

Revealing Patterns: Darek C. Barefoot, Satanic Images in Jehovah's Witnesses Publications, and Biblical Typologies

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Abstract

The article reconstructs and analyses the writings of author, ex-Jehovah's Witness (JW), and YouTuber Darek C. Barefoot. Barefoot wrote his first book in the early 1990s to explain how his attempt at demonstrating and denouncing the existence of satanic images in Jehovah's Witnesses publications led to his disfellowshipment. Later, he published philosophical articles including discussions of Clive Staples Lewis's "argument from reason." Finally, he specialises in an exegetic method called "typologetics" that he popularizes by blogging and vlogging. This study shows how the narrative about satanic images sent, and is still sending, ripples throughout global conversations about Jehovah's Witnesses, also in directions that Barefoot would not have suspected nor welcomed, and how Barefoot's writings, although at first glance heterogeneous, display methodological unity and continuity.

Keywords:

Argument from reason, Biblical typologies, conspiracism, C. S. Lewis, Darek C. Barefoot, disfellowshipping, Jehovah's Witnesses, occult images, satanic images, subliminal images, Satanism

In May of 2014, Darek Clark Barefoot (b. 1956) began uploading a series of videos on his *YouTube* channel, called *Typologetics*, a portmanteau of "typology" and "apologetics," in which he discussed particular correspondences in the Bible's narratives and language as highly suggestive of its divine origin.⁵⁷ This, however, wasn't his first attempt at communicating with a large public. The videos drew upon, and extended, the discussion that he had published five years prior in a book (Barefoot 2010 [2009]) illustrating *typologetics*, a form of Biblical exegesis which he expands upon in pieces and audio-essays published through his web page, also called *Typologetics*, launched in 2009 and including a blog called *Four Faces of the*

⁵⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfw5uTA1FO2zpmzKJjRIWvA>. At the moment of writing (Spring 2021), the channel has 35 subscribers and includes 60 videos; his most popular video has reached 369 views. (All web pages have been accessed for a last check on 4 June 2021).

Gospels, launched in 2014.⁵⁸ Prior to publishing the book on scriptural interpretation, in the early 2000s, Barefoot had authored several texts that he self-published on the web including some about that very exegetical method, as well as others that discussed a philosophical theory advanced by Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963) known as *argument from reason*. Barefoot's debut as a writer, however, dates back to 1991, when he published *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Hour of Darkness* (Barefoot 1992 [1991]).⁵⁹ The author, who had been raised a Jehovah's Witness (JW), had grown strongly convinced that Jehovah's Witnesses publications were systematically hosting sinister images that he characterised as "satanic," "occult," and "subliminal."⁶⁰ Upon pointing out such an anomaly to JW authorities, and presenting plenty of material as evidence along with experts' opinions, Barefoot, his family, and other close relatives had been disfellowshipped. The 1992 book documented and discussed the images and reconstructed the author's expulsion. While Barefoot's videos have yet to reach a large audience, the idea that Jehovah's Witnesses publications have contained satanic images, almost thirty years after the publication of Barefoot's first book, continues being spread and discussed by different parties.

Barefoot's work, narratives, and ideas can be approached from different angles. One may examine the images for which he claimed satanic origin and nature and, so to speak, re-open the case, weighing evidence for their actual existence, as well as advancing and assessing different interpretations of their origin, purpose, and effect on viewers. One may discuss Barefoot's interpretation of Lewis's *argument from reason* from a philosophical or theological standpoint. Finally, one may engage in a theological and scriptural evaluation of Barefoot's "typoetics." This article assumes a somewhat different and overarching perspective. It is based on a meticulous examination of Barefoot's written production, which I discuss in chronological order. I do not engage in a criticism of the author's views, but I reconstruct and contextualise his work. In other words, I explore how Barefoot discussed the presence of satanic images in Jehovah's Witnesses publications, how this topic was, and is being, discussed (indeed, re-conceptualized) by participants in multiple conversations about Jehovah's Witnesses, and I examine similarities and continuities across Barefoot's work.

Barefoot recalls that in the summer of 1983, during a convention in San Diego, he heard from another Witness about "hidden figures, including astrological symbols" in the February 1, 1983 issue of the magazine *Watchtower*; when he looked for himself, he not only found such images but also grew convinced that they could not be coincidental; another Witness had written to the Society's headquarters about the matter and received a denial that Barefoot found "unconvincing" (Barefoot 1992, 6). The September 1, 1984 issue of the magazine published

⁵⁸ The book was first printed in a "pilot" edition in 2009 then released the following year with a new cover and minor edits (D. C. Barefoot, personal communication, 3 June 2021). The blog can be reached at: <https://www.typoetics.com>.

⁵⁹ Also, this book was first printed in a "pilot" edition in 1991 in a few hundred copies then released the following year with a new cover and minor edits (D. C. Barefoot, personal communication, 3 June 2021).

⁶⁰ Obviously, such terms are not interchangeable; additionally, not all the images discussed by Barefoot are, strictly speaking, hidden, and he includes linguistic messages. Furthermore, such images are defined in different ways across different conversations (including controversies). Instead of offering a preliminary list of definitions, I let each author's characterization of the images in question emerge from my reconstruction, including, when available, their explicit definitions of the concepts they use. In order not to clutter the exposition, I refrain from using the term *satanic* in quotes, or to constantly specify "according to the author's perception" and the like.

an official statement that briefly tackled the topic while rejecting rumour mongering (p. 7). Barefoot explained the occurrence as an artist's whim and did not give it more thought until the discussion was tackled again in the March 1, 1987 issue of *Watchtower* reassuring Witnesses that a member of the Governing Body had scrutinised the material (p. 8). However, in the fall of that year, while conducting a "Bible study" at someone's home, Barefoot noticed a face in the illustration of a waterfall in the 1982 book *You Can Live Forever In Paradise On Earth*. That night, he began a systematic examination of illustrations in JW publications, finding more and more hidden figures (p. 9). He regarded the meticulous collection of evidence as the only way he had to convince someone in a position of authority to see "the truth of the situation"; this activity, that he called "the project," occupied him for the following two years (pp. 11-12).

