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**Hanserd Knollys as interpreter of Scripture:  
An examination of his  
*An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Song of Solomon***

Jay T. Collier

Hanserd Knollys (ca. 1599-1691) was an early Particular Baptist minister in London, standing as a prominent figure among those congregations for nearly six decades. He was one of the few university-trained men among early Baptists, whereas the majority of his fellow ministers were “tub-preachers,” without any formal theological training.<sup>1</sup> He also signed a revised edition of the *First London Confession* in 1646 and the *Second London Confession in 1689*, which are the two major Particular Baptist confessions of faith in the seventeenth century. Thus, Knollys served as an important link between the first and later generations of Particular Baptists, making a formative and lasting mark on their identity. The significance of this distinguished minister for Baptist history is undeniable.

The majority of works written on Knollys have been biographical. On that score, Knollys’ autobiographical work has supplied one of the greatest resources for understanding his life.<sup>2</sup> James Culross wrote a biography on Knollys in the late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> In the twentieth century, Pope A. Duncan and Barrington R. White have written brief biographical pieces, not with the intention of giving a full account of Knollys’ life, but with the purpose of showing his place among Baptists and radical dissenters.<sup>4</sup> More recently Muriel James has represented Knollys as a champion of religious liberty, and Dennis Charles Bustin has emphasized the shaping and stabilizing effect Knollys had on early Particular Baptists.<sup>5</sup> Within

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the past decade or two, Baptist scholarship has begun to take greater note of his theological contributions among the early Baptists. For instance, Michael A. G. Haykin has written an essay that analyzes Knollys' position concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> Barry H. Howson has written the most extensive work on Knollys, clearing him of charges of Antinomianism, Hyper-Calvinism, Anabaptism, and Fifth Monarchism.<sup>7</sup> After giving a survey of Knollys' life, Thomas J. Nettles looks at his Calvinism, contribution to Baptist ecclesiology, and views on spiritual gifts.<sup>8</sup>

As a minister who had over 60 years of preaching experience, wrote several expository works,<sup>9</sup> developed manuals on Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and rhetorical devices in the Bible,<sup>10</sup> and advocated ministerial training, he would make an excellent specimen for studies in the history of exegesis in early Baptist life. For the most part, historical study of early Baptist exegesis is lacking. There have been several historical works concerning Baptists and their views on Scripture, but relatively few that have actually sought to address their manner of interpreting the text.<sup>11</sup> One who attempted to make headway in this area of scholarship is H. Leon McBeth, who seeks to give a general introduction to the topic among early Baptists.<sup>12</sup> Kenneth G. C. Newport has looked more particularly at the apocalyptic exposition of Knollys and Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), however his work does not concern itself with hermeneutical principles. Rather, he is satisfied with pointing out Knollys' and Keach's anti-papal interpretations of Revelation and accuses them of eisegesis.<sup>13</sup> Thus, no serious investigation into the significance of Knollys' manner of interpretation has been written.

Considering Knollys' influence on the Particular Baptists and his extensive work as an expositor of Scripture, an evaluation of him

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as a biblical expositor would be a great addition to studies in Baptist history. This essay seeks to fill a gap in the scholarship by analyzing Knollys as an early Baptist interpreter of Scripture. It looks at Knollys' exegetical work, specifically at his treatment of the Song of Solomon. While some theological positions naturally arise, the aim is to analyze Knollys' approach to interpreting Scripture. It examines his understanding of the meaning of a text, as well as his method of expositing it. Knollys is shown to substantially agree with his Puritan counterparts in finding historic, doctrinal, and ethical truths in the text, yet dissented from them by formally embracing multiple senses of Scripture. Methodologically, Knollys used a modified form of the typical sermonic exposition utilized by Puritans.

### **Senses of Scripture**

The idea that a given passage of Scripture can have only one meaning is a common assumption among modern interpreters. This notion is sometimes projected upon the early English Baptists, giving attention to a strictly literal reading of Scripture. For instance, William L. Lumpkin asserts, "For the authors of the early Baptist confessions there appears to have been little disposition to allegorize or spiritualize the Scripture, the plain literal meaning being desired."<sup>14</sup> Although McBeth acknowledges that early Baptists typically held a metaphorical understanding of Song of Solomon, he also says that "if they fell occasionally into allegory and 'spiritualizing' of texts...they did so less than most of their day."<sup>15</sup> Duncan even makes a passing comment concerning "the crudity of Knollys' literalism in interpreting the Scripture."<sup>16</sup> These state-

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ments give the impression that any allegorizing done by Baptists was accidental, and that their fundamental approach to interpreting the Bible tended against it.

The truth is that Knollys can hardly be accused of holding fast to a crude literalism, or portrayed as shying away from allegorical readings of the Bible. One quickly notices upon picking up a copy of his exposition of the Song of Solomon, that the title page claims that in it, “the Allegories are explained, and the hidden Mysteries are unveiled.”<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it can be shown that this allegorical approach to the Song of Solomon was not something to which he unconsciously yielded. One of Knollys’ fundamental assumptions was that there can be more than one sense or meaning to a given text of Scripture. He makes this clear in his epistle dedicatory, when he speaks of his “endeavours to unveil the *Mysteries*, to open the *Metaphors*, and to explain the *Allegories* of this *Song*, in Expounding and Interpreting the *Historical, Prophetical* and *Spiritual* Sense thereof.”<sup>18</sup> Knollys was very comfortable affirming a deeper meaning to the biblical texts than bare literalism affords.

