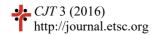
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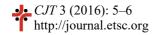
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## Message from the Editor: Following Up on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Van Dyck Bible

Michael Parker (mike.parker@etsc.org) Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo

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 linquistic 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).

# Globalization, Christianity, and the Middle East

Heleen Murre-van den Berg (h.murrevandenberg@ftr.ru.nl) Radboud University Nijmegen

A hot summer afternoon in the northeastern part of Syria draws to an end. More and more people enter the courtyard of the Mort Maryam Monastery in Tel Wardiyat, not far from the road from Hassakeh to Tel Tamar. Small and large family groups, including young children who can barely walk and the elderly who rely on their walking sticks, join the crowds. Many of them enter the church, cross themselves, pray, kiss the Gospel Lectionary, and return to the courtyard. There they greet the monk Abuna Afrem, kiss his ring, and listen to his welcoming words. A little later, he starts to pray the *ramsho*, the evening prayer, assisted by a group of young boys who range from six to sixteen years of age. They stand next to each other in a long line, chanting the prayers, singing the hymns in alternating choirs, crossing themselves, and making deep bows, their foreheads touching the ground. Many of the guests join in the prayer and the rhythmic bodily movements.

Meanwhile, the huge parking lot of the Syrian Orthodox monastery fills up with cars, tables, and chairs. Families sit down to eat and drink together, chatting away the evening, gazing upon the flat fertile fields stretching towards the river Khabur surrounding the monastery. It is August 15, the Eve of Dormition, one of the major Christian festivals of the Middle East. Young

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The introduction of this paper was originally presented as the author's inaugural lecture, June 12, 2009, at Leiden University, and published in Dutch as "Globalisering, christendom en het Midden-Oosten" (Universiteit Leiden: 2009).

and old gather at the monastery, enjoying each other's company as much as the tangible presence of the monastery.<sup>2</sup>

A young girl speaks to me in Dutch, with a slight accent that betrays her upbringing in the eastern part of the Netherlands, near Enschede. Her family originated in nearby Tur Abdin, Turkey. This summer they came to Syria in order to visit family and friends, as well as the newly built monastery that fills them with pride. The girl looks forward to other kinds of parties, not in the monastery but in fancy new restaurants near Qamishli where one can pass the hot afternoons at the sparkling pool or enjoy food, music, and dance during the long summer nights.

When some of the women start to get ready to sleep in the church, we leave for Tel Nasri, a village not far away from the monastery. Here the Assyrian Church of the East organized its own Dormition festival. The brightly lit towers of the new church of St. Mary shine in the dark night. Around midnight, the festival is in full swing, although here, too, many women have gone to sleep in the ambulatory of the church. They hope for a special blessing, perhaps to finally become pregnant or receive healing from a lingering illness. The rest of the village, however, has a decidedly carnavalesque atmosphere. The young adults are all dressed up, walking the streets flirting and laughing; and the smells of food and the sounds of music fill the air. Most people in the village seem to be awake, and the grown-ups sit together in the courtyards of the houses, chatting and enjoying traditional dishes. Not until the next day does a High Mass in honor of St. Mary conclude the festival.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> This impression is mostly based on a visit to the region I made in August 2005. For a short introduction to the history and current situation of the Christians in the region, see Georges Bohas, Florence Hellot-Bellier, *Les Assyriens du Hakkari au Khabour. Mémoire et histoire* (Paris, Geuthner, 2008), Alberto M. Fernandez, "Assyrian Christian Survival on the Khabur River," *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 12,1 (1998) 34–47, and Shabo Talay, *Die neuaramäischen Dialekte der Khabur-Assyrer in Nordostsyrien* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2008).

#### The Churches of the Middle East

The above describes a rather ordinary festival in the Middle East, not very different from the way in which Muslims, Druses, and Yezidees celebrate their festivals. Yet this is a Christian festival, which in its ordinariness displays many features that characterize Christianity in the region: a combination of communal rituals, individual piety, and public festivities. Much of it is characteristic of the Orthodox churches, a term that in this context I use rather loosely for those churches that in the first centuries of Christianity emerged in the Eastern Roman and Persian Empires. It therefore also includes those churches that were later denounced as heretical, such as the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Church, and the Assyrian Church of the East (earlier known as Nestorian).<sup>3</sup>

A major characteristic of this broadly defined Orthodoxy is the importance of its daily and weekly liturgies. Whether these are attended by many of the faithful or just a handful, whether there are twenty deacons to assist or only one, the holy liturgy forms the heart of the Orthodox churches. Every Sunday, major Christian holiday, and Saint's day, the celebration of the Eucharist binds the Christian community together, involving all the senses, body and mind.

These communal celebrations are complemented by a variety of more individual rituals: women sleeping in the church, men and women asking for a *baraka* from a holy man, and family visits to the monasteries and graves of the saints. Often the families take home some earth from such graves in order to obtain health, fertility, a reliable spouse, and good futures for their children. Some may also carry protective prayers on paper scrolls, tucked

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ken Parry, *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007). For an introduction to the Church of the East and the Syrian Orthodox Church respectively, see: Herman Teule, *Les Assyro-Chaldéens. Chrétiens d'Irak, d'Iran et de Turquie* (Turnhout: Éditions Brepols 2008), and Martin Tamcke, *Die Christen vom Tur Abdin: Hinführung zur Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche* (Frankfurt am Main: Otto Lembeck, 2009).

away under clothing or inside the house. In normative descriptions of Orthodoxy, these practices have often been disregarded, but the active participation of priests and monks suggest that these forms of religious expression are an inherent part of Orthodox religious life.<sup>4</sup>

The festivals in northeastern Syria also show that Christianity has a strong public presence in the Middle East. Though the grounds of the monastery and a village of almost hundred percent Christian inhabitants are clearly Christian territory, the festivals are not closed to outsiders. The nearby road gives an unhampered view of the many visitors to the monastery, as do the brightly lit towers of the church in Tel Nasri. Whoever wants to come and have a look is welcome – as in fact many local Muslim families do come, though mostly at times when it is less crowded with Christians. This explicit Christian presence parallels the strong public presence of Islam, which grew in recent decades through the many new mosques, big and small, that dot the country. Wherever possible, Christians in the Khabur region and have reacted by building similarly grand new churches and monasteries.

These new monasteries and churches, however, also reflect internal Christian rivalries: the huge new church of the Assyrian Church of the East in Tel Nasri is a conspicuous response to the impressive Syrian Orthodox monastery. In the near future, both projects may be dwarfed by the new complex that the Catholic Syrian Christians haves started to build near Qamishli.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> These forms have hardly been studied in any systematic way; for some indications see my "Let us partake, all who believe in Christ.' Liturgy in the Church of the East between 1500 and 1850." In Martin Tamcke (ed), *Christliche Gotteslehre im Orient seit dem Aufkommen des Islams bis zur Gegenwart*, Beiruter Texte und Studien 126 (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2008), 139–53. Erica Hunter has done some insightful descriptive work in connection to the so-called 'magic scrolls': "Magic and Medicine amongst the Christians of Kurdistan," in Erica C.D. Hunter (ed.), *The Christian Heritage of Iraq: Collected Papers from the Christianity of Iraq I–V Seminar Days* (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press), 187–202.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> This is being built not far from Qamishli. In January 2009 only the outlines and foundation were visible.

Catholics (Uniates) form the second largest group of churches in the Middle East, though distributed rather unevenly: relatively big in Iraq and Lebanon, relatively small in Egypt. These churches mostly originate in the post-tridentine missions of the seventeenth- to nineteenth-century, when they profited from stable conditions in the Ottoman Empire. Though they separated from the Orthodox churches, most have gone to considerable lengths to retain the distinctive characteristics of Orthodox liturgy and ecclesiastical organization. <sup>6</sup>

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, other missions introduced many varieties of Protestantism to the Middle East, which in later years included Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism.<sup>7</sup> Protestants gained only limited numbers of adherents (in most countries between 1 and 5 percent of the total number of Christians), who mostly originated from the Orthodox churches. I don't need to remind you that our present host, the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, was one fruit of these Protestant

<sup>6</sup> For the history of Catholic missions, see Bernard Heyberger, *Les chrétiens du Proche Orient au temps de la réforme catholique*, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athenes et de Rome 284 (Rome: École Françaises de Rome, 1994). The emergence of the Chaldean Church (out of the Church of the East) is described in detail in Albert Lampart, *Ein Märtyrer der Union mit Rom. Joseph I.*, 1681–1696, Patriarch der Chaldäer (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1966), whereas Parry and Teule (see note 2) provide additional details.

<sup>7</sup>Heleen Murre-van den Berg (ed.), New Faith in Ancient Lands. Western Missions in the Middle East in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, Studies in Christian Missions 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2006); see also the recent work of Martin Tamcke en Arthur Manukyan (eds.), Protestanten im Orient, Orthodoxie, Orient und Europa 1 (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag 2009). At the time of this writing, no in-depth studies on the history of the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in the Middle East have been published. See also Murre-van den Berg, "The Middle East: Western Missions and the Eastern Churches, Islam and Judaism," in Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (eds.), World Christianities, c. 1815–1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), 458–72. This volume of the Cambridge History of Christianity offers a good introduction in the larger context of the missionary activities in this period.

missionary labors, which for many years now has been thoroughly in Egyptian hands.<sup>8</sup>

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The first part of this article was originally prepared as an introduction to a lecture in Leiden, in a setting in which most of the public was not familiar with Middle Eastern Christianity. For Christians in the Middle East, this first part will have been much more familiar. At the same time, I guess that they are often not aware of the specific contribution that their forms of Christianity have made to global Christianity. And thus, in the remaining part of this article, I would like to introduce what I, as an interested outsider, think are three pertinent themes of Middle Eastern Christianity: (1) the minority status of Christianity; (2) the impact of migration and globalization; and (3) the lived religion of the Middle East. I will conclude with a few notes on issues that might be of particular concern for Protestants, especially for Protestants in the Middle East who hope to contribute to the study of Arab Christianity.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> It is difficult to find reliable statistics for Christians in the Middle East, partly because churches that do not always keep accurate membership records and because of the general difficulty of obtaining good demographics in the region. Compare David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, Todd M. Johnson, World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For the year 2001 they indicate the following percentages of Christians: Iraq 3,1%, Iran 0,5%, Turkey: 0,5%, Israel 5.7%, Palestine 8.5%, Jordan 4.5%, Lebanon 52.9%, Syria 7.8% and Egypt 15.1%.; on average 6%. It is likely that these numbers are lower today, partly because some of these numbers already seem too high for 2001. For example, in the case of Lebanon official numbers are recorded at high levels for political reasons – that is, to disguise the reality that considerable numbers of Christians have recently left the country. For the Ottoman period, see Youssef Courbage, "Démographie des communautés chrétiennes au Proche-Orient. Une approche historique," Confluences Méditerranée 66 (2008), 27-44. In the same issue (entitled Chrétiens d'Orient) see also other articles on the demography of Middle Eastern Christianity.