Barefoot discusses the existence and presence of such images as one facet of a general, contemporary phenomenon. He makes reference to satanic and occult elements in songs (both explicit and hidden), singers' performances, and album covers, as well as in movies and in new age self-help tapes (pp. 83-86). "Occult images," he writes, "circulate through the whole of modern culture like viruses in the blood" (p. 89). For instance, he recalls "watered down" satanic signs in Walt Disney's (1901-1966) 1940 film *Fantasia* (p. 94). However, he explains that "no conscious conspiracy exists among artists, musicians, writers, and advertising consultants" since most of them "resort to occult coloration as a professional habit without much forethought" (p. 86). He points out: "I have never seen an example of disguised occultism in popular entertainment that compares with the deviousness of the Watchtower pictures" (p. 84).

Barefoot believes that "the Devil and the demons are real beings of tremendous intelligence whose goal is the mental and spiritual manipulation of humans" (p. 13). He takes paranormal experiences as the sign of the power of demons, but he is also convinced that such power is not really available on demand, so that "even psychics who are not out-and-out frauds have to accumulate a stock of tricks and foolery to fall back on" (p. 92). He writes that "Satan is immaterial, conscious energy without visible forms"; however, demons can manifest themselves as "monsters and freaks" (p. 93). According to Barefoot, "occult influence" is a threat to society (p. 1). He thinks that "planting demonic symbols in biblical literature is the equivalent of spitting on Christ" (p. 102). "The most potent and the most blasphemous affront," according to Barefoot, is in a February 15, 1990 *Watchtower* picture in which the very name of Jehovah was mocked by inserting the syllable "Jah" (interpreted as a shortened form of *Jehovah*) in the teeth of a monstrous face hidden in a figure's sleeve (pp. 127-128).

"Once the mind is given a strong cue to see a picture one way," writes Barefoot, "it is hard for it to change perspective to see it differently" (p. 9). He specifies, however, that he carefully considered the hypothesis that the figures he had identified were coincidental, or that he may be the only one seeing them. He tested whether his children (then nine and seven years old, respectively) could also see the images (p. 26). A fellow Witness pointed out that one can see faces in otherwise casual agglomerates like a rock, but to this he counter-objected that a work of art is not the same thing as a rock and that, in Witnesses' literature, the resemblance between the effigies of the Madonna and of pagan goddesses like Isis was taken as proof of the former's continuity with the latter (p. 43). Additionally, Barefoot states that subliminal images are not accidentally there, but deciphering them "is a matter of guesswork all the same" (p. 79)

and yet he points out that the images he found cannot be casual; they cannot be found in fashion catalogues or comic strips (p. 101).

In the book's *Appendix*, Barefoot publishes several documents that back up his interpretation. One is a 1992 letter from a professional photographer stating that the figures identified by Barefoot were there "not by coincidence, but by clear and conscious efforts by the originators of the artwork" (p. 156). Another document is a 1990 letter from a professional freelance illustrator explaining that those very figures had been "deliberately incorporated into many of the illustrations [he had] examined" (p. 157). Finally, a university art teacher (chair of the art department at Mesa State College) and artist sent a letter in 1992 stating that "the imagery is there and is intentional" (p. 158).

Barefoot identified over a hundred sinister images (p. 111). In regard to their structure, the figures fall under at least three categories: *symbols* (like a moon or a pentacle), *faces* and *silhouettes*, as well as *letters* and *words*. The first category comprises symbols that are either in plain sight (like a ram's head on a plaque in a domestic scene) or hidden, blurred, and confused, especially in the representation of shadows, nuances, greenery, and the like. Faces and silhouettes, as well as letters and words, are usually hidden, too. To such categories two special cases can be added. On one occasion, Barefoot advances an interpretation of an entire illustration in a July 1, 1989 issue of *Watchtower*, that of a black goat that seems to be leading a flock, which he sees as a reference to the very satanic infiltration of the organisation (p. 78). Furthermore, he focuses on the apparently haphazard phrases *jest tups / thru daily* in an illustration representing a cinema's sign that anagrammed yields "jests put through daily"; Barefoot interprets such phrase as a sarcastic reference, on behalf of the authors of the satanic images, to their own activity (pp. 79-80). Barefoot does *not* identify satanic references in the publications' *texts*.

Barefoot reports that while working on the "project" and afterwards, he noticed satanic signs also around himself, such as symbols painted in red and yellow on a bridge near his house, where people in hooded red robes had been spotted (pp. 103-104). He found an "A" circumscribed by a circle in a basketball court during a walk with his children (p. 109). Someone had been looking up the word "Satan" in the library database that he perused and on the same occasion he occupied a cubicle where someone had left stacks of books about mysticism and the supernatural (pp. 111-112). Finally, Barefoot recalls one of the last congregation meetings he attended, after which he was approached by a mysterious, tall, dark-complexioned, soft spoken man. A few days later, he was targeted by obscene phone calls (pp. 107-108).