Knollys’ threefold understanding of Scripture follows in the medieval tradition of interpreting Scripture. Medieval exegetes are well remembered for their appropriation of the *quadriga*, finding four different senses in the biblical text. These four senses were the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical. An alternative to this was a threefold exegesis, exemplified by interpreters such as Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141). This threefold exegesis did not formally incorporate the category of anagogical, admitting of “three ways of conveying meaning—namely, history, allegory, and tropology.”<sup>19</sup> Knollys’ exegesis aligns with that of Hugh of St. Victor.<sup>20</sup>

As Richard A. Muller has observed, the general tendency among

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the Reformers and Protestant orthodoxy was to formally reject the *quadriga*, while retaining the doctrinal, ethical, and eschatological significance usually found in their exegesis.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Knollys' use of the threefold exegesis shows that there were those Protestant exegetes that cut across the grain of their peers. John Cotton (1584-1652), for instance, had written on the Song of Solomon and affirmed a threefold sense or meaning in the text, though his three senses varied slightly from Knollys.<sup>22</sup> While Knollys' exegesis carries a lot of similarities with the exegetical substance of main line Protestant orthodoxy, he dissented by formally embracing a threefold sense of Scripture.

### Literal or historical?

Knollys referred to his first category of meaning as "historical," "literal," or "in the letter."<sup>23</sup> Respecting the Song of Solomon, this sense of Scripture addresses the relationship between God and Israel. Commenting on verses 2-4, Knollys wrote, "In the letter or Historical part of these three Verses, *Solomon* declared the state of the Church during the time of his Reign and Dominion over all *Israel*, which was a time of Peace to the Church of the *Jewes*, 1 King. 4.25.... Thus *Solomon* brings in the Spouse of Christ personating the Church of the Jewes under the Law, in the Letter."<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, Knollys showed throughout the work how the descriptions of the king and the spouse were actually depictions of Israel's history. This is illustrated by the spouse's blackness, confessed in verse 5. He explained:

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*I am black*] The Spouse of Christ in the Letter and History of this Scripture was black; 1. By *Solomon's* fall into the sins of Adultery and Idolatry, 1 King.11.1-8. 2. By *Rehoboam's* folly in refusing good counsel, and forsaking the Law of the Lord, 1 King. 12.8. & 2 Chron. 12.1. 3. By the Defection of ten Tribes, who revolted from the House of *David*, and apostatized from the God of Israel, 1 King. 12.16, 19.<sup>25</sup>

The literal sense of Song of Solomon addresses the historical relationship between Israel and her Messiah.

It may seem surprising to some that Knollys referenced Christ and the nation of Israel as the literal meaning of the text; modern readers might have expected the literal sense to describe Solomon and an historical Shulamite woman. However, his exposition on this point was not novel, and was quite similar to other divines of his time. For instance, James Durham (1622-1658), who sought to find all of the meaning of the Song of Solomon under the literal sense, said that “the Bridegroom is Christ,” and “the *Bride* is the Church.”<sup>26</sup>

Knollys did not arbitrarily regard Christ and Israel as the literal objects of the Song of Solomon. Rather, he believed that his interpretation was most reasonable and biblical. Knollys reflected on the nature of the book as a song, and argued that it was meant to be metaphorical.<sup>27</sup> In doing so, he referred to two passages of Scripture for support. The first passage he cited was Psalm 45, which is described as “A Song of loves.”<sup>28</sup> This Psalm clearly connects God with the image of a king, and likens His people to a beautiful woman and her virgin companions. The second passage Knollys referenced was the song sung by “the Prophet *Isaiah*, ch. 5.

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v. 1, 7. *Now will I sing to my Welbeloved a Song of my beloved. I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine, Cant. 6.3.*"<sup>29</sup> Here, Knollys quoted Is. 5:1 and Song 6:3, demonstrating the commonality between the two. In Is. 5:7, which Knollys merely cited, it is clear that Isaiah's love song was an allegory respecting God and His people.<sup>30</sup> With the similarity of these two biblical love songs, Knollys suggested that this song was constructed to express the love of God and of His people: "*Solomon* being now taken up in the spirit with heavenly contemplations of the holy communion between Christ and his Spouse wherein his soul had real and experimental enjoyment of his Beloved (for *Solomon loved the Lord*, 1 Ki. 3. 3)."<sup>31</sup> It would seem that for Knollys, the Shulamite woman might have only existed within Solomon's divinely inspired imagination.

That Knollys took the literal meaning of the song to address Christ and the church under the Old Testament, rather than Solomon and an actual Shulamite woman, demonstrates that the literal or historical meaning is not found in the bare definition of the words themselves, but in the significance of those words, according to the manner in which they are used. The literal sense of the word "dog" could refer to a canine; yet if it were understood metaphorically as a disgraceful person, then the literal meaning would embrace that informal use. Seeing Solomon's "song" best understood as a metaphor, and that even in Solomon's understanding, Knollys understood its literal sense to embrace the metaphor's designated image. Thus, Knollys' reading of Song of Solomon carries some affinities to that of Nicholas of Lyra (?1270-1349), who said, "And the literal sense is this, *not* that which is signified by the words, but that which is signified by the things signified by the



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words.”<sup>32</sup> Knollys’ understanding of Song of Solomon also strikes a similar chord with one of his contemporaries, Durham, who said “it’s Literal sense is mediat, representing the meaning, not immediately from the Words, but mediatly from the Scope, that is, the intention of the Spirit, which is couched under the Figures and Allegories, here made use of.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Prophetical or mystical?**

