

Sharing the Message “with Courtesy and Respect” (1 Peter 3:15)

The Emmaus-Medina Intertextual Connection: Contextualizing the Presentation of God’s Word

by Brad Williams

Proclaim in the name of your Lord who created!

Created man from a clot of blood.

Proclaim: Your Lord is the Most Generous,

Who teaches by the pen;

Teaches man what he knew not. Qur’an 96:1-3¹

Jesus connecting on the road to Emmaus

On the same day that Jesus was raised from the dead, he encountered two of his disciples on their way to a village called Emmaus. He joined them in their seven mile journey, but chose to remain incognito. After they recounted the events of the crucifixion and resurrection of the prophet that they had hoped would prove to be the Messiah, but whose death had dashed their messianic dreams, Jesus, still incognito, reprimanded them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the *prophets* have spoken! Did not the “Messiah” have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”² (Luke 24:26) According to Luke, Jesus then began with *the writings of Moses and all the Prophets* to demonstrate that what had happened was exactly what God himself had pre-ordained (Luke 24:27).

Jesus’ explanation had a great impact on his audience. Later that evening when he unveiled his identity, and then disappeared from their sight, their reaction to each other was, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the *Scriptures* to us?” (Luke 24:32) They could not even wait till morning to share their discovery. That evening they returned to Jerusalem to tell the apostles what they had learned.

Jesus confirmed their report by appearing to the eleven apostles himself. He reminded them that he had told them that “Everything must be fulfilled that is written . . . in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44) Luke says that Jesus then proceeded “to open their minds so they could understand the *Scriptures*.” (Luke 24:45)

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This divine case study offers a reproducible paradigm for Scripture impact. Followers of Jesus should carefully study how their Teacher relates to people who adhere to a related theological system. Instead of juxtaposing "Christianity" to "Judaism," and challenging others to "cross over" in a climate of confrontation, Jesus relates the two theological systems in order to provide the type of bridge that would facilitate passage from one to the other. He did this so effectively that historians often describe Christianity as a "Jewish sect" that originated in first century Judaism. Lay theologians, on the other hand, have typically preferred to set Judaism and Christianity against each other with such counter-themes as legalism versus grace, law versus love, and religion versus relationship. This explains how historically Christianity has at times produced anti-Semitic movements in the name of orthodoxy.

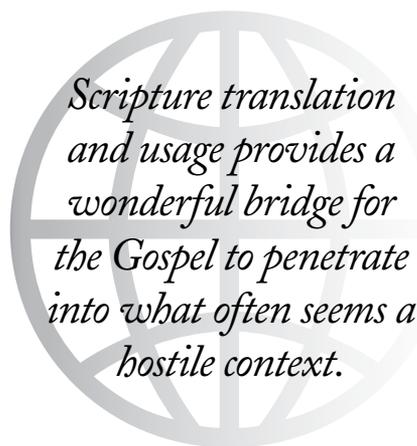
The conversation of Jesus on the road to Emmaus connects to the writings that were a basic element of his audience's worldview. By quoting the Tanakh Jesus found open passage into the minds of Cleopas and his companion. They could understand what Jesus was talking about. He was an insider who packaged his theological revolution as an insider who "fulfills" rather than "abolishes." (Matthew 5:17) It was not something "new and foreign" to them as Paul's message was to the Athenians.³ The ancient Jewish Scriptures provided the intellectual and spiritual bridge necessary for Jews to explore the new waters of Christianity. Jesus "opened" their mind to the Scriptures, to their very own Scriptures, and the result was that their "hearts burned within them."

Jesus connecting on the road to Medina

If the Christian community has often failed to follow their Teacher's example vis-à-vis the Jews, they have committed the same mistake much more fervently with their Muslim cousins. Jihads have been answered with crusades. Ideologies have been juxtaposed to the point of misrepresentation. Oftentimes the lack of intellectual "connection" has

extinguished all possibility of "burning hearts." Sadly, Christians have frequently preferred to burn the bridges of communication with this related theological system, opting for a frontal ideological attack, which historically has not proved to be an effective strategy.