## **Minority Christianity**

The most important issue that is put on the table time and again, both by Christians in the Middle East and by Christians (and others) outside the Middle East, is the issue of minority Christianity. How is Christianity in the Middle East going to survive in what looks like an increasingly hostile context, and how can a small minority (in some countries bigger than in others, but practically everywhere under the same pressures of decreasing social and political influence) sustain itself and contribute positively to the societies of the Middle East? These societies, as I hardly need to explain in these uncertain days, are in need of citizens who are committed to the welfare not just of their own community, but to society as a whole. I won't go into the issue of the origins of this minoritization, which would be a complex discussion about factors that involve conscious political acts that favor one group over another, and in its most extreme form, lead to violence and the expulsion of Christians or other groups. It also involves the higher pace of modernization among Christians, leading, among other things, to the most important concrete factor, the lower birthrates among Christians than among Muslims. But it also involves issues of perception and choice. In societies where religious belonging is seen as the most important social factor, Christians can come to be considered a minority much more easily than when social and political organization is also possible on other terms, such as (secular) political ideologies, class, profession, and educational background.

Whatever the reasons for the minority status that many Christian feel they have today, the most important questions for Christians in the Arab world, as in the Middle East more generally, are how they are to address imbalances, contribute to society as a whole, and avoid a narrow-minded focus on religious boundaries (even those within the Christian community) that can easily obscure shared interests. These are not easy tasks in today's Middle East. In the early days of the popular protests known as the Arab spring, the fight against the legacy of past and present dictators may have stimulated alliances that cut across sectarian bounda-

ries, but now amid the difficulties of building new societies, people easily fall back on the apparent safety of their religious groups.

## Migration and Globalization

The girl at the monastery who addressed me in Dutch was not exceptional. Like many others, she spent her holidays in the region her parents had left about thirty years ago. At that time, about fifty kilometers north of the monastery in southeastern Turkey, the Kurdish revolt was at its height. The Christian presence in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq has fundamentally changed over the last hundred years through the increased migration of Christians to other parts of the world. More than any other type of Christianity that I am aware of, Middle Eastern Christianity has come to know what it means to be a global community, whose members, while maintaining their deep commitment to their local, national, and regional origins, have become integrated in a worldwide community. This has many implications for what Middle Eastern Christianity is and how it may develop in the years to come. Much of this we take for granted as being part of the world we live in, like our increased awareness of what is going on outside our own countries, or the global youth culture of music, film, and Facebook.

The effects of globalization also include the ongoing and even increased involvement of migrants in other parts of the world with the world back home. This involvement may support the Christians in the Middle East or complicate their lives because of the different context in which these migrant Christians find themselves. One effect of globalization is directly connected to the previous point: migration is often the result of the minoritization of Christians, a process that intensifies as Christian communities are increasingly striped of their most talented young men and women. In addition, geopolitical developments, which often have little to do with the actual situation in the Middle East, further exacerbate differences between Muslims and Christians, thus

Murre-van den Berg: Globalization, Christianity, and the Middle East making it even harder to establish a civil society where different groups live together peacefully.

Globalization also affects the way in which Christianity in the Middle East develops. This phenomenon predates the twentieth century: Roman Catholic and Protestant missions are early examples of the same tendencies: ideas and religious practices came from Europe or the U.S. to the Middle East and, despite resistance, led to hybrid forms of religion. For example, Orthodox Christianity was deeply influenced by the visual culture of the Catholics (think of the depictions of Mary, or the wide presence of Leonardo's Last Supper) and, later, by the emphasis on the Bible and an active personal faith by the Protestants. This kind of mixing and matching goes on even as we speak, the most recent example can be clearly seen in the influence of Pentecostal styles of religion on the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant communities of the Middle East.

## Lived Religion

Let me now return briefly to the description of the Dormition Festival in northeast Syria, with which I introduced this talk. As I said, in its ordinariness this festival displays many features that characterize Christianity in the region: a combination of communal rituals, individual piety, and public festivities. Despite minoritization, relatively decreasing numbers, and economic and political hardships, Christians in the Middle East have succeeded in creating what I think is a distinct and important form of Christianity today. This is a form that manages to combine and hold in creative tension three crucial dimensions of Christianity: public, individual, and communal. This is a configuration that often has been lost in Western varieties of the faith. It is also a form that, I think, is still not sufficiently understood.

Earlier, scholars of Eastern Orthodox Christianity tended to focus mostly on two things: theology and theological literature. They dug deeply and generally with much profit into the history of dogma and the various ways in which these dogmas were ar-

ticulated in the East. Other scholars took the route of studying the liturgies of the East. Starting from these texts, they either tried to reconstruct the actual liturgies or to focus on the dogmas as they were expressed in the liturgies. Even interest in the rich Christian poetic literature often tended to focus on dogma. Of course, there is little amiss with this approach, which has left us with many publications on such Orthodox subjects as the role of the incarnation or, its companion, deification. Recently, discussions on Orthodoxy have been supplemented with studies on the role of nationalism among Orthodox Christians, especially because of developments in Russia and other Eastern European countries.

It is time, now, I think, to look at Orthodoxy also from the perspective of what scholars today call "lived religion" – that is, how religion is practiced in real life. Sure, many of the earlier themes will return, and incarnation will be an important concept to grasp in order to understand how Orthodox Christians create a religious life where there is a fluid boundary between the secular and sacred, and between this life and the next. It will also help to articulate the role of women in this process, a subject that scholars frequently overlook when dealing with the official texts of theology and liturgy. Yet it is women who cook the food for fast days and holidays, who visit the monasteries and bring back the sacred dust or the blessed bread to their husbands and children, and – alongside men – teach children to read and pray.

## Conclusion

A few words in conclusion. I hope to have made clear that I think there is more than enough to be studied regarding the Arab and non-Arab Christians of the Middle East, much that so far has hardly been touched upon, and much that will be important to more than a few scholars or these Christians themselves. For the themes of globalization, minoritization, and lived religion are important to Christians and scholars of religion everywhere.

Let me end, however, with some reasons why Protestants, in the Middle East and elsewhere, should be as interested in these questions as much as anyone else. As we all know, Protestants have tended to overlook Eastern Christianity. The Catholics made a much better enemy – at least until the middle of the twentieth century. And the Orthodox could hardly be considered friends since they appeared to be so different. Here in Cairo and elsewhere in the world this has changed. There are two major reasons for this.

The first is that Protestants, having become increasingly involved in the Middle East, are gradually coming to respect the wide varieties of Christianity that are possible and even integral to the faith. As Christian witnesses in the region where Christianity was born, both liberal and conservative Protestants have come to learn that the Middle East is more than Islam and Judaism. For Protestants, the Christianity of the Middle East has become an essential part of the region and not simply an outdated form of the faith that will eventually be replaced by other more viable forms.

The second is that – following up on that last point – Protestants have come to discover that Middle Eastern Christians offer the Christian world not only a rich past but ideas and practices that may help Protestants to rethink their faith in ways that will help to meet the challenges of the modern world. With their rich heritage of public presence, communal rituals, and private piety, Orthodox Arab Christians provide a healthy counterpoint to Protestantism's narrow focus on individual faith as the one and only thing of importance. Through its customs and rituals, Orthodox Christians may teach Protestants something of the importance of the tangible, visible, and olfactory. Practically speaking, they may come to appreciate that the faith can be experienced in specially prepared food, strewn flowers, processions, bowing, rosaries recited, and making the sign of the cross.

Such a re-evaluation of customs, which were rejected in the early phases of Protestantism and reencountered through missions in the Middle East, may raise serious questions about Protestant theology and practice. In attempting to answer these questions, Protestants may come to better understand the rich heritage of Christianity in the Middle East in all of its forms, Arab and non-

Arab, Orthodox and Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal. Perhaps Western Protestantism and Middle Eastern Christianity will find ways to mutually enrich each other as well as Christians elsewhere in the world.

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# The Long-Term Influence of American Bible Translations in the Middle East

Heleen Murre-van den Berg (h.murrevandenberg@ftr.ru.nl) Radboud University Nijmegen

In October 2015, I was in a meeting with a Syriac Orthodox bishop, discussing the difficult situation of the Christians of Syria. The meeting took place in his reception hall in Beirut, and before the bishop's seat was a table with books, papers, tissues, and a cross. On top of one of the piles was a Bible of the kind used by Evangelical preachers all over the world – black, flexible cover, about 16 by 22 cm – and familiar to many people. Towards the end of the meeting, he praised the work of the nineteenth-century missionaries, and said, "They gave us the Bible." He kissed the book and put it back. He had spoken in Arabic except for the English word *Bible*.

This combination of words, language, and gestures, coming from an Orthodox bishop in the Middle East, brings together all the ambiguities in the context and impact of Bible translations in the Middle East. What was it that the missionaries brought when they started translating the Bible in languages that had not been used in that way before? How did their Evangelical message connect to the wider message of modernization and progress that, as they thought, the Middle East needed so badly? Was all of that in fact as new as the missionaries and their early converts wanted us (and themselves) to believe? What led up to the moment in which an Orthodox bishop could praise the work of the missionaries and underline this by kissing the ultimate symbol of their work, a one-volume Bible, and use the English word *Bible* rather than an Arabic equivalent?

