, to which Fee wrote a rejoinder, to which Hodges wrote a surrejoinder.<sup>4</sup> In the least, this present exchange allows both views to be presented and for the reader to see what the issues and arguments are. And that is in the spirit of collegial dialogue, which seems to be the overriding editorial policy of *JETS*.

Unfortunately, even in his response, Porter still does not grasp either Sharp's rule or the evidence for its modification that I argued for in my monograph.<sup>5</sup> But before I examine his major arguments I should address three minor critiques he makes of my work (though he calls all of these “major”).

First, he claims that my monograph was not a scholarly work because it did not have an up-to-date bibliography (few works cited after the mid- to late-1990s), included tangential discussions, and was polemical and even cavalierly dismissive of scholars who, in my view, misunderstood Sharp's rule (Porter, “Response” 95–96).

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<sup>1</sup> *JTS* 61 (2010) 293–96.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Constantine Campbell's review of my monograph in *Themelios* 35 (2010) 53–55.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Granville Sharp's Rule: A Response to Dan Wallace, or Why a Critical Book Review Should be Left Alone,” *JETS* 56 (2013) 93–100. There is a lack of logic in Porter's complaint: if it is unprecedented to have a response to a book review, then of course anything—including his response to my response—is unprecedented. All references to Porter's response from here on will be in the body of this rejoinder.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon D. Fee, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the *Textus Receptus*,” *JETS* 21 (1978) 19–33; Zane C. Hodges, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Response,” *JETS* 21 (1978) 143–55; Gordon D. Fee, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Rejoinder,” *JETS* 21 (1978) 157–60; Zane C. Hodges, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Majority Text: A Surrejoinder,” *JETS* 21 (1978) 161–64.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin: Semantics and Significance* (SBF 14; New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

My main focus in the bibliography was on ancient texts, the literature that discussed Sharp's rule, and the exegetical and grammatical tradition regarding several NT passages relevant to my thesis. For this reason, the concentration needed to be on the past. Still, the 30-page bibliography of cited works included forty items from 1996 on. As for tangential discussions, I see most of them instead as offering the necessary basis for my claims or adding information that some readers would value. Concerning my alleged "cavalier dismissal" of certain scholars' views, I find this comment curious. My second chapter (pp. 55–78) documents the long tradition of misunderstanding of Sharp's rule, and about half of the 356-page monograph is focused on demonstrating a correct understanding of the rule and its general validity. How is it possible to call such interaction a cavalier dismissal? More curiously, Porter places my 13-page interaction with Grudem's treatment of Eph 2:20 and 3:5 (*Sharp's Canon* 214–28) in this same category. The reason I had this extended discussion of these texts is because of the weight of his arguments. Such a lengthy treatment could hardly be characterized as a cavalier dismissal.

Second, Porter says that a "major problem" of my book was "the generally poorly written English of the volume. This volume clearly could have used the work of an editor" (Porter, "Response" 96). Again, this is curious language since the editor of my book was also the editor of Porter's monograph in the same series. But let the readers decide for themselves about my English style. Sometimes scholarly works are written in such over-the-top technical jargon that the argument gets lost in the fog. I generally try to be a bit more humane in my writing style.

More substantively, Porter seems to claim that my poor grasp of the field of modern linguistics means that I am not qualified to speak about the nature of ancient Greek (Porter, "Response" 94–95). On the one hand, he is quite correct that I am not a linguist—in the modern sense of the term—nor do I claim to be. I am a grammarian. On the other hand, this does not necessarily mean that I cannot grasp, at least to some degree, the nature of Hellenistic Greek. There are flaws in his line of reasoning. First, he speaks about my general lack of knowledge of modern linguistics, but then says that "Wallace still limits his use of linguistics—even though he wants to make linguistic judgments, that is, systematic judgments about how language works" (*ibid.*). Here he tacitly equates modern linguistics with "how language works"; the two are not the same. If they were, then no one for the last nineteen hundred years—until very recently—could claim to understand the Greek NT, let alone the myriad other ancient Greek texts. Second, this reveals a fundamental problem that I have with some linguists today: they tend to see grammarians as antiquated whose usefulness for understanding language has become irrelevant. The grammarians I know recognize that linguists, including Porter, make a valuable contribution to the study of language, but that they also tend toward *prescriptivism* (even though that charge is anathema to linguists), while grammarians tend toward *descriptivism*. The grammarian who is true to his or her calling examines the data as fully as possible and *from the data* offers insights as to how the language in question is working. I am reminded that Robert W. Funk once told the Blass-Debrunner-Funk Revision Committee that, for the grammarian, offering examples of actual texts is by far the most important thing, for it grounds our work in actual data.