Knollys referred to his second class of meaning as “prophetical,” “prophetical mystery,” or “in the mysterie” of Scripture.<sup>34</sup> He used this category in a manner comparable to the allegorical sense used by medieval theologians. As Knollys put it, “The Prophetical mystery of this part of the Song may fitly be accommodated unto the peaceable state of the Churches of Christ under the Gospel in the dayes of the Apostles.”<sup>35</sup> Speaking on the spouse’s blackness from verse 5, Knollys wrote:

In the Prophetical mysterie of this Scripture you have described the blackness of the Churches of Christ under the Gospel; by reason, first, of their Persecutions, Act. 8.1, 3. & 2 Thess. 1.4. Secondly, of their false Teachers, Act. 20.29, 30. & 2 Pet. 2.1, 2, 3. And thirdly, of the Errors, Schismes, and divisions amongst them, 1 Cor. 11.18, 19. & 1 Cor. 15.12. Which Blackness overspread the face of the Churches in *Asia*, Rev. 2 & 3 Chapt.<sup>36</sup>

The mystical sense of the Song of Solomon prophetically gives descriptions of Christ and His New Testament church.

It had become common in the interpretation of Song of Solomon to see it speaking prophetically, not just of the apostolic church,

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but also of the history of the Christian church. For instance, Cotton's third category of meaning understood the book as speaking of "particular Churches, from Solomons time to the last judgement," which "doth exceedingly magnifie the wonderful excellency of this Song, making it a divine abridgement of the Acts and Monuments of the Church."<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Knollys' understanding of the prophetic sense was not restricted to the apostolic age. While it did speak of things to be fulfilled in the first century A.D., Knollys was not averse to making stark relations between texts and particular events in his own historical context. He could speak of Song of Solomon as "an Ecclesiastical History, Prophetically relating the state of the Church and the people of God in the present and succeeding Ages."<sup>38</sup> Although his exposition of Song of Solomon demonstrated very little interpretation that points to ecclesiastical events in his day, it does occur. Commenting on verse 7, he understood the prophetic sense of "the flocks of thy companions" to refer to both the apostolic age and church history. Not only did the expression refer to "those Assemblies of the Scribes and Pharisees in the Synagogues of *Judea*, and in the Temple at *Jerusalem*," it also referred to

Those Assemblies of Antichristian Ministers, and people of the World, who wonder after the Beast, and do worship the Beast that did arise up out of the Sea of *Rome*, and do worship the Image of that Beast, and have the name of the Beast, or the number of his Name, and receive the mark the Beast in their fore-heads, or in their right hand, Rev. 13.1, 3, 16, 17. *Rome* is the mystical *Babylon*, and the Mother of Harlots, Rev. 17.5. And all Antichristian Assemblies of false Ministers, and formal professors, are her Daughters, who commit spiritual whoredoms, because of the whoredoms of

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the well-favoured Harlot, Nahum 3.4, 5, 6. These are flocks of his Companions, which she would not turn aside after, nor assemble with; for why should I be as one of them?<sup>39</sup>

Knollys used the book of Revelation as a basis for treating the Song of Solomon passage as addressing church history. Because he saw the book of Revelation as a prophesy concerning events occurring thought the history of the church, he was able to justify his interpretation of “the flocks of thy companions” by letting Scripture interpret Scripture.<sup>40</sup>

### **Spiritual or allegorical?**

Knollys referred to his third category of meaning as “spiritual,” “in the spirit,” and even “allegorical.”<sup>41</sup> Although he could speak of it as allegorical, one should not think of this as related to the allegorical sense of the threefold and fourfold conceptions of exegesis. Rather, Knollys uses it as the tropological or moral sense of the text. Knollys said, “The spiritual sense of this Scripture is applicable unto the condition of every Saint, with respect unto the first love of his Espousals.”<sup>42</sup> Concerning the “blackness” mentioned in the 5th verse, he wrote,

In the Spiritual and Allegorical sense of this Scripture, by *Blackness*, is meant, first the Temptation of the Saints, Job 30.30. *My skin is black upon me*. Secondly, the Afflictions of Beleevers, Lam. 4.7, 8. *Their visage is blacker then a coal*: 3. The corruptions of the Lords people, which makes them empty and voyd, faint and feeble; and much pain is in all loyns, Nahum 2.10. And the faces of them all gather blackness.<sup>43</sup>

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For Knollys, the spiritual sense of Scripture addresses issues related to the individual soul.

E. Ann Matter has pointed out that the medieval exegetes tended to stress the interpretation of the spouse in the Song of Solomon as either the church or the individual soul. While both strands were present, the balance between the allegorical and tropological senses of the text was lost.<sup>44</sup> However, by Knollys' time, effort was given to find and expound both the corporate and individual aspects of the text. Durham and others saw that "the *Bride* is the Church, and every Believer in diverse considerations," and both of these within the literal sense.<sup>45</sup> Knollys, on the other hand, accomplished this by emphasizing the formal categories of prophetic and spiritual meanings in the book.

Having seen each of the meanings that Knollys addressed concerning the Song of Solomon, it is important to note his concern about abusive treatments of such a metaphorical and allegorical book of the Bible, and how he sought to be responsible with the interpretive process. He believed that "this Scripture doth admit of much variety of Interpretation, in regard to the Literal, Mystical, and Spiritual sense thereof, which none can understand, but those that are taught of God, Mar. 4.34."<sup>46</sup> Although he does not explicitly state how his interpretation was taught of God, it is readily apparent that his method was to let Scripture interpret Scripture. By this, Knollys was able to give a responsible rendering of the various senses of the text.