The theme of this talk, looking back at the genesis, context, and subsequent workings of the Van Dyck translation, allows me to delve further into one particular aspect of the ambiguities of

the missionary encounter as it enfolded in the middle of the nineteenth century in Egypt, Lebanon, and the rest of the Middle East, that of the role and function of Bible translations in the process of modernization.

My thoughts on this subject began to change when it slowly dawned on me, as it has for other researchers of recent decades, that many of the Bible translations - the Van Dyck for one, the modern Syriac one as another - were not produced out of the blue. The romantic picture of American missionaries who in splendid isolation worked deep into the night, making a translation in a language they had just mastered, which then was presented to the local population as a big surprise, does not hold up any more. I will say more about the translation process in a moment, but suffice it to say for now that all of these translations resulted from complex negotiations and choices made in continuous conversation between American missionaries and local scholars, who were often part of the clergy. In the following talk, I will use the process of making and distributing Bible translations to delve somewhat more into what the modernization and evangelization process of the nineteenth century entailed.<sup>1</sup>

## Creating the Bible

I will use the translation that was made in Urmia (Northwest Iran) as my main example. Although the linguistic and social context of the translation projects in Urmia and Beirut differ somewhat, it is clear that the basic issues that had to be decided upon were

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For a concise overview of studies on missions in the Middle East, see Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "The Study of Western Missions in the Middle East (1820–1920): An Annotated Bibliography," in Norbert Friedrich, Uwe Kaminsky, Roland Löffler, *The Social Dimension of Christian Missions in the Middle East: Historical Studies of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 35–53. A few important recent monographs have provided inspiration for the current essay: Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in An Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2008).

much the same, even if not always exactly the same choices were made. The similarities can be explained by the fact that both translations were made by missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, a Boston-based organization established in 1810 whose governing committee and general secretary tended to issue clear guidelines for their missionaries worldwide. Since the America Board provided most of the money for translation work, it had much leverage in negotiations despite the distance between Persia and America. In addition, both translations were made against the background of existing oriental and Eastern Orthodox Bible translations and biblical exegesis. To understand how innovative the Protestant Bible was, four aspects are important vis-à-vis what earlier was conceived to be "the Scriptures" by the Orthodox churches: language, text, the printed work and its dissemination, and usage.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. The Language

The American missionaries in Iran had to make a couple of choices before actually starting to translate, and the first important one was what language they were going to use. Somewhat different from the situation in Lebanon when the Americans started on the Arabic translation, they chose to use the vernacular language, albeit in a form that from its inception was intended to be in conversation with Classical Syriac. This is the language used in the liturgy of the Syriac churches and the earliest full Bible translation in Aramaic, the Peshitta. Remarkably, there is no record of any discussion about the use of the vernacular for this project, neither among the missionaries nor between the missionaries and the Syriac clergy. The most likely explanation for this is that impromptu and even written translations of parts of the Clas-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For more on the historical and linguistic aspects of the Urmia translation as discussed below, see Murre-van den Berg, From a Spoken to a Written Language: The Introduction and Development of Literary Urmia Aramaic in the Nineteenth Century (De Goeje Fund: Leiden, 1999). On the mission in Urmia more generally, especially in its modernizing aspects, see Adam Becker, American Evangelical Missionaries in Iran and the Origins of Assyrian Nationalism (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015).

sical Syriac Bible into the vernacular were already part of the local clerical tradition of commenting on the biblical text.

Prompted by contemporary scholarly debates in America and Germany, there was some discussion among the missionaries about whether to use the Latin or the local Syriac alphabet. This debate was quickly decided in favor of the local Syriac alphabet because the vernacular and Classical were close enough to provide for a fairly easy orthography, especially when starting from earlier traditions in the vernacular. More importantly, the missionaries probably correctly sensed that acceptance by the clergy would be hindered by the introduction of a new alphabet.

The translation itself was made by a team of translators that, in addition to the theologically trained and ordained missionary Justin Perkins, included local deacons and a priest. In the process of translating, the Syriac Christians learned English, Hebrew, and Greek. Justin Perkins, who was then in his thirties but was to become a seminal figure like Van Dyck, presided over the process. Before they actually started translating, a few test translations were commissioned from local priests. They were made in different forms of the vernacular and came from different regions. Their texts (some of which have been preserved) not only offered options for the orthography of the vernacular but also helped the translators to decide which form of the vernacular would be most suitable. They chose the vernacular of Urmia, probably because this urban dialect was at least somewhat familiar to those from rural and mountainous regions, while the reverse was not true.

Using the vernacular to translate parts of the Bible was not an innovation, but using it to translate the entire Bible was. Similarly, while particular dialects had been used in Bible translations before, this was the first time that a dialect had been standardized for literary use, including the standardization of its orthography on the basis of earlier less rigid spelling conventions.

#### 2. The Text

The source text to be used for the translation was the subject of fierce discussions, mostly between the missionaries and the American Board in Boston, but also between the missionaries and their local assistants. The missionaries were asked by the General Secretary of the American Board to translate directly from the Greek *Textus Receptus* for the New Testament, and from the Masoretic Hebrew for the Old Testament. The Americans had little doubt that these source texts as they knew them in the early nineteenth century were far superior to whatever might have been available to Syriac Christians in the Middle East. The East-Syriac clergymen, however, highly valued the Peshitta text and were not at all inclined to accept the superiority of the Greek *Textus Receptus*. Meanwhile, the missionaries began to value the Peshitta in its own right and wanted to add it to the biblical texts they would consult to produce their Syriac version of the Bible.

It is not clear whether the Board in Boston actually agreed to a translation from the Peshitta. Nevertheless, in 1846 when the first Syriac Bible was published, it was translated using the Peshitta and included marginal notes to indicate where it differed from the Greek text. The Syriac Bible had two columns, with the Peshitta on one side and the vernacular translation on the other. This, in fact, made the work a "two in one": a new edition of the Peshitta based on East Syriac manuscripts, and an entirely new translation based largely on the Urmia dialect. In combination with the marginal notes referencing the Greek, the first edition also introduced its readers to textual criticism of the Bible.

In producing a Syriac version of the Old Testament, the missionaries could not get away again with the approach they had taken with the New Testament. The Hebrew and Syriac Old Testaments simply differed more extensively than the Greek and Syriac New Testaments, and the translation policies of the American Board were more strictly enforced when the Old Testament was printed in 1852. The Board in Boston also objected to the inclusion of the Peshitta Classical Syriac text, but this fight was won by the missionaries, who produced another beautiful two-columned volume. Both the Old and New Testament volumes, however, were too voluminous and expensive to be reprinted, and all subsequent editions consisted only of the vernacular translation. Whether or not the Peshitta was used in a literal sense as the source text, the Old and New Testament translations are both

deeply influenced by the vocabulary and especially the syntax of the Peshitta, making for a classicized vernacular that may not always have been immediately clear to its readers. In a later revision, the New Testament text more closely followed the Greek, but the influence of the Peshitta returned via the back door. In order to accommodate new readers who used different dialects, the number of typical Urmian words had to be cut back. These were usually replaced by more classical terms, which often happened to be the ones also found in the Peshitta.

To sum up: the vernacular translation that became the standard relied more on the Greek and Hebrew source texts valued by Western Christians than the earliest version of the 1840s. Nonetheless, the text as it stabilized in the 1860s to 1890s was heavily influenced by the traditional Syriac text, which thus continued to influence generations of readers who could not read the Peshitta in its original form.

#### 3. The Printed Work and Its Dissemination

The most visible characteristic that was to distinguish the new Bible from the old Scriptures was the printed form of the one- or two-volume translation. Earlier, the Scriptures were generally transmitted and taught via hand-written manuscript copies of lectionaries that were available for use in churches. Among Syriac Christians, the most important of these was obviously the Gospel lectionary and, secondarily, the Psalter, Epistles of Paul, and Old Testament lectionaries. Few clergy and almost no lay people would possess personal copies of these lectionaries. Even less common was a complete Bible text, which in the early nineteenth century could only be found in the possession of a few scholarly clergymen. Usually, these were bulky books of several separate volumes. Most often the New Testament was published as a single volume that excluded Hebrews and the Apocalypse. The books of the Old Testament were divided into several groups: the Torah, the Book of Sessions (Joshua, Judges, Samuel I and II, Kings I and II, Proverbs, Ecclesiastics, Ruth, Song of Songs, Bar Sirah, and Job), the book of the Prophets (the major and minor Prophets), the book of Maccabees (Chronicles I and II, Maccabees I and II, Ezra, Nehemiah, Wisdom of Salomon, Judith, Esther, Susanna, Letter of Jeremiah, Letter of Baruch), and the Psalter. Only a few of the Old Testament books were available when the missionaries arrived.<sup>3</sup> While Arabic printed Bibles and biblical texts were somewhat easier to come by in Greater Syria where Eli Smith started his work, copies still would have been fairly scarce. Lay people everywhere would be familiar with the biblical texts mostly from hearing the text read aloud during the divine liturgy.

While the earliest copies of the Bible, especially in their two-column editions, were still bulky, heavy, and expensive, later editions became much smaller and cheaper, especially in comparison to handwritten copies. This allowed for many copies to be printed, and the number of people possessing a Bible grew accordingly, thus making the printed text available to practically everyone who was able to read.

It is important to emphasize that printed versions of the Bible did not suddenly make the Bible well known. Biblical stories, vocabulary, and phraseology had already been widely disseminated among the Syriac faithful. However, this took place for the most part orally, via the lectionary readings during the divine liturgy, the stories about the biblical saints, and hymns that were sung during the Mass and festive occasions like weddings and saints' days. What was new is that small printed Bibles made the written text available to all readers, at all times, in all places.

## 4. Reading, Contemplating, Discussing

Finally, it was the readers that differentiated the new from the old. The number of people who learned to read expanded considerably. Boys learned to read with greater proficiency than in ear-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> On the literary culture of the Church of the East, see Heleen Murre-van den Berg, Scribes and Scriptures: The Church of the East in the Eastern Ottoman Provinces (1500–1850), ECS 21 (Peeters: Louvain, 2015). On the Catholic missions and the changes they introduced, see Bernard Heyberger, Les chrétiens du Proche Orient au temps de la Réforme catholique, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athenes et de Rome 284 (Rome: École Françaises de Rome, 1994).

lier times when they were trained only to read the liturgy and recite the Scriptures. In addition, for the first time considerable numbers of women and girls were also becoming literate. Though in earlier times some women had learned to read if they had clerical fathers or brothers willing to teach them, now there was an opportunity for almost all girls to receive some basic education. Reading in general went hand in hand with reading the Bible. Many people, young and old, learn to read from the Bible as various versions issued from the press. As Bibles became less expensive, they were often given as presents to those who completed their education in the missionary school or who performed well in reading contests.