None of the criticism that Porter makes of my lack of expertise in modern linguistics touches on that. In fact, he criticizes me for heavy reliance on a book published in 1982 entitled, *Linguistic Controversies*. But my use of the book is especially to point out that the editor of that *Festschrift* complains in the preface that “the process of theory construction and model-building has left empirical research too far behind: the need for better data-bases is a major conclusion of over half the chapters in the book.”<sup>6</sup> The situation has hardly been remedied thirty years later.

Porter devotes the largest amount of space in his response to a critique of my understanding of Sharp's rule. Both because that is crucial to the rest of my argument and because I am limiting the length of my rejoinder, I will concentrate most of the rest of this article on what, exactly, Granville Sharp's rule meant.

By way of review, I claim that Sharp saw the substantives in an article-substantive-καί-substantive (or TSKS) construction as involving referential identity, when the substantives are singular, personal, and not proper names. That is, he saw both substantives as referring to the same person. It is helpful to distinguish between the basic structure, the components, and the resultant semantics of Sharp's rule. The components are TSKS. The attributes of the substantives (whether nouns, participles, or adjectives) are that they must be grammatically singular, referring to a person, and may not be proper names. When these three attributes are found in a TSKS, Sharp believed that both substantives referred to one person and one person only. And by this rule, and this rule alone, he felt that he could claim that Jesus is called θεός in several NT passages.

Porter claims that Sharp did not restrict his rule to singular substantives (“Response” 96–98); hints that Sharp did not exclude proper names (“Response” 98, n. 11); and did not see the semantics of his rule as involving only referential identity (“Response” 96–98). I will address these issues together. Porter chides me for being repetitive in both my book and in my response. But I felt that the compounding of evidence was necessary to make the case. Apparently even that was not sufficient. So, I offer more evidence below.

I count at least thirty instances in Sharp's book in which, explicitly or implicitly, he argues that the rule excluded plurals and proper names and always indicated referential identity.<sup>7</sup> For example, Sharp explicitly says that his rule meant referential identity: “‘even’ ... this English word is frequently used by our translators to express the *identity of person* ... agreeably to the first rule”<sup>8</sup> (he gives Rom 15:6 and 1 Cor 15:24 as examples, both of which speak of “God, even the Father” [Sharp's translation]).

<sup>6</sup> David Crystal, ed., *Linguistic controversies: Essays in linguistic theory and practice in honour of F. R. Palmer* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982) xi. See Wallace, *Sharp's Canon* 16–17.

<sup>7</sup> Granville Sharp, *Remarks on the Uses of the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament: containing many new Proofs of the Divinity of Christ, from Passages which are wrongly Translated in the common English Version* (4th ed./1st American ed.; Philadelphia: B. B. Hopkins, 1807) 2, 2–3, 5, 5–6, 6, 19, 21, 22, 26, 27, 27–28, 29, 32, 37–37n, 39n, 43, 51–52, 60, 93, 96, 109, 113–14, 115, 116, 118, 121, 125, 139–40, 141–42, 145–46. All references to Sharp's book are to this edition.

<sup>8</sup> *Remarks* 26 (emphasis original).

Porter claimed that Sharp spoke of referential identity only with respect to the Christologically significant texts. This is not true: in discussing nineteen passages which have the phrase ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατήρ, he declares that all these instances refer to “our *heavenly Father* alone; ... [such similar texts] ought certainly to be rendered in a *sense* suitable to the same uniform rule of construction, to express *the identity of persons*, because the same mode of grammatical expression is used in them all.”<sup>9</sup> Note that Sharp’s argument for referential identity is strictly on the basis of his grammatical rule.

In many places he makes the claim that the Christologically significant passages are in strict conformity to his rule. For example, regarding 1 Tim 5:21 he says, “*not even one of the several editors* understood the text in its proper *grammatical sense*, because they have all (without any authority) placed commas after Θεου, in order to distinguish *two persons*, contrary to the necessary grammatical construction of the Greek text.”<sup>10</sup> He appeals to nothing else here but what he perceived to be the *required semantics* of his rule.<sup>11</sup>

I offer two lengthy quotations to demonstrate this beyond reasonable doubt. In his fourth appendix, Sharp responds to one Gregory Blunt regarding Phil 3:3. Blunt uses this verse to show that Sharp’s rule involves plural substantives which, in this instance, bear referential identity; yet there are other places where plural substantives do not. And since they do not always do so, Blunt thinks that Sharp’s rule is invalid. He says: “*We have two PLURAL Nouns taken from Philip. iii. 3. which you mark as a CAPITAL confirmation of your first rule.*”<sup>12</sup>

Sharp’s response is telling:

But G. Sharp has neither marked or remarked any such thing. G. Sharp has said, indeed, in page 6, as Mr. Blunt himself has remarked, that, “there are not wanting examples even of PLURAL Nouns, which are expressed exactly agreeably to the first Rule.” On which Mr. Blunt again remarks, that it is “an observation made for no other purpose,” (says he,) “that I can discover, but that of insinuating that there is nothing in PLURALITY SO INCOMPATIBLE with your Rule, as to prevent even plural nouns from being some confirmation of its truth.[?]” But G. Sharp could not surely have any such purpose, (with due submission to Mr. Blunt’s penetration) because he had, just before, and even in the same sentence, expressly excepted nouns that are “proper names, or in the plural number” and declared, also, that, in these “cases, there are many exceptions.” This was surely an ample reason for excluding them from the first rule.<sup>13</sup>

It is evident that by “exceptions” Sharp meant exclusions from his first rule.

