

Introduction

Do only advise you of one [thing] - that you stand for Allah, [seeking truth] in pairs and individually, and then give thought.

— Qur'an, 34:46

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

— John 8:32 (New Testament)

Almost two decades ago, in my third year at the university, I found myself suddenly acquiring an interest in the field of Biblical studies. As far as can I remember, it all started with a book, in Arabic, called “*The Truth Revealed*,” which I found one day as I was digging in an Islamic library looking for books on comparative Religion. As I came across a small shelf which only had a few books on it, most of which were thin tomes, I checked the titles and then chose one volume. I then went to the back of the library, where I had been sitting between two isles full of Islamic references. When I started reading, I was astonished; and the more I flipped the book’s pages, the more my admiration of that wonderful book grew. Thus, it was that, “*The Truth Revealed*” served as the catalyst which led me to pursue studies about Christianity, and to consequently publish books on different Biblical issues.

What I most admired in the book was the chapter on the evidence of the corruption of the New Testament. The author pointed out dozens of examples where sentences or words of the text were added or deleted by later scribes. He reinforced his point of view with statements made by Christian scholars who acknowledged the impure state of the New Testament text. “*The Truth Revealed*” was an unprecedented study in the Muslim world.

From the time I read that book, I became more and more interested in studying the New Testament, especially the issue of text distortion. I have read almost all the serious Islamic books on this subject in Arabic, French, and English. After a while my research, made me feel an urgent need to analyze more and more works by non-Muslim authors and to go deeper in order to see things from a closer perspective.

Despite the fact that my admiration of “*The Truth Revealed*” did not fade away, my immersion in studying scholarly books and articles published in academic journal brought me to a shocking realization: that, Muslims, in their works, were trying hard to prove to Christian scholars something that these scholars themselves, did not deny, as if trying to prove to these scholars, liberals, conservatives and even apologists, that Muslim scholars were similar to them in thought. Realizing this, I wanted to shout out to my fellow Muslim scholars that it was past time for us to update our understanding of various Christian issues, such as the corruption of the scriptures. Unfortunately, I did not have a platform where I could make my urgent call, not only because I was not the head of an influential official institution, but, essentially, because there was no such platform in the Islamic world, or outside of it.

Muslims who are interested in interfaith dialogue with Christians for the purpose of guiding Christians to the way of salvation, need to know that the revolution of information and the long history of the constant development of methodologies and tools in religious studies in the West have created new understandings of Christianity markedly different from the old Middle-Age ones, even in the most conservative of circles.

I feel that the age-old Islamic challenge to prove that Christian Holy Scriptures are mired in corruption needs to be reconsidered, not, because it has failed to prove this fact, but, on the contrary, because, today, the distortion of the Christian texts is a universally acknowledged fact.

Stiff-necked apologists, such as Keith Small, *accuse* Muslims of claiming that all Christians believe that their Holy Books were perfectly preserved!¹ And Daniel B. Wallace answers Bart Ehrman by a shocking statement: “I have never said in our debates that we are absolutely certain of the wording of the text of the New Testament. So, I would agree with him that “we really don’t have any way to know for sure.”!²

The challenge concerning the preservation of the text of the New Testament changed dramatically from the Middle-Ages to the present day.

1 See Keith E. Small, *Holy Books Have a History*, Textual Histories of the New Testament and the Qur’ān, Avant Ministries, 2010, p.ix

2 Daniel B. Wallace, *The Bart Ehrman Blog and the Reliability of the New Testament Text*, (<http://danielbwallace.com/2012/05/01/the-bart-ehrman-blog-and-the-reliability-of-the-new-testament-text/>)

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Today, we no longer discuss whether or not it is accurate to mention that Christians distorted their holy books, rather, the challenge is whether Christians have restored their books after they were distorted. Or, in other words, the pertinent question now, is, “Can we really reconstruct the lost Original Text of the New Testament?”

The term “lost” preceding “original text” is not related to the loss of the virtual books written by the authors. Nor does it mean that the text we have today is devoid of any similarity with the authentic one. We only mean that “lost” indicates that we have lost confidence and certitude that any passage in the New Testament is truly authentic.

Those who believe that the text of the New Testament is now considered lost, think that the text printed and found today in bookstores and libraries or anywhere else includes some unauthentic or dubious clauses most probably added by later scribes as proven through the scientific research of the oldest and best manuscripts and other changes, the insertion of which, cannot be proved, in the copies produced throughout the history of the transmission of the New Testament. The first genre is an obviously bogus text, while the second one, the authenticity of which countless Christians defend, is proof that there is, indeed, a “lost” original, because the Christian tradition has failed to offer rock solid proof of its originality. It is, undoubtedly an old, nay, a very old text, but there is no evidence to back up the claim that it was penned by the original authors. So, the claim that I make herewith is that we have lost that text because we cannot palpably see the fingerprint of the “original earliest scribe.”