And so the Bible became a book to be read, leafed through, read in private and in groups, reflected upon, discussed, quoted, and used in arguments. In this way, the Bible became more clearly differentiated from other ecclesiastical literature, and its stories were no longer to be merged with those about non-biblical saints. In this process, the book's status became more clearly defined. Soon the expression "the word of God" was restricted to the biblical text, which set it apart from other sacred texts in the Syriac tradition. In addition to this, growing numbers of people joined in conversation about the Bible. Laymen, lay women, and the lesser clergy, who formerly had little to say about theological matters, now had the Bible at hand from which to quote, cite, and comment. The power of the higher clergy was doubly subverted as they both lost their exclusive grip on theological and biblical knowledge and as this knowledge was restricted to a single literary source that they had yet to master by the evolving standards of the day. But again, this was not a sudden and immediate change. Many of the earlier practices of reading and listening have remained in place in Orthodox and Middle Eastern Protestant circles until today. In this tradition, ordained men take the lead in explaining and exhorting, and lay women listen submissively or, if they prefer, contemplate the text among themselves rather than discuss it in public meetings.

## Creating a New Community

It has often has been remarked that Protestant missionaries and the old-new Bible they brought with them contributed greatly to processes of individualization. The Bible as a portable book stimulated personal Bible study and individual pondering of the meaning of faith for this life and the next. Perhaps just as important, however, these changes in individual spirituality are embedded in larger societal changes. Whether those involved are aware of it or not, these personal and individual practices are intricately and reciprocally part of larger societal changes — being informed by the larger community and simultaneously changing that larger community. A case in point is the private readers of the Bible (whether Protestant or not) who formed a new group that introduced important changes in the Syriac community.

Of course, this was not merely the effect of the Bible translations as such. In every place where translations were produced, they were part of a larger movement of translation, of vernacularization (whether of a vernacular or of a classical language) and of the so-called "print culture" of Benedict Anderson. This, in turn, created new communities whose boundaries and structures of authority were not automatically the same as those of the earlier religious community. Whether or not people would choose to become part of the actual Protestant community, the trajectory of vernacularization spread its net more widely, in the end creating both a church and a nation that would be strongly influenced by Protestant ideas that had been introduced by missionaries. At the national level, this resulted in a discourse about modernization, progress, education, and nationalist dreams of unity and autonomy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See especially Becker, *Revival and Awakening*, which emphasizes the social innovations of the missionaries. For another important analysis of the missionary encounter's deep societal and cultural influences, see Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

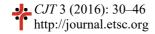
## In Conclusion: Back to the Bishop

The Syriac bishop's English reference to the *Bible*, therefore, illustrates how the language of modernization that was introduced by the missionaries was taken up by Middle Easterners all across the board, influencing society, community, and religion all at the same time. This most importantly included new thinking about the importance of the scriptural text, and of the collection of texts we now call the *Bible*. This in turn is closely linked to what has come to be called religion – the *Bible* as differentiated from the wide array of traditional religious texts, and religion as differentiated from other societal practices, beliefs, and organization. And this allowed for a secular space to emerge where the conversation between religions can take place.

The Syriac bishop also makes clear that accepting these premises does not necessarily include a wholesale protestantizing or secularizing: his type of modernity includes rather than rejects the Bible as a venerated object to be kissed and cherished. It also includes rather than rejects other forms of Syriac learning and tradition in addition to a Protestant reading of the biblical text. But it does (and could not have done otherwise) accept the new community of readers and writers as its basis. While bishops, contrary to what the early missionaries expected, continued to hold their place of honor, they hold this special place within a community where lay women and men are taking part in the religious conversation, and where bishops confer with lay leaders over the well-being of the community they form together. This is most acutely so in these difficult times for many of the Middle East's Christians, when the boundaries of communal and national identities are being violently redefined and all are in desperate need of a new common language.

Murre-van den Berg: American Bible Translations in the Middle-East

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# Islamic Terminology in Christian Arabic: The Use of the Term *Sunna*

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The term *sunna* (law) is used in the Arabic Bible as well as in the writings of Christian authors such as Abū Qurra. It is also a key word in the Islamic tradition. As part of an oral and a living religious tradition, the term connotes personal and communal experience and, as such, resists any kind of fundamentalism based on the written word. By using reason and nature as criteria, explains Abū Qurra, man has the means to discern the Truth and distinguish between good and bad. Moreover, believers are actors in a living tradition, *sunna*, that, together with the Scriptures, amount to revelation.

To better understand the protean term *sunna*, which encompasses natural law, the order of creation, the good norms of the ancestors and God's plan for His creatures, we will now examine the various ways that it has been used in the Middle East Christian context.

## Nomos in the Greek Tradition

The Greek word *nomos* is translated in the Arabic Bible with the word *nāmūs* as well as *sunna*. *Nāmūs* and *sunna* are words with many meanings in Arabic. In order to better understand the meaning of these terms, we should go back to the meaning of the original Greek word *nomos* and its development in history.

*Nomos* (law) was first understood by the Greeks as positive law, custom, and consensus in contrast to the divine law or justice, *dike*. However, Plato claimed that *nomos* possessed a universal value and was to be distinguished from the laws derived from decisions taken by the human councils because *nomos* describes

the law of the cosmos that mirrors the order of creation, which is the source of norms for human behavior. Nomos can be understood as natural law, law in accordance with the order of cosmos, from which concrete human law and customary law is derived. It also means the normative behavior coming from the ancients, transmitted in the form of tradition or custom from generation to generation.

Hence, the original Greek word *nomos* has two dimensions, one divine and universal and the other particular and concrete that takes the form of custom. Thus custom has a religious dimension as a mirror to the universal order or divine law.

In addition to this, *nomos* has the meaning of consensus, since custom in a wider sense is the consensus or accepted praxis of a community.

In this way, *nomos* is to be understood as the expression of the divine law in the life of the community and at the same time as customary law. *Eudemonia*, the good order guaranteed by the law, was central in Greek thought.

In the Greek universe, even the Gods were subject to the *no-mos*, to the natural order of the cosmos, which points to the conception of God as reason.<sup>2</sup> Thus, *nomos* means universal law, and, at the same time, particular law, which takes the form of custom and consensus or the accepted praxis of a community.

Aristoteles introduces the concept of a personal law side by side with the law of the community that reflects the order of cosmos or divine order. Another dimension of the personal conception of a divine law is found in Christianity, since the incarnation is to be understood as the entering of the divine person into history.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "Nomos (Greek Philosophy)"; Wikipedia contributors, "Nomos," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nomos&oldid=723865656 (last accessed September 15, 2016).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> I do not mean reason in a positivistic sense but reason that requires faith and faith that requires reason.

#### Sunna and Nāmūs in the Arabic and Islamic Traditions

The word *sunna* is a pre-Islamic term that stood first for customary behavior, which could be either good or bad. *Sunna* could be a disapproved or approved custom as long as it was the norm of previous generations, *al-'awwaliyūn*. *Sunna* as an ancient Arabian concept was to play an increasingly important role during the formative period of Islam. Eventually, during the Islamic period, the term *sunna* came to stand for the normative custom of the ancestors and, centuries later, the generally approved practice of Muhammad.<sup>3</sup>

Sunna appears in the Qur'an eighteen times in the sense of God's sunna or the sunna of the predecessors, 'awwaliyūn. In both cases this usage reflects the meanings mentioned in relation to nomos: the universal law of God and the particular law of the predecessors. The word sunna does not appear in the Qur'ān explicitly referring to the sunna of Muḥammad, although his role as a messenger is clearly stated. According to Juynboll, the Umayyad caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Azīz was the first to emphasize the idea of sunna as the sunna of the Prophet.<sup>5</sup>

During the seventh century the term *sunna* was used in debates on legal and ritual issues to indicate any good precedents set by ancestors, one of them was Muḥammad. Indeed, *sunna* referred in the beginning of Islam not only to the *sunna* of Muhammad but also to the *sunna* of revered ancestors.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> G. H. A. Juynboll, "Sunna," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* 9:878–81 (Leiden: Brill, 1997); G. H. A. Juynboll, "Some New Ideas on the Development of Sunna as a Technical Term in Early Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 10 (1987): 106–7, 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Qur'ān 4:26; 40:85; 17:77; 33:38; and 48:23. G. H. A. Juynboll, "Sunna," in *Encyclopaedia of the Our'an* 5:163–66 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 26, 30–39; Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 44–45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Juynboll, "Sunna," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 9:878–81.

Moreover, in the beginning, the word *sunna*, not *sharīʿa*, was to designate the concept of law, understood in a wider sense as normativity of the community based on the practice of the ancestors and Muḥammad, which implies a living tradition. Thus in the formative period of Islamic law, or *fiqh*, the term *sunna* was predominantly used in the expression "*sunna* Muhammad," instead of the word *sharīʿa*, meaning with that not Muḥammad's law but the practice of the community follower of Muḥammad. The term *sharīʿa* was seldom used before the eleventh century and became a wide-spread term only after the thirteenth century.

W.C. Smith affirms that the *mutakallimūn* were not concerned with the concept of *sharīʿa*, even if the word was occasionally used. Instead the words *sunna* and *bidʿa* were widespread before the eleventh century. He gives examples of works where inexplicably the word *sharīʿa* does not appear at all, such as *al-Fiqh al-Akbar* li Abū Ḥanifa, and al-Ashaʿarīʾs sypnosis in *Maqālāt al-Islamiyyīn* on the position of *Ahl al-Ḥadīṯ wa l-Sunna*.