In the summer of 1989, Barefoot, his brother and their respective families moved from San Diego to Colorado (pp. 22, 103).⁶¹ During this time, he was exchanging letters with an editor of *Time* magazine concerning his "project"; one employee who also was a Jehovah's Witness stole such correspondence, reported him to elders, and left the job (p. 23). The letters would be later described by JW authorities as "public criticism" of the Society, which is considered apostasy (p. 44). Barefoot made repeated attempts at addressing JW authorities on the satanic

⁶¹ The book is rich in personal information, including Barefoot's background and family; additionally, he often expands on his and his relatives' feelings as well as on the dramatic repercussions of the "project" and the disfellowshipping. Here, I only cite essential information.

images, yet to no avail. In late December of 1989, he mailed copies of his portfolio to the members of the Governing Body; eventually, he did the same with “key overseas offices of the Society” (pp. 21-22). In early spring and winter of 1990, he sent the evidence to the Watchtower Society (p. 18). A typescript letter (also included in the *Appendix*) he wrote to the Governing Body in January 1990, in which he states that Satanic imagery had multiplied having been kept unchecked, suggests that the literature had to be replaced and that an official apology would be “in order” (pp. 159-160). This letter anticipates the arguments and the style of the 1991 book; among other things, Barefoot specifies his view that “at most, a small number of individuals are to blame for the figures inserted into the illustrations” (p. 162).

Barefoot had to face a judicial committee in July 1990 (p. 3). The manuscript that he put together for the committee comprised more than seventy pages, and included photocopies of images from JW publications and enlargements of those very images, as well as clippings and other documents (p. 5). He was challenged by being asked why he would think that, if these images were genuinely satanic, God would operate through him rather than the Governing body (p. 25). He emphasised that the very exposure to those images burdened him with responsibility, to which the Committee replied that his responsibility ended upon reporting the issue to the Society (p. 44).

Barefoot’s brother was disfellowshipped with his family after a congregational meeting that took place on June 17, 1990 (pp. 31-32). On June 18th and 19th 1990, Barefoot’s brother’s disfellowshippment and his own were made official and they were announced on June 28th and July 19th, respectively; Barefoot’s own took some more time since he had registered an appeal (pp. 55-56). The *Appendix* includes Barefoot’s appeal in which he emphasised that the letters he addressed to *Time* magazine did not qualify as “public criticism” since he wasn’t blaming the organization or the Governing Body for inserting or leaving the satanic images in the magazines, but only pointing out circumstantial facts that he ascribed to one or more artists (p. 167). His parents also had to face a judicial committee; their disfellowshippment was announced on August 1, 1990 (pp. 59-62).

Barefoot states that while only the artist could be blamed for promoting occultism, he blames the Society for leaving the artist room to do so and refusing to admit the issue (p. 28). He specifies that his book is not meant to disparage Jehovah’s Witnesses, but only to expose that part of their teaching is “corrupt” (p. 1; cf. also 13). He emphasises that he and his family are “witnesses of the God of the Bible, whose name is Jehovah, and of his Son” (p. 2). His intention, he metaphorically describes, is to “knit together some fabric of meaning without discarding threads either of truth or faith and make sense of a situation fraught with heartache” (p. 132).

Barefoot states, however, that even before the facts recalled in the book, he would “see a contrast between the Witness organization and Christianity as presented in the Bible” (p. 145). Additionally, he is critical of the Governing Body’s disinclination to admit error (p. 10). He points out, based on first-hand anecdotal evidence, that the Witnesses are very reluctant to admit even small mistakes on behalf of the Society (p. 35); also, on the basis of first-hand anecdotes, he describes how Witnesses’ answers to theological questions can be robotic and acritical (pp. 51-52). Barefoot explains that entertaining doubts and engaging in thorny debates are misconstrued as symbols of spiritual weakness and are therefore avoided (pp. 37, 41, 65). He describes the embarrassment and loss of credibility caused by the fact that certain years

identified as the end of the world simply passed normally (p. 38). He points out that the Bible just becomes a “stamp” for what the Society teaches (p. 39). He describes psychological dynamics among Witnesses as being characterised by *suppression* (i.e., conscious avoidance) as well as by *repression* (i.e., unconscious denial) of threatening facts, which, in his interpretation, are induced by the teaching that salvation depends on blind faith in the Society (p. 48). He regrets that people may give up “sound” Biblical doctrines in case the Society’s credibility collapses (p. 50). Witnesses, in his opinion, are in for “disillusionment, depression, and resentment” (p. 51). “I can sympathise to a degree,” he writes, “with the repugnance former Witnesses feel toward the rampant authoritarianism and dogmatism of the Witness organization” (p. 124). He criticises the Witnesses’ way of holding non-public hearings, comparing them to the kind of trial that Jesus underwent; inspired by public judgements that Gospels refer to as held in daylight and in the open, he suggests the introduction of observation (or tape recordings) and accountability; he suggests as well publishing the names of people who produce written material, and reporting on meetings of the Governing Body (pp. 63-65). He is critical of the Society’s exclusive right to “modify, declare, or interpret the divine law” or to “overrule” it (p. 70). Finally, he explains that he has chosen the image of “darkness” for the title of his book since, in the Bible, it is equated with secrecy (pp. 66, 93-94). He clarifies, however, that the scandal told in the book “is not the whole story of [the] organization” (p. 152).

“At stake were human lives as well as ethics” writes Barefoot, while looking retrospectively at his “project,” judgement, and disfellowshipment (p. 106). He thinks that his “personal journey” will be successful if his book “arouses within them not bitterness but simply a thirst for truth” (p. 150). “When a Christian has followed the dictates of his conscience in obedience to Bible commands, he may then trust God for a resolution” he writes, and adds: “if he violates his conscience by hesitating to obey, he is not waiting on God, but rather making God wait on him” (p. 151).