As Jesus' approach was facilitated by his Jewish heritage, the Bible translator may find an accessible bridge due to his/her focus on Holy Writ. An effective link between Emmaus and Medina can be the *Kitaabu*⁴, a Holy book that commands every non-kafiri's⁵



attention. The *Kitaabu* of both camps are connected with common themes and characters. Stories may sometimes differ in their details, but they point to a common heritage. This connection must not be overlooked. Scripture translation and usage provides a wonderful bridge for the Gospel to penetrate into what often seems a hostile context. The common value placed on Holy Scripture opens the door for a "Bible-based approach" to evangelism. An understanding of this Emmaus-type connection may enable the Bible translator to be more effective than the Athenian-type crusader.

The intertextual links between Emmaus and Medina

Jesus models a communication approach that capitalizes on the commonality between two religious systems. This seems to be more effective, i.e., easier to understand and to accept, than proposing a "text" without

any effort to adapt it to one's audience. Translators have always understood and applied this basic concept in terms of grammar and semantics, but when dealing with an audience that often holds the text being translated in contempt *a priori*, then special attention needs to be given to the advantageous use of intertextuality.

These considerations fall into three categories: translation issues, publication issues, and distribution issues. This list is not exhaustive by any means, but it is given in an effort to enhance discussion and share other ideas that may be helpful for translators among Muslims.

Translation issues *Proper Names*

The translation of the proper name and/or general title of God is a key issue that effects the intelligibility and acceptability of translated Scriptures. Anything other than the local equivalent for *Allah* will no doubt be misunderstood as propaganda for a false god. While there may be differences between the theological understanding of God between the two camps, the Bible translator should underline that the purpose of a name is to point to an entity rather than capitulate an entire theology.

A more technical difficulty arises in the Old Testament with the dual forms *Elohim* and *Yahweh*. Solid exegesis commends a differentiation between the two, while a missiologically sensitive use of intertextuality cautions the translator against a choice that might indicate two different entities. Accepted variations of the divine name within particular Muslim contexts may provide the necessary diversity to translate each form distinctly.⁶

The proper name for the historic figure of Jesus of Nazareth as portrayed in the Qur'an is *Isa*. Missionaries have debated for years whether or not use of this name is legitimate due to the different christologies. Again, the purpose of a proper name is to indicate a particular person independently of the opinions held regarding that person.

Members of opposing political parties, for example, do not use different proper names to refer to someone because of their differing evaluations of the person in question. He may be the hero for some and the villain for others, but they all use the same proper name to refer to him. Translations that choose to use a name other than *Isa* lose the intertextual advantage, which in this case enhances a historical understanding of the text.

Proper names for prophets and other characters that are in both the Bible and the Qur'an should be harmonized to aid the Muslim reader to understand the commonality between both texts. In many cases the Biblical story elaborates the historical information of these characters, which Muslim readers find extremely interesting. If the translator chooses to use foreign forms for these proper names, the immediate "connect" with our Muslim friends is diminished. A foreign set of names implies that their own forms have been "rejected," which automatically puts them on the defensive.

Proper names for common places like Israel and Jerusalem should also represent the form most commonly known by our audience. This enhances understanding and keeps the narrative from appearing foreign.

Another set of proper names that can provide an important intertextual link, is the names of the books of the Bible. Our Muslim friends do not know the names of the individual books of the Bible, but their tradition divides them into three distinct sets known as the *Tawrah Musa* (the *Torah of Moses*), *Zabur Dawuda* (the *Psalms of David*), and *Injil Isa* (the *Gospel of Jesus*). In addition to these three categories, they sometimes refer to the "Writings of the Prophets." By using this three or four fold division of Holy Book names, we obtain a Qur'anic approval of these books as divinely inspired material. The Christian division of "Old and New Testaments" is foreign and irrelevant from our audience's perspective. The advantage

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of using their categories in dividing scripture is significant.