Regarding the word  $n\bar{a}m\bar{u}s$ , we find the use of this term in  $S\bar{\imath}rat$  Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn Hishām where it is specifically used to refer to Christian revelation, the gospel. Ibn Hishām, who wrote in the Abbasid period, quotes John 15:26 in his Sirat, commenting: "It is necessary that the Word, kalima, which is in al- $Nam\bar{u}s$ , would be fulfilled...and if al-Menahmana comes...he would give testimony of me." In this passage, Jesus announced the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, in Syriac al-Menahmana. However, the term Word, or Logos, was not understood as a personal Logos but as a transmitted message, reinforcing, in that way, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> This is based on coming results of the Arabic Papyrology Database project at the Department of Near Eastern Studies, LMU, Munich led by Prof. Andreas Kaplony, supported by Data Base cald-ilm, led by Prof. Christian Müller.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> W. C. Smith, "The Concept of Shari'a among Some Mutakallimun," in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, ed. George Makdisi, 581–601 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 585.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> From the Syriac word *naham*, meaning a roaring, howling fire. See Payne Smith, *Syriac English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), s.v. "Naham."

importance of the concept of so-called "law," *al-Nāmūs*. <sup>10</sup> M. Plessner <sup>11</sup> says that following Islamic tradition Waraqa b. Nawfāl identified the Paraclete with Muḥammad, who links the gospel passage on the Paraclete to sura 61:6 in which the One to come is called Ahmad.

Consequently, the idea of the Paraclete as the Holy Spirt did not prevail. Ibn Hishām observes that Waraqa said to Ḥadīja: "If thou hast reported the truth to me then truly the greatest *namūs* has come to him, who used to come to Mūsà, and then he (Muḥammad) is the prophet of this 'umma." Later on Waraqa personally confirmed this interpretation of the words to Muḥammad: You are the Prophet of this 'umma, because the greatest *namūs* has come to you, the one which had come to Mūsà before. <sup>12</sup>

In al-Ṭābarī the greatest  $n\bar{a}m\bar{u}s$  is said to be Djibrīl, called *al-Nāmūs al-Akbar*. <sup>13</sup>

Tor Andrae derived the *nāmūs* of the Waraqa tradition from the *nomos aiwnios* in pseudo-Clementine's writings, which according to the book *Kerigma Petru* was revealed to Adam and afterwards to all the prophets, from Moses to Jesus. Baumstark tries to track down the origin of the Christian use of *nomos* in the Arabic tradition. He notes that a passage in the liturgy of St. James of Jerusalem was authoritative in Bedouin camps and must have existed in an Arabic tradition. <sup>14</sup> In any case, the word Menahmana, meaning the one who fulfills the nāmūs, is documented in a Palestinian Syriac lectionary, but not in the Peshitta. <sup>15</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-nabāwiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 2010), 1:152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> M. Plessner, "Nāmūs," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* 7:953–55 (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibn Hishām, al-Sīrat al-nabāwiyya, 1:155–56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Plessner, "Nāmūs"; Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1974), s.v. "Nāmūs."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Plessner, "Nāmūs."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> I owe this information to Prof. Ronny Vollandt, Department of Near Eastern Studies, LUM, Munich, Germany.

## Sunna of the Philosophers

The term *sunna* has also been used by the most important Muslim philosophers.

Lawrence V. Berman and Ilai Alon remark that *sunna* as a translation of *nomos* appears in earlier texts. <sup>16</sup> He studied the short treatise attributed to Socrates, *Maqāla Ṣuqrāt fī 'l-muqāyasa bayn al-sunna wa l-falsafa*, <sup>17</sup> in which the term *sunna* is used in the sense of religious law. However the marginal annotations done in a later period by an unknown annotator replace the word *sunna* with the word *sharī 'a*. <sup>18</sup> The treatise distinguishes between *sunna* and *falsafa*, and the same annotator replaced later the word *falsafa* with *ḥikma*, which has quasi-mystical connotations.

The object of this short treatise was to prove that law is good but philosophy is better because, among other things, while *sunna* forbids sin, philosophy teaches how to do good. Their relation is similar to that of necessity and free will, necessity being considered of less value than the will. Besides, philosophy is rooted in nature and applies to all people, while the commandments of religious law are restricted to certain times and countries. Philosophy (or wisdom) creates agreement between human beings, while religious law sets sect against sect. Therefore, the conclusion is that it is necessary to teach wisdom, while the duty of the authorities is to enforce religious law.

An abbreviated text of this work ascribed to Socrates makes the same point: "Al-sunna ḥasana wa-l-ḥikma ḥasana. Al-sunna taqhuru-nā 'ala tark al-ma'ātim wa-l-ḥikma tunāl bihā al-fā'ida wa tudrik kull faḍīla." (Law is good and wisdom is good. Law

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Lawrence V. Berman and Ilai Alon, "Socrates on Law and Philosophy," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 263–79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> This is an unknown work found by L. V. Berman in the Suleymaniye Library in Istanbul in 1972 (MS Esat Efendi 3688). It has been published before in Mubahat Türker, "Petit traité en arabe attribué à Socrate," in *Andara* (Turkey: Necati Lujal Armagani, 1968).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Berman and Alon, "Socrates on Law and Philosophy," 267.

forces us to forsake sins, but advantage is gained through wisdom, and it attains every virtue.)<sup>19</sup>

Two of three translations of Mantiq Aristū use the word *sunna* to translate the word *nomos*. However, in the translation of Yaḥyà b. ʿĀdī, teacher of al-Fārābī, he differentiates *sunna* from philosophy or wisdom, *ḥikma*, saying, "wa dālika anna al-sunna 'arā' al-katīrīn wa l-ḥukamā' yaqūlū bi ḥasab al-ṭabī'a wa bi-ḥasab al-ḥaqq" (sunna contains the view of the many, whereas the sages and philosophers speak in accordance with nature and truth).

Al-Fārābī observes that the words sunna and sharī `a are the practical part of milla or  $d\bar{\imath}n$ , but he qualifies his point by saying that opinions may also be termed sharī `a, "so that sharī `a and milla and  $d\bar{\imath}n$  become synonymous terms, for the milla is composed of two parts, that of defining opinions and determining actions."

From the tenth century on, the medieval term  $shar\bar{\iota}'a$  was understood as religious law; hence from this time the term  $shar\bar{\iota}'a$  was interchangeable with sunna and little by little eventually replaced the term sunna. Thus, sunna became mainly a technical term used to address sunnat  $an-n\bar{a}b\bar{\iota}$ , even if the original meaning did not disappear completely, especially among the philosophers. For example, Avicena observes in  $Majm\bar{\iota}'a$   $al-ras\bar{a}'il$  that nomos as used by Plato and Aristotle means sunna in the sense of revelation, for the laws of the community are dependent on prophecy and divine law. The term sunna sunature sunature also used until today to express the constantly action of God creating the world.

Furthermore, the general and particular aspects of the concept of *nomos* or *sunna*, as understood in the Qur'an, have been

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Al-Mubashshir b.Fatik, *Mukhtār al-ḥikam wa maḥāsin al-kilam*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Madrid: Instituto Egypcio de Estudios Islamicos, 1958), 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> A. R. Badawi, ed., *Mantiq Aristu* (Bayrut: Dār al-Qalam, 1980), 2:867.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Book of Religion and Related Texts*, ed. Muhsin Mahdi (Bayrut: Dār al-Mašriq, 1968), 46. See Berman and Alon, "Socrates on Law and Philosophy," 265, n.7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Plessner, "Nāmūs."

grasped and expressed by a gigantic figure of the Islamic intellectual and legal tradition: Averroes. He distinguishes between sunna 'āmma and sunna khaṣṣa, universal sunna and particular sunna. In Talkhīṣ al-khaṭāba, 23 Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Rhetoric.<sup>24</sup> Averroes takes the Aristotelian concept of natural justice and understands Aristotle's distinction between a particular and a general law under the categories of written law, alsunna al-maktūba, and unwritten law, al-sunna ghayr almaktūba. Laws, al-sunna, are of two kinds according to Averroes: some are particular, khassa, and others are general, 'āmma. Particular laws are written laws, al-sunnan al-maktūba, which are written down in order not to be forgotten. These particular laws are specific to each community, gawm, or each nation, 'umma. As for the general laws, they are unwritten laws, al-sunnan al-ghayr al-maktūba. They are acknowledged by all people (yu 'taraf bihā) as a matter of filial piety, birr al-wālidayn, and gratitude to a benefactor, shukr al-min 'ām.

Averroes acknowledges the importance of unwritten law as arising from the common nature of all people,  $tab\bar{t}$  at al- $jam\bar{t}$ . These are laws that people accept as natural although they are stated in no covenant,  $ittif\bar{a}q$ , or contract, ta  $\bar{a}qud$ , among individuals in a community, and it is not known when or by whom these laws were laid down, wudi at. Averroes's understanding is similar to that of Cicero's in De re publica 3.22, who speaks of natural law.

Unlike Aristotle, who maintains that the particular law could both be written or unwritten to account for customs, Averroes separates these ideas, holding that the general law was unwritten and the particular was written. The *sunna 'āmma*, explains Averroes, has an unknown origin. This lack of epistemological origin of the general law could be understood as referring to the impossibility of knowing the Prophet who had laid it down. While he does not negate the divine origin of *sunna 'āmma*, he argues that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Written in 1175.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibn Rushd, *Averroès (ibn Rušd): Commentaire moyen à la Rhétorique d'Aristote*, 3 vol., ed. Maroun Aouad (Paris: Vrin, 2002).

general (or universal) law arises orally and from human consensus; it does not have any necessary correlation or effect on written law, but it can run parallel to it. Nonetheless, since oral culture used to have a major social role, oral law and written law may have been seen in some ways as interrelated even though sunna 'āmma is definitively not considered to be the source or foundation of the written law or sunna khaṣṣa.