Asked to retrospectively assess, in 2021, the presence of satanic images and its implications for Jehovah’s Witnesses, Barefoot stated:

Inappropriate images, some of which have disturbing occultic associations, were incorporated into illustrations in publications of the Watchtower Society from the early 1980s through at least the 1990s. That statement is supported by the evidence presented in my book. Going beyond it involves speculation. It seems improbable that one individual acted without the notice of anyone else involved in the creation of these illustrations, which suggests a degree of complicity on the part of some others. It also seems safe to describe what occurred as spiritual vandalism, the psychological motives for which could be complicated. I stopped researching this subject as the 1990s came to a close, so I’m not in a position to say what has transpired in the years since then. To my knowledge the Watchtower Society’s presumptuous claims to unrivalled spiritual authority have never been abandoned.⁶²

⁶² D. C. Barefoot, personal communication, 23 May 2021.

Asked about the theological views he currently subscribes to, Barefoot explained:

I am a follower of Jesus Christ as my Savior and the Lord of creation. I hold the Scriptures to be fully inspired while communicating divine truth in various ways, therefore I see no conflict, generally speaking, between them and the historical sciences. I do not see my faith as based upon or deferential to the theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, my transition away from the Witnesses toward a more traditional Christian theology in some areas has led to me to adopt a high standard for adherence to biblical truth. I do not find that I fit neatly into a denominational category. I am opposed to any pursuit of governmental power on the part of the church. I further reject the association of the Christian gospel with nationalistic pretensions or the agendas of political factions, or the gospel being used as a justification for violence of any kind. Since the early period of the pandemic my family and I have viewed church services online, but I believe that association with like-minded believers for worship and mutual encouragement is important.⁶³

Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963), Irish-born scholar and novelist, famed and celebrated both for his apologetic and literary work, including the fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia* (7 vols., 1950-1956), is among Barefoot's sources of inspiration. It is worth recalling that Lewis converted in his early thirties from atheism to Anglicanism.⁶⁴ Barefoot mentions Lewis in *The Hour of Darkness* as an author that he enjoyed reading although he did not always agree with him; he explains that he was fascinated by Lewis as an intellectual who not only was not ashamed of believing in God and the devil, but who also showed that the Biblical teaching concerning good and evil "can be argued reasonably and persuasively" in a simple and clear style (Barefoot, 1992: 90-91). He also recalls reading in Lewis about a kind of arrogance typical of religious people that Barefoot identified in himself when he was a teenager (p. 138). Lewis is mentioned as well in *Gospel Mysteries*, as saying that believers "live in rebel-controlled territory" (Barefoot 2010, 109). since they inhabit a post-fall world. Finally, Barefoot uses a reference to Lewis to conclude the same book: "the greatest challenge to his faith was not rational arguments against Christianity, since he thought they were decisively outweighed by arguments in its favour, but rather an emotional feeling of the world's emptiness"; relating to such reflection, as a remedy, Barefoot suggests prayer, and the study of the sacred scriptures (pp. 310-311).

Lewis's book *On Miracles*, originally published in 1947 and, in a revised edition, in 1960 (Lewis, 2012), answers in the affirmative the question whether miracles are in principle possible. Lewis argues that supernatural events are interferences in the universe from a system outside it. The book is notable for containing a defence of the *argument from reason* that Lewis refined in response to the objections on behalf of philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (1919-2001). *In nuce*, the argument is a challenge to materialism, and takes the very existence of human reason as a good reason for God's existence. To put it simply, Lewis points out that

⁶³ D. C. Barefoot, personal communication, 23 May 2021.

⁶⁴ For an overview (and scholarly discussion) of Lewis's life, work, and ideas, see Como 2019.

naturalism, the position according to which all phenomena are material and random, includes the very thoughts of those who advocate it (considering such thoughts as phenomena in the brain), and is therefore self-defeating; naturalism being self-defeating, as Lewis suggests, one can regard the alternative position, *supernaturalism* as reasonable (see Como, 2019: 66-67).

In 2001, Barefoot posted on the Internet page *The Secular Web* a response to Nicholas Tattersall's critical review of *On Miracles* by Lewis. The author questioned Lewis' methodology. Tattersall argued that the number of "miracles" that were exposed as due to natural causes is so high that the initial probability for a miracle to be genuine is very low. He also challenges Lewis' definition of "naturalism" (opposed to "supernaturalism") as entailing determinism, i.e. the idea that each event (except, possibly, a first one) has antecedent causes sufficient for its occurrence. Failure to understand that it is possible to embrace non-deterministic naturalism, according to Tattersall, irremediably invalidates all of Lewis's discussion. Additionally, according to him, Lewis falsely assumes that naturalists are bound to discard the existence of objective values. Finally, Tattersall rejects Lewis' critique of empiricism, according to which naturalists have no justification for relying on inductive reasoning (Tattersall, 2000). Barefoot responds that Tattersall's claim according to which "many" alleged miracles throughout history have been reduced "beyond all dispute" to natural causes suffers from the same ambiguity which Tattersall attributes to Lewis, starting with the very definition of "natural causes" and of the concept of "beyond all dispute." Additionally, Tattersall's critique of Lewis' definition of naturalism is, according to Barefoot, flawed, since determinism is not the focus of Lewis' discussion but rather the idea that reality may be reduced to a combination of natural and supernatural causes (Barefoot, 2001).

A meticulous examination of the Tattersall-Barefoot exchange goes beyond the scope of the present paper. However, I have reconstructed some of its salient elements and passages to show how Barefoot painstakingly engages with Lewis's critic and responds displaying sharp analytical and philosophical skills. Two years later, a lengthy citation from Barefoot's "Response" was incorporated and favorably discussed by academic philosopher, and Lewis scholar, Victor Reppert, in a monograph elaborating on Lewis's *argument from reason* (Reppert, 2003: 118-119). After Reppert's arguments were criticized by another author through a review, once again on *The Secular Web* (Carrier, 2004), Barefoot produced a meticulous commentary and rebuttal, in fact extending Reppert's discussion (Barefoot, 2007). Notably, Barefoot's contribution to the debate is also mentioned by Reppert in a chapter that he contributed to *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Reppert 2009, 362, 378-379). Barefoot was then inspired by Reppert's work to further elaborate on Lewis' argument (Barefoot, 2013a).