A brief review of what has already been discussed concerning Knollys' threefold interpretation will reveal his efforts to be a responsible expositor taught by God. To begin with, Knollys paid

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careful attention to the immediate context of the text. More will be said later in this essay about his attention to various details of the text, but for now, it will prove sufficient to recall his assessment of the book as a song. Having noticed the literary genre of the Song of Solomon, and verifying its use in other Old Testament contexts, Knollys deduced that the metaphorical expression of the text was the literal meaning of the text. Thus, his explanation of the various senses was grounded in a grammatical and contextual understanding of the literal sense. Having his starting point firmly fixed, he used the greater canonical context of God's Word to restrain himself from fanciful interpretations. As each of his renderings of the blackness of the spouse shows, Knollys used other passages of Scripture to establish warrant for understanding it the way he did. His expanded understanding of the literal sense was determined by Old Testament passages describing dark times in Israel's history, the prophetic sense was decided by relevant passage in the New Testament, and the spiritual sense was settled by various biblical texts referring to a metaphorical blackness among individuals. Knollys demonstrated responsibility in interpreting the multiple senses of Scripture by rooting all meaning in the literal sense, extending them by types and metaphors, and restraining them by canonical context. While his exegesis might have been freer than more modern interpreters, his approach was careful and principled.

### **Style, format, and exegetical concerns**

Having surveyed how Knollys aimed at conveying the fuller meaning of the Song of Solomon, it is important to examine more close-

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ly his method of operation. Muller has documented several different methods of exposition of that were used within the Reformed tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>47</sup> Particularly popular among the Puritans, a mould from which Knollys was cast, was the sermonic development of the *locus* method of exegesis, made popular by William Perkins (1558-1602). One of Knollys' earlier works, *Christ Exalted*, follows in this line of exposition. There, Knollys' method was to state the text, explain it, draw out a doctrine, and suggest various uses. However, Knollys employed a different method concerning the Song of Solomon in his later expositional works. In these works, Knollys retained many of the same expositional interests he had before, yet framed them in a modified format. In this newer format, he generally worked verse by verse through the intended passage, breaking it into several sections. He treated each section in a fourfold manner; typically, each section began by announcing the verses to be treated, gave a synopsis of the argument or aim of the text, and then alternated between commenting on the meaning of words or phrases and improving upon these comments with meditations.

#### **Announcing the verse**

Knollys divided his exposition into seventeen sections, corresponding with the number of verses in the chapter. As a means of announcing the verse to be treated, and distinguishing each section from another, he printed out his text as a heading (or the first portion of it if it were too long). For instance, he began his first section with, "Vers. 1. *The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.*"<sup>48</sup> On occasion, he announced multiple verses in his heading instead of

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just one: "Vers. 2, 3, 4. *Let him kiss me, &c.*"<sup>49</sup> In cases like this, Knollys gave expositions of the first verse given in the sequence of verses mentioned. His purpose in referencing multiple verses was to designate clusters of verses marked by changes of direction in the conversation. His third section continued with, "Vers. 3. *Because of the Savour of thy good Oyntments, thy Name is as Oyntment poured forth, therefore do the Virgins love thee.*"<sup>50</sup>

Despite his religious status as a nonconformist, Knollys felt comfortable using the Authorized Version as his translation of choice. One will note that the wording throughout his exposition follows the King James almost without deviation. This being said, Knollys was not so constrained so as to retain every last jot and tittle. His presentation of the text displays a number of slight deviations from the typical King James printings prior to the publication of his book. Some of these consist of variations in spelling, capitalizing initial letters in certain nouns, added punctuation, and even the addition of the word "and" in verse 4. It is difficult to give an exact explanation for all of these deviations. Some might be explained by the lack of standardization in the English language of his time. For instance, even though most King James printings use the spelling of "ointments" in verse 3, one can find the occasional printing that favours Knollys' use of "oyntments."<sup>51</sup> However, it is harder to explain his use of an exclamation point in verse 7 ("*O thou whom my Soul loveth!*"), and the addition of "and" in verse 4.<sup>52</sup> One possible explanation is that adding "and" was accidental, for it does not appear in the quotations given in his comments.<sup>53</sup> As to the use of exclamation points in verse 7, they seem more purposeful. Not only is this punctuation repeated in the subsection containing the comments, he grammatically classified this

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phrase as an “Interjection.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, he restated different parts of the phrase at different points, adding the exclamation point after each use (“O!” and “O thou!”).<sup>55</sup> Whatever the exact reasons for these deviations may be, they do not detract from the fact that Knollys favoured the Authorized Version as his translation of choice.

### Synopsis of argument

Having announced the text, Knollys used the second subsection to summarize the aim of the verse. His primary task here is to give a concise analysis of the verse, finding the purpose for which it was written. One good illustration of this is given in reference to verses 5-6. Knollys wrote:

These two Verses are an [’Apostrefh] aversion, wherein the Spouse turneth her speech from her Beloved unto the Daughters of *Jerusalem*, to prevent their scandal or offence at the Churches affliction, and her members defection. And this she doth, 1. By a *confession* of her Deformity, *I am black*; which she aggravateth by a *comparison*, *as the Tents of Kedar*. 2. By a Refutation of Contempt, *but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem!* which she illustrateth by a similitude, *as the hangings of Solomon*. 3. By an Admonition, *vers. 6. Look not upon me, because I am black*; amplified by a threefold reason of her blackness: 1. From the Efficient Cause thereof, *Because the Sun hath looked upon me*. 2. From the Subordinate Cause, *My mothers children were angry with me, they made me the keeper of the Vineyards*. 3. From the meritorious Cause, *But mine own vineyard have I not kept*.<sup>56</sup>



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One notices that Knollys was greatly concerned with the rhetorical construction of the book.<sup>57</sup> He gave careful attention to which characters are speaking, and to whom their speech is directed. By following the direction of speech within the dialogue, Knollys was able to determine the purpose for which the verses were written. Thus, his brief summary gathered together the basic argument of the text. Though he did not see it as a formal argument, constructed in classical syllogistic style, he did understand that this song is a literary device intended to persuade its audience. Thus, he could speak of Solomon's masterpiece as "an Argument of a spiritual joy."<sup>58</sup>

In following the argument of the text, Knollys was also careful to show how each verse relates to other verses in the chapter. His synopsis of verse 11 stated: "In the former Verse was set forth the Churches present beauty under the Government of *Abijah*, and in this Verse you have a promise of the Churches and the Saints future glory illustrated."<sup>59</sup> This reiterates his concern for understanding the rhetorical flow of Scripture. Each verse is part of a greater conversation, and recognizing how they relate enabled Knollys to better follow the Spirit's train of thought in Scripture.