Key Terms

Translators working in Muslim contexts should take note of key terms that are found in both contexts, sometimes with similar meanings, and sometimes with very different meanings. Time does not allow for an exhaustive discussion of these terms in this context, but it might be helpful to mention three different categories.

There are some key terms that are quite simple to transfer from one context to another. In many languages in Africa the term for angels falls into this category. The meaning of the word seems to be the same in both contexts.

At other times there are key terms that may seem appropriate, but upon more careful consideration they slightly skew the Biblical meaning. In another African language the term "*sali*" is often times translated as prayer. On the surface it seems to fit. However the term actually comes closer to the concept of worship, as opposed to the Biblical concept of communicating a particular message to God. In cases like this we risk using a word that is close enough that it can be used without any apparent problem, when in reality part of the key semantic components are lacking.

A final category consists of words that actually communicate an altogether different meaning. Translators may be tempted to use a word that comes from a particular Muslim context, thinking that they can be adapted to express a Biblical concept, only later to find that the adaptation to the other context is inadequate. One case in point was the search for a word for baptism. A word was found that indicated a ritual washing with water, and seemed like a possible correspondence. Unfortunately it turned out that the term was limited to indicate such a washing after sexual relations,

and was totally inappropriate for translating the Biblical concept.

Extra-textual matter

A typical edition of the Bible contains extra-textual matter such as book introductions, footnotes, and glossaries. How these might be included and what they should contain is an important consideration for translators working among Muslims. A key principle found in the Muslim's "cognitive environment" aims at the protection of the special status of the actual inspired text, as opposed to material authored by humans. A study of various editions of the Qur'an shows that extra-textual matter can be included, but that it must be clearly distinguished from the holy text. Bible translators can indicate holy text with the use of borders. This will be discussed further under publication issues.

Harmonization of exegesis

Certain Bible translation projects undergo a tremendous amount of scrutiny in that linguistically related Muslim groups are receiving their first translation of the Scriptures at the same time. This encourages them to compare notes with each other, and to see whether or not the various translations are indeed the same. At times this takes place in a critical climate which can magnify minor differences into the accusation that the Scriptures are inconsistent. This kind of context needs to be taken seriously, and perhaps it would be well worth our time to network more to make sure that we present a unified front for the cause.

Register

A key theme in Muslims' cognitive environment revolves around the issue of reverence for all that is holy, such as God, the prophets, and the Scriptures. This positive aspect can clash with the more Western mind set that sometimes seeks to informalize that which is holy in an

attempt to make it more relevant and acceptable to modern society. While our attempts may be noble in certain cultural contexts, the concept of intertextuality would encourage us to maintain a high social register in our translation so as to meet the expectations of our audience.

Publication issues

In addition to the previously discussed translation issues that deal specifically with the contents of the text, Bible translators do well to carefully consider publication issues, that is issues that regard "extra-textual" factors that create coherence with their translation choices. In both of these domains Muslims have many expectations. Meeting these expectations will enhance the possibility of Scripture impact.

Script

The script of a reportedly holy text is a case in point for Muslim readers. They consider the Arabic language the holy language *par excellence*. They believe that anything that comes "from God" would no doubt be encoded in this fashion. One can speak of the translation of different languages and the use of different scripts as simply various legitimate modes of communication, but the Arabic script itself carries an emotional impact and sub-conscious message that we cannot underestimate.