In the paper "The Testimony of the Cosmos in a Scientific Age" (Barefoot, 2017b) Barefoot discusses the patterns exhibited by the universe and the ways available to humans to unlock them, inspired by Paul's assertion in *Romans* 1:20 that the invisible attributes of God are known from his creation (Barefoot, 2017b: 1). He argues that Paul's statement is true on at least two levels, and that scientific theories about the origins of the universe or life do not impinge on them. To start with, the cosmos can inspire a sense of wonder and awe that is unaffected by the way in which one explains how the cosmos itself, or some of its elements, came to be (p. 2). Secondly, and on a more intellectual level, science, points out Barefoot, is based on the identification of patterns. Such patterns may be generated by chance instead of by those rules

that scientists call laws of nature; rational people, however, find it impossible to believe that natural patterns owe to chance, although this idea cannot be discarded; after all, some predictions do fail (and we rationalise them as mistakes of some sort) and, most importantly, it isn't illogical that all the regularities observed so far are just accidental, like rolling a series of "1s" with a standard pair of dice; one viable hypothesis is that of a divine mind, which encompasses the physical world, its very laws, as well as human minds; Barefoot finds support for this idea in scriptural passages (*Acts* 17:28; *Colossians* 1:17; *Hebrews* 1:3) (Barefoot, 2017b: 2-3). In other words, the laws of nature may be, argues Barefoot, thoughts in God's mind, according to which he sustains the universe from moment to moment (p. 5). Barefoot completes his discussion with a caveat: "no argument amounts to a 'proof' of God, if by proof we mean a statement with the logical force of a mathematical equation. In front of us lie clues pointing in a Godward direction" (p. 7). Additionally, he points out that even the value of science cannot be justified with a strictly *scientific* argument: "God, therefore, can be a rational explanation even if not a scientific one" (p. 8).⁶⁵

In his second book, Barefoot recalls how in the 1990s Israeli mathematicians claimed the discovery, through a computer, of a secret biblical code. He points out that, given the great number of letters in the Bible, the chances of finding alleged "references" to topics that the interpreters are interested in, are very high; furthermore, the existence of such codes is not something that the Bible explicitly indicates. Barefoot observes that such sensationalist work discredits the Bible (Barefoot, 2010: 1). He, however, is in favor of reading the Bible while looking for *typological prophecy*: "a method of foreshadowing in which characters and circumstances early in a narrative portray what will occur later" (p. 2). While acknowledging that this too can be overstated, Barefoot identifies criteria that guarantee that the identification of typologies does not become arbitrary and vague: the presence of "encrypted narratives" in the Hebrew scriptures, "decrypted messages" in the New Testament, and "symbol identifiers" that relate the former to the latter (p. 2). This correspondence, he argues, can be found in the Bible but not in other works, and can only be explained by divine inspiration. Barefoot does acknowledge that this study cannot reach mathematical precision and that "judgements are involved" (p. 3) yet such judgements are in his opinion reasonable, and liable to be examined by anyone, including those who are not inclined to believe in the Bible. In this sense, the discussion of typology can be, according to Barefoot, common ground for different interlocutors, and the acknowledgment of correspondences can be an element in someone's faith although perhaps not a decisive one. "Faith," he writes, "may not be a cold decision comparable to solving an equation, but neither is it raw emotional heat detached from the facts" (p. 3).

Multiple instances of typology are discussed in detail by Barefoot. A meticulous scrutiny goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, I shall consider at least one example. Barefoot focuses on the Genesis description of Jacob's flock, that included streaked and spotted animals, as he expressly required of his father-in-law Laban. Barefoot points out that *Peter* 1:18-19 conceptualizes sin as a "spot" or "blemish" (p. 10). Jacob thus becomes a symbol of Christ, and his flock symbolizes humanity. "God, having planned in the remote past to send his Son

⁶⁵ Barefoot offered discussions of related topics also in other self-published papers: Barefoot 2013b, Barefoot 2013c, Barefoot 2013d.

to lay claim to the fallen human family, moved Jacob to make his strange proposal to Laban. God then saw to it that the story was preserved, first through oral tradition and afterward in the writing of Genesis. Finally, he inspired later writers to record those clues necessary to unlock the episode's meaning" (p. 13).

Barefoot points out that resemblances across Biblical passages *can* occur by chance; however, he emphasizes that the cases he discusses are characterized by multiple occurrences, but also by "economy of distribution" and "interconnectedness" (p. 27). To these principles he adds that "effective typology must be brief and pointed, not encumbered by excess detail. We can expect minor incongruities. By its very nature it cannot be pressed beyond the limits of illustration, yet it will reveal connections between seemingly isolated facts" (p. 30).

"Purposefulness" explains Barefoot, "is an important means of separating coincidence from consciously created patterns" (p. 88). Special patterns or correspondences between names or historical figures can be easily found, explains Barefoot, if one looks hard enough; such is the case of similarities that have been traditionally pointed out between Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy (e.g., both surnames have seven letters). However, states Barefoot, what could be the purpose of such correspondences? One may claim that it is fate; however, he rejects such an explanation because of its vagueness and "mindlessness": "believers in 'fate' don't conceive of it as a person who consciously plans the scheme for future events. Presumably, fate is an uncanny force occasionally recognizable by the patterns it creates. But this is what blind circumstance does" (p. 89). Purposefulness however, according to Barefoot, is a quality "inferred not just from events lining up in a surprising way, but to their lining up in a way that indicates rational intent" (p. 89). He adds that "for a body of facts to be purposeful does not require that everything about it be understandable" (p. 89). To the features of typology listed so far, he thus adds "purposefulness of type coding within the tradition" (p. 90).

