

Introduction

Why this reading of the meanings and metaphors of the Gospel?¹

According to the statistics of the Bible Society, the Bible has been translated into more than 2800 languages and dialects across the world, but there are still some languages and dialects of some tribes that have not had the Bible translated yet. As for the Arabic language, among modern Bible translations there are no less than ten different translations, starting with the Van Dyck, which is a translation done by an American missionary in Beirut with the help of Butrus Bustani, which was completed in 1860. It is considered the first complete translation of the Holy Scriptures (the Torah, the Psalms, the other books of the prophets and the Gospel) in modern times, and it has been adopted by all Arabic-speaking churches, such as the Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical churches, until the interpretive translation and the Injeel ash-Sharif came to light, among others. Each one of these translations had different goals, so the Bible Society ecumenical translation had the goal of lightening the classical language of the Van Dyck, in other words modernizing the translation and making it contemporary without losing the meaning or remaining faithful to the Arabic language. The interpretive translation (also known as the Arabic Living Bible) had the goal of rephrasing the Gospel in a simple way and clarifying the vocabulary, even if the translator were forced to add a word here or there from himself, or the addition of prepositions or putting exclamation marks or question marks or numbering, etc., so that the Gospel would explain itself by itself. The translation known as the Sharif Bible was written in a way closer to the Arab reader, since in reading history we find that when Christian scholars began to translate the Gospel in the ninth century into Arabic, the language that had become the official language of Egypt and Syria at that time, they translated the Bible into the language that Egyptians and Syrians learned from Arabs coming from the Arabian Peninsula, a language that was spoken by all with their different religions. For this reason they wrote in a completely natural way at the beginning of the Gospel: "In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate -The Noble Gospel according to the evangelist Matthew". At that time Christ and the Christian used the same vocabulary, but with time and for many reasons, political (the Crusades for

¹ This is an English translation of an article from "The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ," 2nd edition, published in Arabic. Copyright ©2016 Al Kalima. This article is covered by the following Creative Commons License: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). The full license can be found here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>

example) and economic and social, which drove Christians into their churches and monasteries in self absorption and introversion, which increased the gulf between the sons of the one nation. So it happened that each side had a kind of language that differed from the other, so that the word "noble" for example, was characteristic of Islam, where this title was given to any Christian person converting to Islam, and so this term was rejected by Christian society. In the same way the greeting of Islam "peace be upon you" which was originally a greeting of the Lord Christ, which became exclusively used by Muslims, which Christians had a different greeting "good day". And so little by little the Christians had a language that was not understood except by those brought up in the church, even though this language is Arabic and its vocabulary is understandable, except that the words have a very different significance. So for example, if a Muslim enters a church and hears a Christian sermon on "na'ama" (grace), he will think according to his own understanding that the word is referring to bread or other kinds of material blessings, which the preacher is speaking about the favor of Christ the Savior from sins, just as the word "khalaas" (salvation) only means for a Muslim the end of a problem or situation or escape from some difficulty, with no connection to spiritual issues or with a relationship to God. For this reason many Christian terms have disappeared from Muslim publications, just as Muslim terminology has disappeared from Christian writings and publications, for example "In the name of God the Merciful the Compassionate," "Noble," and so on. For this reason the translators of the Sharif Bible tried to change some of the vocabulary of the Gospel so that it would be easy to read for Arabic speakers who do not know Christian jargon. Here we come to an important question: What does this reading you hold in your hands add, dear reader, to the many translations that have preceded it?

First: This translation attempts to communicate the meaning behind the words.

As we all know, thought is spirit and a word is the embodiment of a thought, of this spirit. An idea is transformed by means of words into particular letters and useful sentences, so the idea is clarified, made evident and distinguished by means of the words that express it, but it also become solidified when it is put into words, so it is no longer an idea in its broadest sense but is limited. This is where the role of meaning and significance comes in with this reading, since this reading does not attempt to solidify the idea in words, but it gives the words space and flexibility so as to allow the reader to understand that the written sentence is not the end of the story, but rather we present the meaning that is hidden behind the words, without being the final word.

Second: This reading attempts to make this meaning contemporary.

After this reading reaches the meaning behind the words, it must frame the words in relation to a particular culture and place and time, since they are not coming from a place separate from time and are not supercultural, but the reading serves as a bridge joining what was written more than two thousand years ago and today's culture and daily events. So a theologian said that he grasped the Gospel in his right hand and the daily newspaper in his left, trying to answer the contemporary questions posed in the newspaper by means of the Bible. It is not possible to do so except by means of the bridge that joins the two of them together, namely, the theologian himself. In the same way those behind this reading have tried to be the bridge between the Gospel written two thousand years ago and today's modern culture.

Three: This reading attempts to present the cultural background of the Noble Gospel.

Based upon the discoveries of scholars of linguistics and sociology, it has been found necessary to provide some cultural information that was available to Christ's audience, information which is not known to many today. For this reason we have added a number of footnotes and introductions for each book of the New Testament, as well as a number of articles that deal with topics of importance to readers of this reading.

Four: This reading attempts to use vocabulary understood by all, avoiding unnaturalness.

This reading has attempted to be a neutral reading, meaning that Arabic speakers can receive it without feeling it to be strange, reading what is their everyday language without feeling targeted for any particular reason.

Dear reader, we hope you enjoy perusing this unique reading, a reading different from other translations of the Holy Bible, and we need to hear your opinions and impressions.