# Oral Revelation in Judaism and Early Christianity

In Judaism the revealed law is based on both oral and written law. From the beginning, the Judaic tradition holds that together with the revelation of the law, or written Torah, in Sinai, there was also an oral revelation, the Oral Torah. Hence, the revealed law takes the form of written and oral law. Even the Karaites, who stress the value and truth in the written Torah, understand that a source of law is consensus and custom, called 'ādet.<sup>25</sup> The correct reading of the Bible, it is said by the Karaitas, does not depend on the authority of sages but the community that establishes it.<sup>26</sup>

In this case, the divine law, Torah, is *sunna ʿāmma* and *khaṣṣa* at the same time. The term Torah, as it has been said, refers to both the oral and written law, to universal or divine law as well as to particular human norms. Hanina ben Menehem<sup>27</sup> points out that "there is unanimity of opinion in rabbinic literature concerning the existence and antiquity of the oral law . . . Revelation in Sinai included a significant oral teaching that accompanied written law."

Origen<sup>28</sup> claims that with Christianity the law is a divine and human person, Jesus Christ, not a tradition of the ancients. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Marc Hirshman, "Torah in Rabbinic Thought: The Theology of Learning," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. Steven T. Katz, 4:899–924 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4: 907.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Geoffrey Khan, "Los caraitas ante la Biblia," *'Ilu: Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones*, Anejo IX (2004): 33–46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Hanina ben Menehem, "Talmudic Law: A Jurisprudential Perspective," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. Steven T. Katz, 4:877–98 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4:877–99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Hirshman, "Torah in Rabbinic Thought," 4:906.

nomos gives place to the Logos, which is reason and word, and it is at the beginning of creation and creation's end. The Logos does not abolish the law of the ancients, but fulfills it. Therefore, the idea of a living tradition that transmits and witnesses to the Logos or personal *nomos* becomes central in Christianity.

In Syriac we find the concept of law as arising from community consensus. Nonnus of Nisibi, Abū Qurra's Jacobite adversary, who wrote an apologetic treatise on Syriac, mentions the commonly received ideas, *mahshboto gawwonoyoto*, as a way to know the truth, which carries the same value as scriptural proofs or the evidentiary value of miracles.<sup>29</sup>

J. P. Montferrer-Sala finds in a lectionary of probable Palestinian origin where *sunna al-nāmūs* is used in the sense of  $n\bar{a}m\bar{u}s$  al-rabb, <sup>30</sup> the law of the Lord.

Nikolai Seleznyov observes that in a Nestorian encyclopedic work from the mid-tenth to the early eleven century K.al-Majdal uses the expression *Sunna sayyid-na al-Masīḥ, ḥafaẓa waṣāyà wa sunnata-hu* (*sunna* of our Lord the Messiah, he kept his command and his *sunna*).<sup>31</sup>

Romans 3:31 in the Peshitta Bible uses the word  $n\bar{a}m\bar{u}s$  in the expression  $n\bar{a}m\bar{u}sa$  w-nebiyyin. In the Arabic manuscript London BL 3383 (which contains the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Nonnus of Nisibi was Abu Qurra's Jacobite adversary in a Christological debate in 815–16 at the court of the Armenian prince Ashat Msaker. S. Griffith, "Faith and Reason in Christian Kalam: Theodore Abu Qurrah on discerning the True Religion," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen, 1–43 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 41, 39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> J. P. Montferrer-Sala, "Arabic rendering of Nomos and nomicos in an eleventh century Greec-Arabic Lectionary," *Folia Orientalia* 49 (2012): 311.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Chapter on Love and Chapter on Circumcision. I thank Seleznyov for having sent me the pages of the manuscript where these expressions appear. See: Nikolai N. Seleznyov, "These Stones Shall Be for a Memorial': A Discussion of the Abolition of Circumcision in the *Kitāb al-Majdāl*," *Scrinium* 10 (2014): 115–48.

and is dated in the thirteenth century), this is translated with the words *Sunna of Torah*. <sup>32</sup>

### Written Law in Islam

With the establishment of Islam as a ruling force, the need for law to organize the conquered territories led to the establishment of written law. The oral tradition of the first community of Muslims was rejected in favor of the written one. The *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq reveals its roots in an oral tradition, which Mālik, who had been charged by the caliph to write down the *sunna* of Muḥammad, would condemn. Mālik is the first to canonize the *sunna* of Muḥammad and the local praxis of Medina in his written work, *al-Muwaṭṭa*. However, it would be many centuries before the law would be embedded in oral and written tradition. The teaching methodology — an oral one, *sam'a* — presupposes the oral tradition.

On the other hand, the Islamic project of writing down the law had a huge impact on other religious communities. The Karaites, under this influence, may have denied the rabbinic oral tradition of the Torah and followed a pattern similar to Islam, deriving the law from the Torah by means of consensus and analogy, *qiyās*.

The Karaites' doctrine developed in parallel to that of the  $Sh\bar{1}$ 'a which uses the categories of  $b\bar{a}tin$  and  $z\bar{a}hir$  to describe the exoteric and esoteric in Scripture. The hermeneutic of the written text becomes from now on central when dealing with law and revelation. However, the esoteric or inner meaning of the text, in some way or another, willingly or not, continued to be based on the living, oral tradition of the community.

Al-Shāfi'ī, a legal scholar of the ninth-century, narrowed the idea of religious law in order to reduce dependence on local and customary law and establish a law that could be applied in the whole realm of Islam. He developed a scientific method for eval-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> I own the reference to my colleague Vevian Zaki, research fellow for The Bible in Arabic Project at the Department of Near Eastern Studies, LMU, Munich, Germany.

uating traditions, *hadith*, and deriving the law from them. However, he never used sura 33:21, in which Muhammad is depicted as the perfect example to be followed in order to legitimize *Sunna* Muhammad. On the contrary, he uses the word *hikma* (wisdom) as a synonym of sunna, in the same sense as it is used in the Qur'an. <sup>33</sup>

Moreover, for *Shāfi 'ī*, at the outset of his career, *sunna* meant the tradition inherited from the forebears, including teachers, parents, Successors, Companions, and the Prophet.Moreover, *sunna* was to be the criteria for interpreting the Qur'ān.<sup>34</sup>

As a matter of fact, it was Ibn Ḥanbal the first one to use the verse of Qurʾān 33:21 to affirm the necessity of following the *sunna* Muḥammad, in this way canonizing the *Sunna*. Soon after this in the ninth century, Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Mājā, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidī, and al-Nizāʾī wrote down the *sunna* Muḥammad, recording his words and deeds in large part as they were passed down through oral tradition and custom. Hence, the corpus of the *ḥadīt* became fixed by means of writing it down.

The following developments in relation to *sunna* Muḥammad is influenced by internal controversies. It seems that the concept of infallibility developed by the Muʿtāzila and the Shīʿa influenced the Sunnis so that they adopted the idea that all prophets, including Muḥammad, were infallible.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, the local praxis of the community of Medina, *ijmā* 'ahl al-madīna, even if it did not disappear completely, gave way to the legal category of the consensus of the experts for deriving the law. Hence, *sunna* became intertwined into a system of written law enforced by the state, but without disappearing completely as a living tradition until modern times.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Juynboll, "Sunna," Encyclopedia of the Qur'an, 5:1636.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> J. Burton, *An Introduction to the Hadith* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) 160, 178–79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> G. R. Hawting, "The Development of the Doctrine of the Infallibility of the Prophets and the Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012): 141–63, esp. 145–46.

# Sunna and living Tradition in Abū Qurra

In the ninth century Abū Qurra, a contemporary of al-Shāfiʿī, produced writings that reflected the debate in this century on wisdom and law. In his treatise on icons, he affirms the need to maintain the living tradition and the *sunna* of the Christian community because it has a role as important as the written form of revelation. According to Abū Qurra, *sunna* means Christian wisdom. He continues the debate on philosophy and law, *hikma* and *sunna* or *sharīʿa*, asserting the value of Christian wisdom above any custom, while being this wisdom a source of law:

Christianity is a godly wisdom, which the minds of the wise men of the world call ignorance. Because in their own ignorance, they suppose that their wisdom is the utmost of sagacity. They have given Christianity the name of foolishness because it contradicts their wisdom...not what the majority of people think is to be called wisdom; neither the uncommon is to be called stupidity. Christian wisdom surpasses the knowledge of the so called wise people of this world. The latter thinks that their knowledge is the ultimate object of wisdom and call Christianity stupidity, because it differs from their concept of wisdom.<sup>36</sup>

The Good News, da'awa – so he calls the gospel – is not stupidity. Nonetheless, he says, the majority of people think that wisdom is only what is common to them.

Other authors mirror this debate on wisdom and law. Ṭābarī comments on sura 2:129 in his Tafsīr that Qatāda (d.736) identifies wisdom, *ḥikma*, with the *sunna* of 'Īsà b. Maryam. While Shāfi'ī insists that the term *ḥikma* in sura 2:129 (*wa yu alimmuhum al-kitāb wa l- ḥikma*) means *sunnat rasûl Allāh*. The Qur'ān also observes that there was a law previous to Islam, meaning that of Jews and Christians. This is clear in sura 4:48, "what others before us legislated" (*shar man qablana*).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> T. Abu Qurrah, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*, trans. Sidney H. Griffith, Eastern Christian Texts in Translation (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> M. Rohe, *Das Islamische Recht* (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 68–70, 73, 32.

Abū Qurra indicates in his debate on wisdom and law (or *sunna*) that the Islamic legal tradition had in large measure already started to develop in the direction of a written law that would be in the service of the state.

Juynboll witnesses this development when he quotes Muslim's Ṣaḥīḥ, which says, "you intended to study the entire body of traditions,  $akhb\bar{a}r$ , transmitted from the Messenger of God, concerning the usages – or living tradition – sunna, and the ordinances,  $ahk\bar{a}m$ , of the religion." Previous to this development, Wansbrough mentions that there is "a transition from  $s\bar{i}ra$  or narration, to sunna, or exemplum (where the dominant cognitive category is nomos)."

The Islamic oral tradition started to be systematized and written down taking shape, in part, as law for the use of nascent Islamic institutions. Meanwhile, *Sunna* became a written source from which to derive the written law, even if the role of sunna in deriving the law in the classical period as some may understand today is controversial.

On the other hand, in his treatise on icons, Abū Qurra recalls the value of *sunna* as the "living tradition of the Church," which means the life of the community, the example of the Fathers of the Church, and the practice of the disciples. Within this living tradition, Scripture is subject to historical interpretations, and Christians are expected to become icons (images) of the incarnated God. As an icon of the Lord, a true Christian saint is a corrector of customs, traditions, and institutions.