Barefoot also responds to two possible objections. One may emphasize that, for a given type, more than one symbolic association is possible; the choice, however is not arbitrary, according to Barefoot, in the sense that it is guided by the context, that for instance tells the reader whether a certain type should be read positively or negatively (p. 93). Concerning the objection that the authors of the Gospels may have conspired to interpret Old Testament stories symbolically and to fulfil them in practice, Barefoot explains that this would require an implausible degree of coordination, organization, and ability to influence the course of the events (p. 94). "The case for biblical inspiration," he concludes "-or for something equally removed from natural causes- looks incredibly formidable" (p. 95).

Barefoot recalls that an unspecified skeptical reviewer "chalked up [his interpretations] to the human mind's 'amazing ability to make connections'" (pp. 251-252). He objects, however, that the system of connections that he is highlighting is unlikely to have been conjured and "common sense tells us we are looking at something extraordinary" (p. 252). Barefoot also references sceptic Michael Shermer's idea that evolution has shaped human minds in such a way that they are strongly inclined to see patterns; Barefoot points out that such an ability does not seem to be particularly useful and that Shermer's claim "is itself based on observations of patterns in human behaviour and might therefore be imaginary according to Shermer's own reasoning" (p. 253). Barefoot, who even cites Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905-1980) famous idea that human beings are condemned to choose, adds that when it comes to vital questions like the ones about faith and salvation, "we cannot afford the luxury of fence-sitting" (p. 253) and that

“it seems that under some circumstances having a lower threshold of belief than others can be a mark not of credulity but of insight” (p. 254).⁶⁶

The claim according to which satanic, or Satan-inspired, agencies resort to subliminal images and messages, as a form of debasement of the media in which they are inserted, or as means of manipulating the consumers of those very media, has often surfaced in relation to rock or heavy metal songs, and album covers. For instance, this kind of allegation was used in the “Judas Priest Case” in 1985 to argue that the band’s music had induced a pair of young men into making a suicide pact. The accusation, according to new religious movements scholar and jurist James T. Richardson, was based on a

simplicistic psychological theory about how such messages affect the human mind. Supposedly, such messages enter the mind without the subject’s awareness, but can then ‘surface’ later, as ideas that the person thinks are his or her own, and therefore may be more prone to act on. Such invasion of a person’s mind is viewed as a major violation of personal privacy that should be disallowed. In short, the constitutional protection for privacy overcomes the constitutional protection afforded speech, if that speech is subliminal in character, because subliminal speech is assumed to be invasive by definition. Those who embedded the alleged subliminal messages should be liable for damages, especially if the embedding was done deliberately (tortious conduct that could even result in punitive damages). However, they might also be found liable even if unaware of the possible impact of such messages, or if they placed messages inadvertently (relying on product liability theory) (Richardson, 2017 [1991]: 212).

The judge, however, ruled Judas Priest not liable: “He agreed that there were some subliminal messages on the records in question, but did not find that they were placed there deliberately. He also ruled that a case had not been made about the effects of subliminal messages on behavior, although he explicitly left the door open for further scientific research on the issue” (p. 213).

As discussed in detail by Massimo Introvigne in his monumental *Satanism - A Social History* (Introvigne 2016), the conversation and controversy about subliminal images and “backmasked” messages in rock songs drew upon ideas that were advanced as early as the 1950s, and most notably in journalist Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (Packard 1957);⁶⁷ such a debate, however, was a relevant component of the “Great Satanism Scare” that erupted in the United States in the 1980s and was exported to other countries to decline in the mid-1990s (Introvigne 2016, 437-443). One may regard Barefoot’s case and story as part of

⁶⁶ Barefoot also expanded on typologetics in several self-published papers, including some whose discussion overlaps with his more philosophical discussions: Barefoot 2000; Barefoot 2013e; Barefoot 2014a; Barefoot 2014b; Barefoot 2014c; Barefoot 2014d; Barefoot 2015a; Barefoot 2015b; Barefoot 2015c; Barefoot 2017a; Barefoot 2018; Barefoot 2019.

⁶⁷ In fact, Packard offered an investigation of how advertising companies had started researching and exploiting the non-rational (or in any case unstated) motives behind consumers’ choices in order to increase sales; however, he also offered a nuanced discussion of whether such research was ultimately scientific and whether the methods at stake were ethical.

such “scare” (or controversy). This seems to be confirmed by the timing (early 80s-early 90s) as well as by the references and influences reported by Barefoot. He namely mentions pieces, in *Watchtower* literature (that was apparently receiving and elaborating on discussions from the “Scare”), of Satanism as a “growing menace,” and of satanic messages, explicit as well as implicit, in rock songs and music albums (Barefoot 1992, 77, 82-84). Additionally, he mentions newspaper stories of murders that were described as resulting from satanic messages (pp. 14-18, 88-89).

Decades after Barefoot first heard about hidden images in JW publications, the narrative was still being propagated and was incorporated in different conversations about the movement, being globally re-conceptualized also in ways that differ significantly from Barefoot’s original thesis, in directions that he would have hardly suspected and that he explicitly disapproves of.