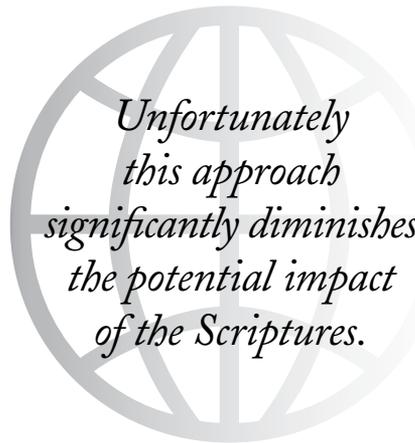
Because of this concept, various language projects have experimented with using the Arabic script in conjunction with the vernacular languages. The vernacular is written with the Arabic script to enable understanding by those who have learned how to read the script (i.e. pronounce the sounds encoded), but are unable to understand the Arabic language itself. As they read the Arabic letters, they recognize that the language being read is their mother tongue. Besides the advantage of being able to understand what they are reading, they also consider the literary work as more prestigious because it utilizes the "holy" script.

Artwork

The abhorrence of idolatry has led Muslims to adamantly oppose religious iconography. Editions of the Bible over

the years in the Western world, have often made use of images to describe certain events in the text. Many Westerners have enjoyed this feature, but as we attempt to share our holy text with a broader community, we should understand that there are other perspectives worthy of our attention. Since our evaluation of idolatry concurs with that of our Muslim friends, we might do well to abstain from any use of illustrative pictures in our Scriptures.

This iconoclastic perspective does not however, indicate a lack of artistic appreciation. Architectonic studies of



mosques, as well as studies of mid-eastern calligraphy point to the contrary. Arabic calligraphy constitutes an amazing art form, where the script itself performs a decorative role. Bible translators would do well to explore the usage of these art forms in their publications.

Another area of artwork that intersects with the previous discussion on distinguishing holy and non-holy text revolves around the usage of borders. Besides the function of delineating the source of a text, a border serves to enhance the artistic value of the document. In essence it constitutes a sign of respect towards the message and its source, something that any Bible translator would highly desire.

Content

The question of which Biblical books should be translated and published first may seem to be a question easily answered by our theology with no need to take our Muslim readers into consideration. Unfortunately this

approach significantly diminishes the potential impact of the Scriptures. Experience has shown however, that Scripture impact can be enhanced by beginning our translation (and distribution) at the *genesis* of our canon, so as to underline our theological common ground.

Typically a translation project lasts many years, and people have found it helpful to lay out a strategy of the publication of portions before the whole of Scriptures are available. Experience has shown that a panorama of the Bible with selections from both testaments, or a set of chronological Bible stories taken directly from the text can be useful to give our audience an overview of God's Word.

Layout

Regarding the typographical layout of the text, the issue of borders and holy text has already been discussed. In addition to putting notes and other non-holy text outside of a decorative border, it may be a good idea to employ a different font as well. This underlines the importance of the Sacred text.

Many editions of the Qur'an place the verse numbers in a special graphic design. By following this same convention we can enhance the artistic quality of the text according to accepted canons used frequently by Muslims.

Another feature found in many editions of the Qur'an that we could duplicate, is the placement of the reference number of the first verse of the page in the margin. This denotes the special attention given by the editor to insure that the entire holy text is printed. Reproducing this feature communicates that we have the same respect of Scripture as do our Muslim friends.⁷

Diglots and Discripts

Over the centuries, translators have chosen to use diglots (or multiple-glots) for various reasons. Often this technique seeks to accommodate audiences that understand multiple languages and who want to compare the translations in those languages. In multi-lingual societies diglots provide

a mixed audience the possibility of using the same book.

In the context of Scripture impact for Muslims, another rationale presents itself as noteworthy, namely that of demonstrating that the origin of this translated text is a much older document written in a prestigious language. Numerous translators have experimented with this technique by placing the vernacular translation along side the original Greek and/or Hebrew text. The use of this type of diglot serves the communicative purpose of elevating the prestige of the translation by visually presenting its ancient origin. Rarely if ever will the audience be able to use the original text for comprehension purposes, but the very presence of the text in the book speaks volumes regarding the inspiration, authenticity, and origin of the Scriptures.