Therefore, the challenge is no longer to prove the existence of the fingerprint of unfaithful scribes, rather it is to prove the existence of the fingerprint of the original authors. We all, Muslims and Christians, can see the apparent marks of the unreliable scribes, but we debate those of the composers.

If the conclusion is reached that the original text is unrecoverable, this means that Bibliocentric believers can no longer put their faith in the so-called *Word of God* as upheld by the Church, or in the view of Jesus, as the crucified savior, as portrayed in Church scriptures.

This is the conclusion that I will show in this book.

Conversely, the authenticity of the Qur’ānic text is being challenged today from different angles. The historical narrations and the extant manuscripts are the main sources of the views that argue for the corruption of

the text. To be fair with the Christian apologists' camp, I did not work on a distinct subjective collection of Christian objections, rather I preferred quoting the objections of a well respected Christian scholar in Christian - missionary and academic- circles who discusses the most updated studies made, whose ignoble purpose appears only to prove that the Qur'ānic text has been distorted and that the history of the New Testament books, as detailed in a PhD dissertation made by the same author, is superior. This author is considered today, the most important scholar in this field, even though his studies were published only a few years ago.

The present book is not written by a *neutral* author, but, rather, by an *objective* researcher. A neutral author does not incline to any particular view and does not strive to prove a certain theory. An objective researcher, however, is interested in guiding his human fellows to enlightenment and truth. I do not hide my religious affiliation, but I have committed myself to portraying the factual situation of the history of the Christian and Muslim scriptures, and to present the Christian arguments for the existence of the original text of the New Testament as displayed by the apologists or other scholars who share, with them, the same claim. Moreover, I have not used any argument or any statement from the Muslim camp in the first half of the book, when discussing what is an evident loss of the words of the authors of the New Testament. The proof of my objectivity is that, when I discuss the history of the Qur'anic text, I only use arguments accepted by the majority of both Muslim and non-Muslim academic scholars.

In no way is it my intention to merely excite, in the manner of recent popular books that declare that Jesus lived in France, travelled to India, or was a womanizer. This book is meant to research a paramount issue that needs to be discussed outside of theological institutes as well as inside of them, to speak to ordinary people and allow the "believer" to cast a more discerning eye on the "reality" of his belief.

Despite the clear focus of the topic, it is a challenge to reach its entire target audience, because this audience consists of both scholars and lay readers. Some previous textual knowledge is required in order to clearly understand the details and analyze the subject matter. To assist in reaching all members of my audience, I have made my best attempt to make unpopular and unfamiliar information easy to grasp. Regardless of the reader's background, the following points are vital signposts that will help him or her to better comprehend the main themes, methods, and conclusions in this book.

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✓ This book is not intended to offend church members, but rather to open the possibility of another way of thinking. It discusses the authenticity of the texts of the New Testament only through evidence agreed upon by the majority of scholars, whatever their affiliation may be.

✓ Since this book refers to the New Testament's "original text," definitions thereof will be based on latest studies in textual criticism (the science that aims to remove the transcription errors occurring in the texts of manuscripts³).

✓ The main premise of this book is that the original copy of the New Testament has disappeared. This premise has been commonly agreed upon. In addition, scholars who believe that it is possible to reconstruct the original text depend on three tools to accomplish the task:

1. The Greek manuscripts (handwritten documents) of the New Testament
2. The various versions of the New Testament
3. The citations of the Fathers of the Church.

They then proceed to recompose the original text based on the pre-adopted textual criticism method. My primary disagreement with these scholars is not about the aforementioned method, but with the *results* which they *may* reach.

✓ Since the book will discuss the issue of the original text, the modern translation will not be discussed, only the Greek text. I have included English translations for every Greek text to facilitate the reader's understanding.

✓ Quotations from the New Testament will be from the famous traditional version, the King James Version, since this critical study is mainly directed to conservative readers.

✓ To prevent any accusations that the author is subjective and relying on weak theories, many authorities in the discipline of textual criticism will be quoted. Most of these authorities are respected scholars, even by conservative theological seminary standards.

³ This is a "basic" definition of the term. The debate about identifying the goals of this discipline will be discussed later.