Understanding how the biblical conversation flows helped Knollys to establish his understanding of the historical sense of the text. He did not allow himself to interpret the various images without grasping how they were being used in the dialogue. The meaning of the text was governed not just by parallel expressions found throughout Scripture, but also by the more immediate context within the chapter.

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The third subsection consisted of comments and explanation of the text. It is here that Knollys spent the bulk of his efforts explaining the threefold meaning of the text. He introduced these subsections by stating the particular word or phrase to be explained, typically printed in italics and set off by a bracket. This was usually followed by a paragraph or more of critical remarks, aimed at illuminating the meaning.

Occasionally, Knollys followed the phrase with an alternative translation. For instance, concerning part of verse 8, he wrote, "*Go thy way forth*] Or go forth for thy self."<sup>60</sup> Knollys never named from where he took his alternative translation, so it is difficult to tell exactly where he acquired it. Considering his grasp of the biblical languages, some instances could actually be his own personal proposals. This being said, there are some places where the evidence seems to suggest that he was comparing the text with various English translations available during his time. For instance, he followed the phrase "*As the Curtains of Solomon*" in verse 5 with "*or Hangings of Solomon,*" which happens to be the same rendering given in the so-called Bishop's Bible.<sup>61</sup> Another interesting translation option is the amplified rendering of verse 9: "*I have compared thee to a company of Horses in Pharaoh's Chariots,*] or *to my Mare, or my troop of Horses.*"<sup>62</sup> This wording bears a remarkable similarity to the rendering given by Thomas Brightman (1562-1607), in *A Commentary on the Canticles or the Song of Salomon*: "*to my Mare, or to my Troope of horses in Pharaohs Chariots.*"<sup>63</sup> Brightman's commentary was well known, and it would not have been odd for Knollys to use it.

In providing alternative translations, Knollys also took notice of

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ancient translations of Scripture. Addressing verse 14, he said, “As *a Cluster of Camphire*] The word [rpk] is sometimes taken for the Name of a Tree called a Cypresse Tree.”<sup>64</sup> While it is possible that he was directed to this rendering by the marginal notes of the King James or works like the English annotations (sometimes referred to as the Westminster Annotations),<sup>65</sup> the reason he preferred this translation was based on an early source. Knollys went on to compare the Hebrew text with the Septuagint, which he translated as, “*A Cluster of Cypresse is my beloved unto me.*”<sup>66</sup>

In order to determine the meaning of the text, Knollys gave great emphasis to the meaning of Hebrew words and how they were used in the text. Concerning the declaration of the phrase “thou art fair” in verse 15, Knollys wrote, “The word [hpy] signifieth *fair*, or beautiful, not only in colour, but in comely proportion, and parts, such as engageth affection, and draweth love and complacency.”<sup>67</sup> Knollys showed that the complexion of the spouse’s skin was not all that was considered, but the beauty of her overall appearance.

Knollys not only concerned himself with definitions of words, he also made careful observation about several grammatical issues in the text. Explaining the reason for the spouse’s affection in verse 2 (“*For thy Love is better then Wine*”), Knollys pointed out that “*Love*” is better translated as “*loves*,” for “She speaks in the plural number.”<sup>68</sup> He used this grammatical insight not only to point out a more accurate translation, but more importantly to draw attention to the abundance of Christ’s love for his people. Another example of Knollys’ attention to grammar occurs in his comments on portions of verse 4. He wrote,

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*We will be glad and rejoyce in thee*] *We*, that is, the whole Church, which is but one (Cant. 6.9.) Mystical body, whereof Christ is the Head, Col. 1.18. And in that respect used in the Singular Number, *Draw me, Hath brought me*; But consists of many members, 1 Cor 12.12, 27. united by the Spirit of faith unto Christ the Head, Ephes. 4.13. and by the Spirit of love unto the Church, the Body, Col. 2.2, 3. and in that respect used in the plural number, *We will run after thee, We will be glad and rejoyce in thee.*<sup>69</sup>

Here he took note of the shift between singular and plural word usage as a way to underscore Christ's relationship to his people, both as a corporate whole and as individuals. This, in effect, gives an exegetical basis for him to argue for both prophetic and spiritual sense attributed to the same text. "The Spouse of Christ is but one mystical Body, consisting of many spiritual members, compacted and fitly joynd together."<sup>70</sup> One final example of his interest in grammar shows its importance for the development of doctrine. Commenting on verse 11, "*We will make thee borders of gold, with studs of silver,*" Knollys focused on the subject of the sentence, specifically its number being plural. He wrote, "And this word [*We*] expressing the Person that made this promise, it must necessarily be understood to be Christ, unto whom this word of the plural Number [*We*] may as properly be applied as the word [*Us*] Gen. 1.26. *Let us make man in our image.* For by him were all things created, Col. 1.16, 17, 18."<sup>71</sup> This multiplicity in the Godhead gave Knollys the grounds to reflect on the Trinity: "The great mysterie of the Trinity in Unity and Unity in the Trinity, is unveiled and revealed in the Face of Christ, by the Spirit of God and the Word of the Scripture, unto the hearts of Beleevers, 2 Cor. 4.6."<sup>72</sup> Unmistakably, Grammatical observation played an important part

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in Knollys' exegesis.