One special type of publication is called a discript, where the same text is written in different scripts. This technique attempts to target a broader audience by providing the text in multiple scripts that are known by different sub-sets of the population. In many African countries the Arabic script is considered prestigious in the religious domain, while the Latin script is prestigious in modern intellectual domains. The use of both scripts to present the same text capitalizes on both advantages. Many readers appreciate this for the educational value as well, since they can use the discript to learn the other script.

Front matter

This paper has already addressed the issue of extra-textual material designed to elucidate the text, such as footnotes, book introductions, and glossary entries. Another type of extra-textual material serves a similar purpose but at a higher level, namely that of making statements about the publication as a whole. Translators may consider the advantages of including some type of introduction to the Biblical text as a whole, explaining such things as the origin of the text, translation procedures adopted, and the religious and intellectual value of the publica-

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tion. Photographs of ancient texts may prove useful to demonstrate the authenticity of the text. Endorsements by Muslim religious leaders, when available, would help validate the intrinsic value of the Scriptures.

Degree of quality

Publishers must make multiple decisions about the overall quality of the physical product regarding the quality and color of paper, the type of cover, and the mode of binding. In light of Scripture impact these decisions take on new importance. Publishers must not only consider practical issues like durability in the physical context of the target audience, but also abstract issues such as how the document will be perceived. A high quality publication underlines the importance of the document, and according to the cognitive environment of our Muslim friends, may be more coherent with the nature of the text. All of these issues must be taken into consideration, realizing that a more expensive option may be more cost effective in the end.

Distribution issues

Once the Scriptures have been translated and published in a manner that exhibits sensitivity to Muslims, attention should be given to distributing the text in such a way as to enhance the impact of these Scriptures. In order to do this the same intertextual considerations should be kept in mind. One can have a Muslim-sensitive publication but annul the impact by presenting it in a non-sensitive manner or context. This section deals with various modes of presentation of the Scriptures in an effort to cause the public to engage the text.

Print Media

Printed editions of the Scriptures are totally compatible with the Muslim's cognitive environment. Publications may include portions of Scripture or the Scriptures in their entirety. Holy Books in general enjoy popularity, even among illiterate Muslims. They

embody something important that can be carried around even if the people are unable to understand them completely. As the literacy skills of our audience improve, they may be found reading the Scriptures throughout the day in their free time.

Non-print Media

Because of the high level of orality⁸ in many places the non-print media has proven to be very effective. Scripture portions can be easily recorded on cassette tapes and distributed widely. Typically even the poorest of families have some access to tape players, and typically large numbers of people are within hearing range when these tapes are played. Sometimes radio stations are even willing to air some of these recordings given their unique nature.

Television offers another non-print media that can be used to enhance Scripture impact among Muslims. A simple reading of Scripture performed by someone appropriately dressed sitting on a mat can be a powerful presentation in a very natural setting. Scriptures are often read with or without comment among our Muslim friends, and we should explore ways that we can do the same. The modern media of television provides us with a way to reach the masses while at the same time employing a quite traditional approach.

Theatrical contexts can also be used to present the Scriptures in a powerful manner. A dramatization of a Scripture portion can make the meaning of a text quite clear. While these advantages apply to Muslims, it may be necessary to do something quite intentional to link the drama to the "written text," which constitutes the authoritative source from their perspective.

Small group settings

In many areas radio and television would not be willing to air such broadcasts for political reasons. In this case a reading of the Holy Text in small groups can prove to be ideal.

The difference between a reading and a preaching session is significant. Muslims are enamored by the text, and simple readings with limited explanations impact them significantly. These sessions serve as a time to check the translation as well as a time to promote the message of the text.

Public event settings

In contrast with the small group setting, there may be ways to expose the Scriptures to a broader audience in a public context. In Africa for example, the Holy Books are often read at the funeral of an important person. Sometimes a similar reading is done in a public context to invoke divine blessings upon the community, like a baby naming ceremony. It may be possible in certain instances to propose selections from the *Taurat*, *Zabur* and *Injil* for a public reading. Given the high prestige of Scripture among Muslims, God can use such occasions in a mighty way.

