

Message from the Editor: Following Up on the 150th Anniversary of the Van Dyck Bible

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In December of 2015 the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC) hosted a four-day conference to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Van Dyck. The conference was jointly organized by the Center for Middle Eastern Christianity (CMEC) at ETSC and the Center of Coptic Studies of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Scholars came from Europe, the United States, and the Middle East to present papers on various aspects of the translation of the Bible into Arabic. There was a general consensus that a fresh translation of the Bible into modern colloquial Arabic is much needed. How to proceed with this, however, was not immediately apparent.

This third edition of *CJT* includes four papers that were presented at the conference. The first two of these were presented by the Dutch professor of Christian history Heleen Murre-van den Berg. Her first article, “Globalization, Christianity, and the Middle East,” highlights three themes of Middle Eastern Christianity: its minority status in the region, the impact of migration and globalization, and the experience of Christianity in the Middle East as a “lived religion.” She concludes with some ways in which Western Protestants may benefit from the heritage and insights of Christianity as it is practised in various forms in the Middle East.

Dr. Murre-van den Berg’s second article, “The Long-Term Influence of American Bible Translations in the Middle East,” rejects the romantic view of Protestant Bible translation projects in the Middle East – including the Van Dyck translation – in which isolated missionaries produced translations out of whole

cloth to the surprise and delight of passive recipients in the region. What actually occurred was much more complex – and much more interesting.

The third article is by professor Rocia Dago, “Islamic Terminology in Christian Arabic: The Use of the Term Sunna.” To say that the term and concept of *sunna* (law) is key to an understanding of Islam is of course well known. What is not so well known is how this term emerged in Greek, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, and how these traditions interacted to produce the complex understandings of law that exist today.

The fourth article by Bishop Markar, “The Book of Job: Between Hebrew and Arabic,” is a careful linguistic analysis of the Arabic translation of Job from the Hebrew original. Among other things, Markar is concerned with the word choices made in the Van Dyck translation, which he believes were accurate but not always ideal.

This collection concludes with a book review of Michael Houellebecq’s *Submission: A Novel*. The book first appeared in January 2015 on the very day that the offices of the magazine *Charlie Hebdo* were attacked by Islamic extremists and a dozen people were killed. A caricature of the controversial Houellebecq appeared on the cover of the magazine that day. In the novel, Houellebecq imagines France in the year 2022 when the Muslim Brotherhood succeeds in winning a majority in the French Parliament and France becomes an Islamic state. Despite Houellebecq’s reputation, this novel is not an attack on Islam but on the current French intellectual elite. The English version of the novel appeared in October 2015.

The second volume of the *Cairo Journal of Theology* (2015) also included as one of its main themes reflection on the Arabic translation of the Bible commonly known as the Van Dyck Bible. Interested readers are encouraged to consult this earlier issue for more information on the Van Dyck (see <http://journal.etsc.org>).