Among the variety of meanings of *sunna*, Abū Qurra asserts the value of *sunna* as a living tradition, a practice that is passed on and lived from generation to generation and which carries theological weight as a source of dogma – although the living tradition does not necessarily correspond to the praxis of the majority of the people.

Abū Qurra's intention is to point out the need to take into consideration the role of the living tradition in the life of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Juynboll, "Some New Ideas on the Development of Sunna as a Technical Term in Early Islam," 106–7.

community as source of revelation. This tradition, together with Scriptures, the lives of the saints, personal testimony, and the experience of believers in the life of the community are criteria and sources of revelation for futures generations. In the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent declared that the truth of the Gospel was to be found both in the Scriptures and in tradition, "in *libris scriptis et sine scripto traditionibus*."

# The Role of Living Tradition

At present, few people are aware of the importance of living tradition – of the *sunna*, as Abū Qurra would say – for the life of the community of faith. Indeed, the living tradition of the Church is together with the Scriptures the actual revelation. This tradition of the Church has several aspects, including both the consensus of experts (theologians) and the living tradition of the community.

The Church affirms, as does Islamic law in an unspecific way, that God assures His community that "it would never agree on error." In the Church that means, concretely, the certainty that the presence of the Holy Spirit guaranties the permanence of the Truth and the renewal of the people of God, which takes expression in the "Sunna" or living tradition of the community.

Abū Qurra states that the living tradition is the opposite of the written law, which kills the spirit. In this way, he stands against the identification of religious law with the law of jurists. Abū Qurra, a contemporary of Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Shāfiʿī, takes part in the debate on the canonization and the writing down of *sunna* and Islamic law, *fiqh*, and he emphasizes the need of a living tradition that transmits the experience of what is good from generation to generation. For Abū Qurra, this living tradition is the proof of the existence of the Holy Spirit, and the living tradition is as much a source of revelation as the Scriptures. In this sense, the Christian Church affirms that God guaranties that His people will not to fall into error.

By affirming the need of the living tradition, Abū Qurra states that the criterion to discern good from bad tradition is reason, which affirms the interrelation of faith and reason. By the rational nature inherent to human beings, good and bad can be discerned and deduced from the divine law. The divine law does not contradict reason. Divine law can be grasped through reason, but this reason requires faith. Moreover, the praxis of the saints is the expression of natural law, which is rooted in the order of the cosmos. It is the saints who correct by the example of their lives what is merely contingent and customary.

In his treatise on the true religion, Abū Qurra adds another criterion for recognizing the true religion, nature  $(tab\bar{\iota}'a)$ . At the beginning of his treatise, Abū Qurra uses Islamic terminology, which might lead some to think that they were reading a book on Islamic law. However, his use of the term *nature* brings us back to the world of philosophy. He refers to human nature as the criterion for knowing the true religion:

Our nature teaches us the miracle/verses, 'ayāt, of God's messengers, rusul, His books, the Truth that comes from God. Their verses, 'ayāt – referring to the verses of the books of the Bible – are His true religion, by which man should worship him according to His perfect attributes. Their verses are His commandment, 'amr, and His prohibitions, nahà, His reward, tawāb, and punishment, 'aqāb, the Truth.

This treatise uses nature instead of reason – as he did in the treaties on icons – as the criterion or human instrument to obtain the knowledge of God.

Although he begins by paraphrasing Islamic religious language and its fundamental affirmations, he replaces the word Qur'ān with the word *nature*, saying that while the Qur'an teaches us the verses, 'ayāt, of the Messenger of God, the book of nature is directly from God. Hence, reason and nature (in its philosophical sense) are the criteria for knowing true religion and discerning the truth of a tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. This is the true *sunna*.

## Conclusion

I will conclude by listing the various affirmations I have made about the nature of *sunna*.

- Sunna as the translation of nomos has a variety of meanings.
- Sunna as a normativity proceeding from rightful predecessors comprises an aspect of the universal and particular, divine law and customary law, an expression of the good order of the divine.
- Sunna comprises in its origin an aspect of oral law or normativity for the community and later also takes the form of written law.
- The term *sunna* has been used for the translation of the term Torah in the Arabic Bible, and it has been used with the expression "*sunna* of the Torah" (*Sunna al-Nāmūs*).
- The expression "sunna of Jesus" has been used in Nestorian writings.
- The Melkite writer Abū Qurra describes the living tradition of the Church, Sunna, as a source of revelation together with Scripture.
- At a philosophical level, *sunna* is described as natural law, *ius naturalis*. Averroes calls it *sunna* 'āmma a normativity that is known by all people and whose origin is unknown. It seems that he does not deny a divine origin for it even if an epistemological foundation is lacking.

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# The Book of Job between Hebrew and Arabic

Bishop Makar Archbishop of Sharqia and 10<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan City

The book of Job is one of the important poetic books in the Bible because it addresses an important human issue, the issue of pain in human life. Nevertheless, it is generally considered the least read or studied book in churches. So, is the human suffering of Job actually due to God's wrath? Is pain related only to sin as a punishment and discipline without any other cause? These are ancient questions and need a special study that explores the issue of suffering as it appears throughout the Bible. But we will limit this paper to the book of Job. First we will look at Job in the original Hebrew Bible, then in the Bustani-Van Dyck Arabic translation of 1865, and finally compare these Arabic translations with other Arabic translations, such as the Jesuit translation.

## General outline of Job

- 1. Introduction, chapters 1–2: two tests (the first includes the initial story in heaven and Job's loss of family and wealth, the second his physical suffering through disease).
- 2. Job's opening speech, chapter 3: Job curses the day he was born.
- 3. Three cycles of speeches:

<sup>\*</sup> This article has been translated from Arabic by Sameh Raheef, assisted by Michael Parker for style and by Willem J. de Wit for the discussions of Hebrew terms and their Arabic translation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Coptic Church reads the book of Job from beginning to end during the Great Fasting (known as Lent in the West) and Holy Week. Copts see Job's suffering as a reminder of Christ's redemptive suffering.

- A. First argument, chapters 4–14: attacking Job indirectly<sup>2</sup>
- B. Second argument, chapters 15–21: attacking Job directly<sup>3</sup>
- C. Third argument, chapter 22–27: attacking Job insultingly<sup>4</sup>
- 4. Wisdom song, chapter 28
- 5. Job's final speech, chapter 29–31
- 6. Elihu the young man, chapter 32–37
- 7. The Lord speaks, chapter 38-41
- 8. Job's submission and the epilogue, chapter 42<sup>5</sup>

## The Content of the book

The book consists of a group of marvelous poems: seven about God<sup>6</sup> and six about evil,<sup>7</sup> which includes the wisdom song, the song of suffering in chapter 30, and the song of salvation in chapter 33. In the latter passage Elihu muses what an angelic mediator might say and what might follow:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Eliphaz, for example, says, "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished?" (Job 4:7). We understand from this sentence that Job is not as innocent as he claims to be.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Zophar the Naamathite describes evil, saying, "He will spit out the riches he swallowed; God will make his stomach vomit them up" (Job 20: 15). He seems to be saying to Job, You are the evil, and what happened to you is because of your sin.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Eliphaz here insults Job with harsh words: "Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?" (Job 22:5).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> There are several methods to divide the book. See, for example: George Rawlinson and Thomas Whitelaw, *Job*, The Pulpit Commentary 16 (Rio, WI: AGES Software, 2001; version 1.0), "Introduction"; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997; version 1.0); J. E. Hartley, "Job," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 2:1064;

نخبة من الأساتذة، قاموس الكتاب المقدس (بيروت، بدون تاريخ)، "يوب" (ص٤٦)؛ تادرس يعقوب (القمص)، تفسير سفر أيوب (كنيسة مارجرجس إسبورتنج، الإسكندرية).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Eliphaz 5:8–16, Job 9:1–13, Zophar 11:7–12, Job 12:12–25, Bildad 25:1–6, Job 26:5–14, and Elihu 36:22–33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Eliphaz 15:20–35, Bildad 18:5–21, Zophar 21:4–29, Job 21:6–21, Job 24:1–25, and Job 27:13–23.

"Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him" – then his flesh is renewed like a child's; it is restored as in the days of his youth. He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state. Then he comes to men and says, "I have sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved. He redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and I shall live to enjoy the light." (33:24–28 NIV)

# The Hebrew Language of the Book

The Hebrew language of the book is difficult and confusing, especially in the poetic parts. It is not only the words but also the syntax that is hard to understand. Hence Job has confused commentators and translators.

#### 1. Aramaic Terms Fill the Book

Hebrew terms appear with Aramaic terms as synonyms, for example in Job 3:25: יָבֹא לֵי ... יָבֹא לֵי ... The first word, wayye 'ĕtāyēnî, is an Aramaism that is equal to Arabic נֵצֶּׁאָרָנִינִי fa'atānī ("has come upon me"), while the second word, yābō' (lî), is a true Hebrew word with the same meaning. In Job 16:19 we find the Hebrew word with the Aramaic word שָׁרָּדִי śāhǎdî, both meaning "my witness." Sometimes the Aramaic words occur more often than their Hebrew equivalents. For example, מְּלָּה millâ ("word") is used only six times with the Hebrew plural ending (שִׁלִּה millîm) but ten times with the Aramaic plural ending (millîm).

# 2. Names of God in Job<sup>8</sup>

The prose section of Job uses names for God that are common in the Old Testament: אַלהֵים 'ĕlōhîm three times and יהוה YHWH thirty times (in the Old Testament as a whole 'ĕlōhîm is used 2,600 times and YHWH 6,828 times). On the other hand, the poetic section of Job uses archaic designations for God: אַלוֹה 'ĕlôah ("God") forty-one times and 'yadday ("Almighty") thirty-one times (in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> These statistics were made using *BibleWorks* (CD version: 6.01, program version: 6.0.005).

addition to 'ĕl, which is used fifty-seven times). Apart from Job, 'ĕlôah and šadday are rarely used in the Old Testament: the former appears sixteen times and the latter seventeen times outside the Book of Job ('ēl is more common and is used 179 times outside the Book of Job).