Italy is the European country with the greatest number of Jehovah’s Witnesses (Introvigne and Zoccatelli, 2021). In 1998, a Parliamentary Question was presented by twenty Italian Senators of different parties (both governmental and belonging to the oppositions), in the framework of a negotiation for an agreement (*intesa*) between Jehovah’s Witnesses and the government,⁶⁸ while raising concerns about Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Senators pointed out how they had received “plenty of unanimous information” according to which, among other things, Watchtower publications “according to experts, contained subliminal messages, liable to facilitate the readers’ manipulation.”⁶⁹ In an official response the same year, Jehovah’s Witnesses addressed such concern pointing out that “manipulation” (*plagio*) had been abolished as an offense in Italy in 1981 due to the concept’s vagueness. Additionally, they emphasized that the Senators had not been precise as to the nature of the “subliminal” messages, whose efficacy was questionable anyway; in order to strengthen this last point, they made reference to the writings of New Religious Movements scholars Massimo Introvigne, Eileen Barker, and James T. Richardson.⁷⁰

The Italian *Centro Culturale San Giorgio*, a conservative Catholic association founded in 1990 and based in Ferrara (Centro Culturale San Giorgio, undated a), published, through its website, extensive discussion of subliminal images in various products including JW publications (Centro Culturale San Giorgio, undated b). One of the sections about Jehovah’s Witnesses that widely and positively cites Barefoot’s work is in fact the translation of an article in French originally written by former Jehovah’s Witness Jacques Luc⁷¹ (“Les techniques subliminales et la Watch Tower,” undated) and the Preface to it is written by Paolo Baroni, the Center’s president (Centro Culturale San Giorgio 2015).

The claim contained in the 1998 Parliamentary Question, as well as those made on different pages of the Centro Culturale San Giorgio, were discussed in 2014 on an unofficial site of Italian Jehovah’s Witnesses called Testimoni di Geova Online, whose authors self-

⁶⁸ The agreement (available here: https://www.cesnur.org/testi/geova_it99.htm) was approved but never ratified and it was redrafted and approved in 2007 but again not ratified by the Parliament.

⁶⁹ Point 14: “Che nei testi delle suddette pubblicazioni, a detta di esperti, sarebbero contenuti messaggi subliminali, atti a favorire il plagio dei lettori”; document available here <http://www.kelebekler.com/cesnur/txt/geova1.htm>.

⁷⁰ The document is available here: <http://tdgonline.altervista.org/risposta-ufficiale-della-congregazione-cristiana-dei-testimoni-di-geova-allinterrogazione-parlamentare-del-12-novembre-1998-seduta-485/>.

⁷¹ See https://twitter.com/Jacques_Luc/.

identified as a “small team,” claiming competence in different scientific fields (Testimoni di Geova Online, 2021). While pointing out the inefficacy of the subliminal messages, along with the aforementioned scholar Introvigne, the authors cite Silvano Fuso, a chemist, known author and “debunker,” notably active in the skeptical Italian organization CICAP (Committee for the Investigation of Claims of the Pseudosciences); Fuso pointed out in an article that a famous narrative about the efficacy of subliminal advertisements turned out to be a false claim made in the late 1950s by an advertisement expert as a publicity stunt. The Testimoni di Geova Online extensively referred to Barefoot’s 1992 book as being Centro San Giorgio’s only source, discrediting him as being solely interested in tarnishing the Witnesses’ reputation; the images that Barefoot identified were described as ‘fuzzy’ (unlike alleged “subliminal messages” inserted in films for advertising purposes), de-contextualized, and overinterpreted; following the same process, the authors point out, one may even identify satanic images in those that decorate the website of the Centro San Giorgio. Finally, among other critics who explicitly rejected Barefoot’s ideas as far-fetched, the Testimoni di Geova Online cite Catholic priest don Ernesto Zucchini, who in a 1994 article about Freemasonry and Jehovah’s Witnesses, stated that “Barefoot’s arguments are, often, frankly incredible; by breaking down apparently harmless images- perhaps with the aid of a computer- one may find sinister, demonic symbols almost everywhere” (Testimoni di Geova Online, 2014). Incidentally, Zucchini did confirm the influence of masonic symbolism and language on Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916), founder of the International Bible Students Association from which Jehovah’s Witnesses stemmed; however, he did not push his conclusion to claiming institutional or doctrinal continuity (or identity) between Jehovah’s Witnesses and Freemasonry (Zucchini, 1994).

Social media and a platform like *YouTube* (launched in 2005) have opened unprecedented possibilities for the production and dissemination of material on behalf of ex-members of religious organizations interested in criticizing such organizations in various ways.⁷² Presently, discussion and criticism of Jehovah’s Witnesses on behalf of ex-members include the examination and denunciation of hidden figures in their publications. For instance, the Italian Giuseppe Longo (b. 1974), who disassociated in 2014 (Longo, 2015), discusses multiple symbols in several videos, linking them to Freemasonry, described as devoted to the Devil and financially supported by “Jewish Freemasonry” (Longo, 2018).⁷³ Multiple figures that Longo shows and interprets correspond with those identified by Barefoot in his “project.” Another *YouTube* channel features a lengthy interview with Longo and his wife who clearly explains how the discovery of satanic images (through online sources) played a major role in her decision to disassociate (Dio-ti-cerca !!!, 2016).

⁷² At the moment of writing, a *Google* search for videos related to the combination “ex Jehovah witness” yields 21,700 results, 4,190 for the Spanish equivalent “ex testigo de Jehová,” and 1,740 for the Italian equivalent, “ex testimone di Geova.” To the best of my knowledge, this important phenomenon has not been yet made the object of scholarly examination.

⁷³ To be sure, in the videos I examined, Longo does not elaborate in detail on the *exact* connection between Jehovah’s Witnesses and other agencies and organisations, nor does he explain whether the images are just a form of spiritual vandalism or mockery, or an identity-marker, or if they have any *effect* on the viewers. His presentations are quite crude and “factual”: he shows pictures and symbols, claims their masonic/satanic origin, and makes statements like: “Freemasons worship the devil,” “this organization [Jehovah’s Witnesses] is led by the devil” (Longo, 2018).