Another important means of explaining the text is awareness of various figures of speech and other literary devices. Considering the nature of the Song of Solomon, it comes as no surprise that he paid attention to metaphorical language. After all, he claimed in the dedication that he sought "to open the *Metaphors*" in the text.<sup>73</sup> Beyond metaphors, Knollys pointed out several uses of synecdoche.<sup>74</sup> For instance, concerning the comely cheeks in verse 10, Knollys said, "The Spouses *Cheeks* are [by a Senecdoche] her face or Countenance, which is *comely* and beautiful in the eyes of Christ. Cant. 2.14. *Thy Countenance is comely.*"<sup>75</sup> Knollys also noted such things as a redundant use of words. Commenting on the repetition of "Behold" in v. 15, he pointed out that the necessity of "the word being doubled" indicates "the slownesse of heart to believe" and "a Note of wonder and Admiration."<sup>76</sup>

Knollys considered historical background important in interpreting the text of Scripture. There are many times throughout the treatise that Knollys justified his explanations by giving similar cases of historical uses. Some of the times, he used other parts of Scripture as precedent for his interpretation. Commenting on verse 12, Knollys stated,

*Sitteth at his Table] wbsmb \$lmhv d[, While the King was in his Round, This manner of speaking alludeth unto the Jewish Form of Sitting at the Table, the Hebrews were wont to sit round about the Table at their Feast, in a Circumference or Circle. 1 Sam. 16.11. [hb wab d[ bsn al yk] For we will not Round [the Table] till he come hither.<sup>77</sup>*

Other times, Knollys called upon the authority of ancient historians

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to solidify his case. On verse 5, he explained how “the Tents of *Kedar* were exceeding rich within, full of all rich merchandise, Pearls and precious Jewels, as *Solinus in Polychist. cap. 46.* and *Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. 6. cap. 28.* do report.”<sup>78</sup> Likewise, concerning “the curtains of Solomon,” he spoke of how “*Josephus lib. 8.c.2. Antiq.* doth report, That *Solomon’s* Hall had three several Hangings of Tapistry, every one more costly and rich then other.”<sup>79</sup>

### Meditation

Knollys’ fourth subsection was designated as “Meditation.” Although he never expressed the exact role that these meditations were meant to take, several functions can be detected. Perhaps the most obvious function served by these meditations was the succinct stating of a particular doctrine to be drawn from the comments preceding it. For example, having explained the meaning of the words “*Tell me (O thou whom my Soul loveth) where thou feedest*” in verse 7, Knollys wrote, “*Meditation.* Gracious Souls do greatly desire to enjoy the Ministry of Iesus Christ. *Cant. 2.3. I sate down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was [s]weet to my taste.*”<sup>80</sup> Sometimes, Knollys would go beyond merely stating the doctrine and would draw from other parts of Scripture to elaborate on it. After giving the doctrine that the “Ministry of Christ is a Soul-feeding Ministry,” he gave six aspects of the “work of the Ministry”: Convert, feed with knowledge and understanding, comfort, strengthen and confirm, establish, and save souls.<sup>81</sup> Not only could Knollys fill in details of the doctrine, he also made room to draw inferences. Having deduced from “*The King hath brought me into his chambers*” that “Soul-government

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solely belongeth unto Jesus Christ," he further deduced three more implications from verse 4: "1. Saints must not be the servants of Men in the things of Christ, 1 Cor. 7.23.... 2. Sin and Grace cannot reign together in one and the same heart, Rom. 5.21.... 3. Christ and Antichrist (the Man of Sin) are opposite in their government about Spiritual matters, 2 Thes. 2.3, 4."<sup>82</sup> Clearly, these inferences were drawn by logical deduction and supported by the testimony of Scripture.

Every meditation has at least a statement of a doctrine. Beyond declaring the doctrine, Knollys often moved from teaching to application for his readers. Drawing on the imagery of shepherds feeding their sheep in verse 8, he stated the following doctrine in his meditation: "*6 Meditation*, Whosoever hath the care and charge of Souls, ought to bring them to the Congregations of the Lords people, where his faithful Ministers dispense his holy Ordinances that they may be fed and nourished, converted and comforted, sanctified and saved by the Spirit and grace of God in Jesus Christ. *And feed thy kids beside the shepherds tents.*"<sup>83</sup> By way of application, he exhorted both parents and monarchs (the latter without their coercive power) to bring those under their charge to the churches and ordinances of God.<sup>84</sup>

Knollys sought to press these doctrines to the consciences of the readers in several different ways. In encouraging the saints in their Christian duties, Knollys was not reluctant to give warnings against neglecting the personal application of doctrines. An example of this occurs in one of Knollys' meditations on verse 14 concerning the spouse and her beloved. The doctrine he gave was that those "who are espoused unto Christ in spiritual relation, should be constant in their spiritual affection unto him."<sup>85</sup> In applying it, he cau-