Near the end of the book, Sharp rebukes Blunt again. Blunt thinks that the rule applies to plurals and he sees Luke 8:1–2 as an exception to it: “*You might show, by your rule, that the twelve Apostles were women.*” Sharp responds: “But this, surely, is *not* by G. Sharp’s rule, but only by Mr. Blunt’s own absurd manner of treating it ...”—

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 27–28 (emphasis original).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 39n (emphasis original).

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, *ibid.* 43, 51–52, 60, 93.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 125.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

and, further, "that G. *Sharp* himself has *disregarded* his own *limitations*, an assertion, which Mr. *Blunt*, with all his grammatical sophistry, cannot maintain; for, it is obvious that all the texts which he has cited in his second and third letters, *as objections* to the rules, are rendered so merely by his willfully '*setting aside those limitations.*'"<sup>14</sup> What could this mean except that Blunt ignored Sharp's restriction of the rule to singular substantives?

As I wrote in my response to Porter's review, "If I have misunderstood Sharp's rule to be restricted to singular substantives, then so have the scholars—both proponents and opponents of the rule—who were both the earliest and who interacted most with Sharp's canon. For Porter to claim that plurals were in view is to overlook *all* the prooftexts that Sharp produced, his rebuttals of Blunt, Winstanley's concessions, Wordsworth's patristic examples, and Middleton's philological arguments and evidence."<sup>15</sup>

Regarding my "illegitimate" narrowing of Sharp's rule to exclude generic singulars, even Calvin Winstanley, the ablest adversary to Sharp's rule and the first one to mention generics as an exception, admitted that "the nouns, though personal, are used in a general or universal sense. In this respect, it must be confessed, they differ materially from those of which you [Sharp] would correct the common version: and so far may be thought inapplicable."<sup>16</sup>

As to my discussion of the patristic exceptions to Sharp's rule, Porter claims that "Wallace's response seems to me to be of the character of 'I win if I do and I win if I don't.' After arguing stringently for a restricted view of Sharp's rule, he now wishes to see evidence that the rule is not followed by patristic writers also as support of the rule" ("Response" 99). But this is to slide over the major point I made about the patristic exceptions. I note that the only violations to Sharp's rule that I could find in the early patristic literature were when they spoke of the members of the Trinity. I conclude my section on the patristic evidence with this:

Yet, when it is almost exclusively pre-Chalcedon fathers who seem to violate Sharp's rule; when their alleged abuses are all in reference to the members of the Trinity (and only uttered by those who embraced a high Christology); and when there is demonstrable "naïve modalism" in the earliest part of this period, what are we to conclude? Surely it would be too hasty on our part to assume that here and only here is Sharp's rule violated. The very subtle distinction between "person" and "being" could hardly be expected of these writers. Hence, to identify the Son with the Father was, in one sense, perfectly orthodox. More than likely these final proof texts on which Winstanley rested his case only demonstrate that the early fathers were in the midst of hammering out a Christology that had

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 145–46.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, "Sharp's Rule Revisited: A Response to Stanley Porter," *JETS* 56 (2013) 85.

<sup>16</sup> C. Winstanley, *A Vindication of Certain Passages in the Common English Version of the New Testament: Addressed to Granville Sharp, Esq.* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/Hilliard and Metcalf, 1819) 9. See my discussion of generic substantives in *Sharp's Canon* 122–23.

to await another century or two before it took final form. Indeed, rather than refute Sharp's rule, these proof texts seem to confirm it.<sup>17</sup>

In conclusion, readers can get only so much out of the give-and-take of this dialogue. I would urge them to examine my monograph and make up their own minds as to whether I have clearly understood Sharp's rule and whether his rule, by itself, unequivocally affirms the deity of Christ in Titus 2:13 and 2 Pet 1:1. I am still convinced that this is so, Porter's critiques notwithstanding.

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<sup>17</sup> Wallace, *Sharp's Canon* 271–72 (full discussion of these patristic examples on pp. 267–72). Even as late as the early fifth century, long after the Chalcedonian Definition, Augustine could say, “When you ask ‘Three what?’ human speech labors under a great dearth of words. So we say three persons, not in order to say precisely what they are, but in order not to be reduced to silence” (Augustine, *The Trinity* 5.2.10).