Another example is that of the French ex-Jehovah's Witness, author and YouTuber Sylviane Nuccio, who offers coaching for "women with toxic relationship issues" as well as for former Jehovah's Witnesses (Nuccio, undated). In one of her videos, she discusses "subliminal images" in Watchtower publications, describing them as "meant to affect the subconscious mind"; focusing on 2016 publications, she explains that subliminal messages cannot affect one's actions but they do have an impact on one's thoughts (especially in children) and emphasizes the presence of pornographic images. Challenged by some viewers who suggested that the images could have been inserted without the knowledge of Jehovah's Witnesses Governing Body or that they may only be a prank, Nuccio replied that the images were too numerous and too obvious, and that creating them can be no form or expression of humor (Nuccio, 2016).

In regard to the discrepancy between the ideas expressed through his project and his 1992 book, and the way in which the hidden images are currently being perceived and discussed, Barefoot stated:

I reject conspiracy-mongering in all its forms. I in no way endorse unsubstantiated and inflammatory accusations directed at any religious group including Jehovah's Witnesses. Further, I reject in the strongest terms the persecution of anyone, including Jehovah's Witnesses, for their peacefully-held opinions and the non-violent practice of their religion. Peaceful missionary activity by the members of any religion ought to be opposed only by the equally peaceful means of discussion and persuasion, never by violence, harassment, derision, or intimidation.⁷⁴

Barefoot, who has no college background and describes himself as an "autodidact,"⁷⁵ states that since childhood he was "blessed with a combination of curiosity and tenacious memory" (Barefoot, 1992: 13). He recalls learning "the value of the written word. For as long as I can remember," he adds, "I have loved books" (p. 134). He also writes about his English teacher in high school encouraging him to cultivate his aptitude for writing (p. 138). It seems safe to state that such qualities and inclination are mirrored in his texts. They are punctuated with scriptural references as expected from someone who was shaped through intensive Biblical training within Jehovah's Witnesses, but they also contain multiple references to world literature. For instance, Barefoot compares his story with that of the protagonist of Henrik Ibsen's (1828-1906) play *An Enemy of the People* (1882) (Barefoot, 1992: 1).⁷⁶ Barefoot also demonstrates love for structured and meticulous argumentation. While not everyone will be convinced by Barefoot's theories, they are undoubtedly constructed and presented with subtlety and nuance; for instance, he is fond of carefully considering and refuting objections and

⁷⁴ D. C. Barefoot, personal communication, 23 May 2021.

⁷⁵ D. C. Barefoot, personal communication, 3 December 2020. At the moment of writing, Barefoot works in the engineering department of a small manufacturer. He has several patents to his credit, but not having a degree in engineering, he does not refer to himself as an engineer. He instead sometimes describes himself as a "product designer" (Barefoot, personal communication, 28 May 2021).

⁷⁶ Other literary references include: L. Frank Baum (1856-1919) (Barefoot 1992, 73), Robert Bolt (1924-1995) (p. 91) Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) (p. 97), John Milton (1608-1674) (p. 121), William Blake (1757-1827) (p. 122), Arthur Miller (1915-2005) (p. 128), Fyodor Dostoevskij (1821-1881) (p. 130).

alternatives to his own claims. Such qualities and virtues aren't always instantiated across most of the conversations that currently echo, or draw upon, his original denunciation of the satanic images. In regard to the quality of Barefoot's style, arguments, and analytical skills, it is also highly telling that his writings about Lewis's *argument from reason* have been judged worthwhile by professional philosopher Reppert and incorporated in his scholarly discussions of the topic.

Barefoot's discussion of the satanic images, his elaboration on the *argument from reason* (as well as on related philosophical topics), and his "typogetics" may seem to cover different topics and they have found different (and not equally extended) audiences. However, I contend that they are characterized by a strong continuity. I am not only referring to the aforementioned formal qualities of Barefoot's texts, but to the fact that, on close and deep scrutiny, all of his discussions seem to reference, and rely on, a particular concept of *reason*. Reason (or mind), be it divine, satanic, or human, is characterized by the production of *patterns*. Patterns can therefore be taken by the human mind as a strong clue (although never univocal) as to the existence of a reasoning purposeful agent (although possibly an evil one).

Discussing why, if God is the universe's superintendent, catastrophes happen, Barefoot argues that "our cosmic discomfort is evidence that a rupture has occurred between us and the Source of life," concluding that "each of us must decide whether to cooperate with God's ongoing project to repair this breach through Christ" (Barefoot, 2010: 301). The imperfection of human reason contributes to such "discomfort" and also explains why absolute certainty is impossible, except perhaps in mathematics. Barefoot himself did experience a moment of uncertainty; he states that after high school, he started questioning religion, following a bereavement (Barefoot, 1992: 140-141). In a blog entry, he writes that "faith does not always mean belief that is unquestioning and immediate" (Barefoot, 2014b). Barefoot's work can be overall interpreted as an attempt at "repairing the breach," cooperating with God. The writer finds himself pushed by his curiosity to constantly use his reason to recognize patterns (both in reality and in the scriptures) indicative of other forms of reason, be they evil or good. In each and every act of "recognition" and in each and every argument made for the existence of such forms of reason, no matter how well and logically conducted, there always will be room for doubt, due to the aforementioned imperfection of the human mind. However, there is no alternative for the researcher and writer but to keep investigating, extending and refining his analysis, and communicating his results. In other words, in Barefoot's work, epistemology, exegesis, ethics and engagement as an author converge. Once a pattern is revealed, it calls not only for analysis and contemplation, but for action as well. In particular, the recognition of an intentional non-human agent through the patterns that it produces entails a strong moral obligation: denouncing and fighting satanic plans, or announcing, and adjusting to, divine ones.

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