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tioned that “Souls ought not to coole in their spiritual affections unto Christ Jesus,” and that “Christ doth take it unkindly that any beleevvers should leave their first love.”<sup>86</sup> He followed this by cautioning them of three common ways Christians lose constancy in their affections for Christ.<sup>87</sup> More often than giving warnings, Knollys exhorted his readers in their Christian duties by pointing out incentives. While meditating on “O thou whom my soul loveth” from verse 7, he wrote, “The Saints have good reasons to love Christ in all changes,” followed by three encouragements: “1. Christ changeth not, Mal. 3.6.... 2. Christ sweetneth and sanctifieth all changes unto his Saints, and maketh all work together for their good, Rom. 8.28.... 3. Christ loves the Saints in all the changes that come upon them, Joh. 13.1.”<sup>88</sup>

Another function of the meditation was to exhort the readers to search their souls to see if the truths of the doctrines expressed were mirrored in their own lives. Addressing the doctrines found in “*My beloved is unto me ...*” of verse 14, Knollys pleaded with his readers: “O blessed Saint! What is Christ to thee?”<sup>89</sup> and “O sinner! ~~What is Christ to thee?~~” Knollys thought that part of his job in expositing the text was to make sure that his audience saw that the text spoke to them and their circumstances.

One more way Knollys used the meditation to apply doctrines to the reader was by giving expressions of relish and delight. After stating a doctrine found in the text, Knollys would occasionally deliver exclamations of joy over it. Reflecting on the sweet communion shared between the spouse and her beloved, he wrote, “O how are the hunger-thirsty Soules of the poor Saints revived, refreshed, comforted, and satiated with the Communications of the Spirit and grace of Christ, in his holy Ordinances? When the Lord meets



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them, manifesteth himself to them, speaketh gracious words unto their hearts, and witnesseth his love, and sealeth it by his Spirit in the promises of the new Covenant.”<sup>90</sup> By glorying in the beauties of Christ, Knollys sought to warm the hearts and affections of his readers to love Jesus more.

### **Conclusions**

When expounding the meanings of the text, Knollys gave a verse by verse and phrase by phrase analysis of the text. His format was to 1) announce the verses to be treated, 2) give a synopsis of the argument or aim of the passage, 3) comment on and explain the meaning of words or phrases, and 4) deliver a meditation, containing doctrine and application. This appears to be a slight modification of the Puritan sermonic form of exposition, which elicit doctrines from the text and deliver uses of the doctrine.

In his exegesis, Knollys sought to determine the meaning of the text by keeping in mind both the narrow and broad context of the book. Regarding the narrower context, he delved into the Hebrew text to understand the meaning of different words and phrases, and to analyze more carefully its grammatical constructions. He was very interested in historical background, for it helped him to determine with greater accuracy the common usage of different words and images. His attention to things like synecdoche and figures of speech reveal his great attention to the rhetorical elements of the text. As to the broader context, Knollys allowed Scripture to interpret Scripture. In determining the metaphorical aspects of Song of Solomon, he never established a meaning without citing other biblical texts for justification. This dependence on

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the wider witness of Scripture displays a common assumption held among his predecessors and contemporaries, that God is the primary author of the text.

With this method and these exegetical concerns, Knollys used his interpretive skills to determine the right understanding of the Song of Solomon. When it came to the issue of the meaning of the text, Knollys preferred the medieval tradition of seeing multiple senses in Scripture. Rather than adopting the more popular medieval scheme known as the *quadriga*, Knollys incorporated the threefold exegesis, as found in the works of Hugh of St. Victor. Accordingly, Knollys expounded what he called the literal or historical sense of the Song of Solomon, referring to the relationship between the Jewish church in Solomon's time and her Messiah. Knollys showed continuity with medievals like Nicholas of Lyra and Puritans like James Durham, conceiving of the literal sense of Scripture as embracing the metaphorical meanings in the text. Knollys expounded the prophetic or mystical sense of the text, describing the relationship of the church from the days of the apostles to the judgment. In this, Knollys echoed the medieval allegorical sense of Scripture, and embraced the fairly common view of Reformed orthodoxy that the Song of Solomon looked prophetically to events occurring until the final days. He also expounded what he referred to as the spiritual or allegorical sense of the text as portraying the relationship of God with individual souls. This spiritual sense mirrored the medieval view of the tropological sense of Scripture, and carried forth a common Protestant desire to relate the book to the individual lives of believers. However, Knollys broke with the majority of his Protestant companions by interpreting the prophetic and spiritual aspects of Song of Solomon as formal categories of meaning

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that are not technically considered the literal sense. This appears to be a formal departure only, for in substance, Knollys' prophetic and spiritual senses were rooted in the literal sense. Yet in arguing for multiple senses of Scripture, he highlighted the truth that the Bible aims at more than rehearsing historical data. His threefold sense was a strong affirmation that God's Word carries historical, doctrinal, and ethical meaning to sustain the hope of God's people.

Knollys proved to be a very capable exegete among his Baptist brethren. While distinctly a Baptist in his theological convictions, it is clear that Knollys shared many exegetical commonalities with the broader Christian tradition. Much of his approach to interpreting the Bible reveals his Puritan background and Cambridge education. There is also a good deal of his exegesis that shows an affinity and preference to older medieval categories of biblical interpretation. Thus, a look at Knollys as an interpreter of Scripture gives a sampling of early Baptist, Puritan, and catholic exegesis.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Cf. the anonymous pamphlet *Tub-preachers overturnd or Independency to be abandon'd and abhor'd as destructive to the majestacy and ministry, of the church and common-wealth of England* (London: George Lindsay, 1647).

<sup>2</sup>Hanserd Knollys, *The Life and Death of That Old Disciple of Jesus Christ and Eminent Minister of the Gospel, Mr. Hanserd Knollys* (London: John Harris, 1692).