Another occasion for public "distribution" of Scripture is in the context of memorization contests. Often times our Muslim friends will organize public contests where participants recite large portions of the Qur'an. Similar recitations from the *Taurat*, *Zabur* and *Injil* have raised considerable curiosity in many places.

Mass distribution strategy

Muslims do not live in homogenous contexts. Each country and each people group presents its own set of limitations and opportunities. Those of us concerned with Scripture impact should seriously study all networks worthy of Scripture distribution. Secular bookstores may provide a good network in more developed areas of the world. Daily or weekly markets can also be used to offer the Scriptures to the masses.

Another way to reach an entire people group with the Scriptures is a planned systematic visit to every town and village where the target language is spoken. Given the social nature of Muslim societies, these visits are most effective if they focus on the religious and political leaders in each place with the intention of giving them the

very first copies of the newly translated Scriptures. When people see a leader receiving such a gift with gratitude it gives them social permission to receive and use the Scriptures as well. Such visits can be organized systematically and periodically to present the Scriptures in a chronological fashion and follow-up with those who show special interest.⁹

Emmaus-Medina connection towards a "burning of hearts"

Our Muslim friends on the road to Medina are very similar to those who were on the road to Emmaus. They have a hope; they have a yearning. Cleopas said, "...but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." (Luke 24:21a) Many Muslims believe that something is missing in their spiritual lives; that the pieces of the puzzle are not complete. Assurance of salvation, inner peace, and a transmission of behavior-transforming faith to their children quietly eludes them. They blame these shortcomings on their society or on themselves, instead of recognizing them as deficiencies in their religious system.

They need to be shown otherwise, but their culture causes them to resist sermons from "false preachers." Their resistance to the "enemy" is formidable, and defies any frontal attack that Christians may organize. They are willing to fight for their religion, and martyrdom is not an unknown concept. The walls are erected; they cannot be knocked down from the outside.

The only way to penetrate the resistance is from the inside. An intertextual link with their cognitive environment provides passage to their hearts from within their external walls. God's quiet inner voice must be introduced to their yearning hearts through a familiar and authoritative medium: the Holy Scriptures. If we can but plant the seed in an "agriculturally" sound fashion, the Maker of hearts will perform the miracle of growth. (Mark 4:26-29) He will blow His breath of life into their inner person, and the dormant coals will burst into flames.

May we never lose sight of the goal. May we live to see our Muslim friends' hearts "burn with His fire." **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Translation from Smith, Huston. *Islam: A concise introduction*. HarperSan-Francisco: New York, 2001.

² Biblical citations from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

³ Acts 17:16-23—Paul's message sounded "foreign" to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. It could have been his preaching to the "Jews and the God-fearing Greeks" (17:17) that sounded foreign to the Epicureans and Stoics in 17:18.

⁴ Arabic for "book." In some African countries this Arabic loan word indicates a "holy book."

⁵ Arabic for unbeliever or infidel.

⁶ In one language the divine name "Ala" has another form "Alatala." Everyone recognizes the two forms as legitimate names of the one God. Our translation has simply used one for Elohim/Theos and the other for Yahweh.

⁷ Not to mention our Jewish scribal fathers who used numerous methods to make sure that they had correctly transcribed a text.

⁸ The distinction between "illiteracy" and "orality" deserves our attention. The first can be seen in a pejorative manner if literacy is perceived as the ideal or the norm. Orality on the other hand, attempts to describe in a neutral light the most typical mode of communication in many societies. See Rick Brown, "Communicating God's Message in an Oral Culture," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 21:3, Fall 2004, pp. 122-129.

⁹ Ideally the Torah could be distributed at the first visit, then the Zabur, and finally the Injil. In this way the whole message of the Scriptures could be presented in a systematic fashion.