## 3. The Hebrew and Septuagint

There is a slight difference between the Hebrew text and the Greek Septuagint text. For example, in Job 7:20a the Hebrew texts uses the phrase עָלִי לְמַשֵּׁא ("a burden to myself"), while the Septuagint says, ἐπὶ σοι φορτίον ("a burden to you"). The Arabic Van Dyck translation followed the Hebrew text, "to be a burden to myself," and the Arabic Jesuit version follows the Septuagint, "to be a burden to you."

## 4. The Difference Between Written and Spoken

This difference appears a lot in the Hebrew text. In Job 13:15 the word  $8\bar{b}$   $l\bar{o}$  appears, which indicates negation ("not") in the written form, but sounds like  $8\bar{b}$   $l\hat{o}$  ("for him") when spoken. So the meaning changes from "I will not hope" (written) to "I will hope in him" (spoken).

## The Arabic Van Dyck

It is clear that the Van Dyck translation used uncommonly difficult Arabic terms. To understand the translator's decision to choose these difficult words, we have to examine the Hebrew text. In Job 15:26, the uncommon Arabic word בשני majānn ("shields"; singular: מְבִּנִים māginnîm (singular: מְבֵּנִים māgēn). The Arabic Jesuit translation is clearer, however, because it uses a more common Arabic word for "shield."

In Job 20:25, the Van Dyck uses the Arabic word مرارة marārah ("bitterness, gall, gall bladder") because it follows the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Note that Arabic  $\varepsilon$  *j* equals Hebrew  $\lambda$  *g*. The consonants of Arabic *mijānn* and Hebrew *māgēn* are the same. [WJdW]

Hebrew text, which has מְּרֹרֶה *měrōrâ*. Here again, the Jesuit version has chosen for a different translation that is clearer in Arabic.

In Job 30:17, the Arabic عارفي ' $\bar{a}riq\bar{\imath}y$  in the Van Dyck is difficult and almost incomprehensible, yet is true to the Hebrew text, which has עֹרְקֵי ' $\bar{o}r\check{e}qay$  ("my gnawers, those who gnaw me," i.e., "my gnawing pains"). The Arabic Jesuit translation is simpler once again.

In Job 30:30 ("my bones burn/are burned with heat"), the Van Dyck uses the Arabic verb וֹבְּיֹנִי  $h\bar{a}ra$  (burned, is burned"), because both words are from the root hrr (בע, הדרו). However, although speakers of Arabic may recognize that בּינִים hararat is related to the common Arabic word בעוני hararat ("heat"; also used in Job 30:30), בינ hararat itself is never used in Arabic. In contrast, the Jesuit translation has chosen once again a translation that clearly conveys the meaning in Arabic.

## A Final Word

Job in its original Hebrew is one of the more difficult books of the Old Testament to understand. Nevertheless, it uses proper diction and syntax, and it has wondrous contents and eloquent poetry. The Arabic Van Dyck text was an admirable translation, but in striving for literalness, it tried to use Arabic terms that were closest to the Hebrew text. Consequently, the book proved to be incomprehensible for all who are not masters of Arabic. For that reason, there should be a new Arabic translation that is more easily understandable. This is especially needed for youth who thirst for God's word.

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# Review of *Submission* by Michel Houellebecq

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Submission: A Novel. By Michel Houellebecq. Translated by Lorin Stein. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015. 256 pages.

On January 7, 2015, two Muslim extremists broke into the Parisian offices of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and opened fire with automatic weapons. Twelve people were killed and eleven wounded, and the words *Je suis Charlie* soon became a catchphrase among the supporters of free expression in France. On the day of this attack, the cover of *Charlie Hebdo* featured a caricature of the French writer Michel Houellebecq (pronounced *well-bek*) as a prophet of doom wearing a wizard's conical cap. Houellebecq's prophetic imagination was also on display that day in the form of his sixth novel, *Soumission*, a dystopian fiction that envisions a Muslim France in the near future. The English translation of the book appeared in October 2015.

Houellebecq is, needless to say, a controversial writer. His 1998 novel, *Atomised*, won the Dublin Literary Award but was seen by many as a disturbing nihilistic read. His 2001 novel, *Platform*, was not as critically well received but earned him a wider reputation. It is a romance filled with sex scenes and, in the name of free-market economics, seems to approve of prostitution and sex tourism. The book is also explicitly critical of Islam. This criticism, followed by anti-Islamic comments he made in an interview for the magazine *Lire* in which he characterized Islam as a "stupid religion," led to his prosecution in 2002 for inspiring racial hatred. He was acquitted by a three-judge panel that found the expression of his opinions to be within the bounds of legitimate free speech.

In *Submission* Houellebecq imagines the France of 2022 when in a multiparty election the three political party finalists are the Front National (extreme right nativists), the Socialists, and the French Muslim Brotherhood. In the run-off election the Front National and the Brotherhood are essentially tied, and the Socialists decide to form a collation with the Brotherhood, preferring Muslims to their traditional nemeses. Hence France gains a Muslim president and prime minister, and overnight France becomes a Muslim country. Although there are initial protests, rioting, and talk of a drift toward civil war, France quickly and fairly smoothly accepts Islam.

Except for the fate of women, the form of Islam adopted by the country is arguably benign. Unemployment is halved by eliminating women from the workplace. The budget of the national government is balanced by cutting educational costs. Jews immigrate to Israel. The European Union is reformulated as a modern Roman Empire, shifting southward to be centered around the Mediterranean as was the original Roman Empire. The new states to be included are Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, and Turkey. France, having the strongest military and economy in this new formulation, is propelled to a position of global power that revivals that of the United States.

Although the novel is written as political satire in the tradition of Jonathan Swift and George Orwell, it has a strong undercurrent of irony. Once Islam is in place, the nativist political right does not find it unpalatable. A Muslim intellectual in the book opines, "When it came to rejecting atheism and humanism, or the necessary submission of women, or the return to patriarchy, they were fighting exactly the same fight." Nativists could also be expected to embrace the return to "family values" and the renewed *gloire* of France in the reformed European Union. Liberals, who are largely in denial about the threat of Islam, are paralyzed and silenced by their own oppressive multiculturalism, and the few who warn of the calamity to come are dismissed as Cassandras – the ancient Greek prophet who was cursed to predict accurately a dire future but not to be believed. The greatest irony of the book, however, is that that Islam is not the target of Houellebecq's satir-

ical bolts. Although Houellebecq is known to detest Islam and has been stigmatized as an Islamophobe, he presents Islam in his novel in its most moderate and reasonable form. Hence, the object at the center of this novel's cross hairs is not Islam but a feckless French elite.

The protagonist, François, is a forty-four-year-old literature professor at the Sorbonne who admits that he "never felt the slightest vocation for teaching" and begins every academic year by searching for a new girlfriend from among his students. His interior dialogue is largely about his physical ailments and his sex life – he indulges in smutty sex that will certainly be unsettling to many readers. François represents an intellectual elite that is morally and spiritually adrift. When the Sorbonne is transformed into the Islamic University of Paris, he and others like him are easily bought off with pensions. Upon losing his job, François's most acute worry is that he will no longer have access to female students. Towards the end of the story, he is close to suicide because he has nothing left for which to live – not himself, humanity, or even a wife and family. He is a painfully isolated and pathetic figure.

François specializes in the study of J. K. Huysmans, a fin-desiècle French novelist who made the transition from the Decadent Movement to Roman Catholicism. Huysmans had rejected Catholicism in his youth but was profoundly pessimistic about modern life. His novels are autobiographical, tracking his spiritual progress until he reconverts to Catholicism. Hollellebecq uses Huysmans as a foil for his protagonist who, like his nineteenth-century precursor, comes to reject the humanism of the Enlightenment as the basis for modern life yet cannot easily accept a return to religion.

In his desire to find meaning in life, François journeys to the pilgrimage church of Notre Dame in Rocamadour to view the Black Madonna. He is genuinely moved but still cannot embrace Catholicism. Eventually, he acquiesces to the new religious reality in France, becoming a Muslim. This allows him to regain his position as a professor at the Sorbonne and, he is promised, to have as many as three wives. The novel ends with François's re-

alization that his "intellectual life was finished" but that life still had more to offer him.

Where is Christianity in this satire? Hollellebecq is entirely dismissive of the Church. He has a Muslim intellectual explain, "Without Christianity, the European nations had become bodies without souls – zombies." Yet "atheist humanism," he believes, is incapable of being the foundation of a society. The Church, however, has long since relinquished its place as an authentic and credible alternative to secularism. "Thanks to the simpering seductions and the lewd enticement of the progressives, the Church had lost its ability to oppose moral decadence, to renounce homosexual marriage, abortion rights, and women in the workplace."

Houellebecq's satire, it might be argued, is dissatisfying for a number of reasons. To begin with, it is plainly overwrought: France's intellectual elite would not go down with the spiritless whimper that the author imagines. Intellectuals, like any other group, can at times be craven crowds, but surely some at least could be expected to render a noble defiance. Also, the novel is undoubtedly poor political prophesy as the French public has already shown itself to be capable, at least in some instances, of resisting the inroads of Islam. Finally, the novel has a certain cringe-factor in its protagonist's endless, low-minded, sexual prattle and desultory personal life. *Submission*, however, would be unfairly impugned on these grounds.

Satire, after all, tends to be overwrought by its very nature: it extrapolates from certain current trends, while ignoring others, in order to predict a scary future. Hence, it is not prophesy but political commentary. Intellectuals, it is true, are treated unfairly and shown no quarter in this novel, but the author seems to feel, rightly I think, that they need to be reminded from time to time – and in no uncertain terms – that their vocation calls for more than pedantic curiosity and erudite glosses. In effect, they need to take threats to cherished values seriously – to take ideas seriously. François recognizes this in the end: "I was more or less resigned and apathetic myself. I'd been wrong." And as for the protagonist's lasciviousness, one is tempted to see here a projection of the author's own predilections rather than social commentary.

Houellebecq has given his readers a withering critique of the modern French intellectual elite and one possible – if not probable – direction that French society and perhaps European society, too, may take in the not-too-distant future. If his novel at times makes the reader uncomfortable, resentful, and even angry, then perhaps this contentious author has simply succeeded in earning the doleful responses that naturally accrue to any effective satirist.