<sup>3</sup>James Culross, *Hanserd Knollys: "A Minister and Witness of Jesus Christ," 1598-1691* (London: Alexander and Shephard, 1895).

<sup>4</sup>Pope A. Duncan, *Hanserd Knollys: Seventeenth-Century Baptist* (Nashville: Broadman, 1965); Barrington R. White, *Hanserd Knollys and Radical Dissent in the 17th Century* (London: Dr. Williams's Trust, 1977); Barrington R. White, "Knollys, Hanserd (c.1599-1691)" in Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century*, (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983), 2:

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160-162.

<sup>5</sup>Muriel James, *Religious Liberty on Trial: Hanserd Knollys - Early Baptist Hero* (Franklin, Tennessee: Providence House, 1997); Dennis Charles Bustin, "Hanserd Knollys: Particular Baptist Pioneer in Seventeenth-Century England" (Ph.D. diss., Queen's University at Kingston, 2003). Several brief biographical sketches of Knollys are also available. E.g., Benjamin Brook, *Lives of the Puritans* (London: James Black, 1813; reprinted Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 3:491-500; J. Newton Brown, "Hanserd Knollys" in William B. Sprague, ed., *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 6:1-7; Alexander Gordon, "Knollys, Hanserd (1599?-1691)" in Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917), II, 279-81; Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Knollys, Hanserd (1598-1691)" in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31:967-70.

<sup>6</sup>Michael A. G. Haykin, "Hanserd Knollys (ca.1599-1691) on the Gifts of the Spirit," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 54 (Spring 1992), 99-113. Haykin's article is incorporated into his book *Kiffin, Knollys and Keach: Rediscovering Our English Baptist Heritage* (Leeds: Reformation Today Trust, 1996), 54-61.

<sup>7</sup>Barry H. Howson, *Erroneous and Schismatical Opinions: The Question of Orthodoxy Regarding the Theology of Hanserd Knollys (c.1599-1691)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). The biographical portion of Howson's work also appears in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The British Particular Baptists, 1638-1910*, (Springfield, Missouri: Particular Baptist Press, 1998), I, 39-62.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*. Vol. 1: *Beginnings in Britain* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 147-163.

<sup>9</sup>Hanserd Knollys, *Christ Exalted* (London: Jane Coe, 1646); Hanserd Knollys, *An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Song of Solomon* (London: W. Godbid, 1656); Hanserd Knollys, *The Parable of the Kingdom Heaven Expounded, or an Exposition of the First Thirteen Verses of the Twenty Fifth Chapter of Matthew* (London: Benjamin Harris, 1674); Hanserd Knollys, *Exposition of the Eleventh Chapter of the Revelation* (1679); Hanserd Knollys, *An Exposition of the Whole Book of the Revelation* (London, 1689).

<sup>10</sup>Hanserd Knollys, *The Rudiments of Hebrew Grammer in English* (London: Moses Bell, 1648); Hanserd Knollys, *Rhetoricae Adumbratio* (London, 1663); Hanserd Knollys, *Radices Simplicium Vocum, Flexilium*

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*Maxime, Novi Testamenti* (London, 1664); Hanserd Knollys, *Grammaticae Latinae Compendium, or, An Introduction to the Latin Tongue* (London, 1664); Hanserd Knollys, *Grammaticae Graecae Compendium* (London, 1664); Hanserd Knollys, *Linguae Hebraicae Delineatio* (London, 1664); Hanserd Knollys, *Radices Hebraicae Omenes, Quae in S. Scriptura, Veteris Testamenti Occurrunt* (London, 1664). All but the First of these were compiled together in Hanserd Knollys, *Grammaticae Latinae, Graecae, & Hebraicae. Compendium. Rhetoricae Adumbration. Item Radices Graecae & Hebraicae Omnes quae in Sacra Scriptura Veteris & Novi Testamenti Occurrunt* (London: Tho. Roycroft, 1665).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and exp. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999); Michael A. G. Hakyin, "A Spirituality of the Word: The Scriptures in Early Baptist Life and Thought," *Reformation and Revival*, 9 (Fall 2000), 75-89; William L. Lumpkin, "The Bible in Early Baptist Confessions of Faith," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 19 (July 1984), 33-41; James Leo Garrett, Jr. "Biblical Infallibility and Inerrancy according to Baptist Confessions," *Search*, 3 (Fall 1972), 42-45; James Leo Garrett, Jr., "Sources of Authority in Baptist Thought," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 13 (July 1978), 41-49; James Leo Garrett, Jr., "Biblical Authority according to Baptist Confessions of Faith," *Review and Expositor* 76 (Winter 1979), 43-54; James Leo Garrett, Jr., "The Authority of the Bible for Baptists," *Southwestern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 41 (Spring 1999), 4-40.

<sup>12</sup> H. Leon McBeth, "Early Baptist Hermeneutics" in Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 88-98.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth G. C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24-47. He entitled this chapter on Knollys and Keach, "Hanserd Knollys, Benjamin Keach and the Book of Revelation: A Study in Baptist Eisegesis." The portion on Keach was previously published as Kenneth G. C. Newport, "Benjamin Keach, William of Orange and the Book of Revelation: A Study in English Prophetic Exegesis," *The Baptist Quarterly*, 36 (1995-1996), 43-51.

<sup>14</sup> Lumpkin, "The Bible in Early Baptist Confessions of Faith," 41.

<sup>15</sup> McBeth, "Early Baptist Hermeneutics," 94, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Duncan, *Hanserd Knollys*, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Knollys, *Song of Solomon*, title page.

<sup>18</sup> Knollys, *Song of Solomon*, dedicatory epistle [iv]. The epistle has no pagination. For future reference in this essay, the page number of the