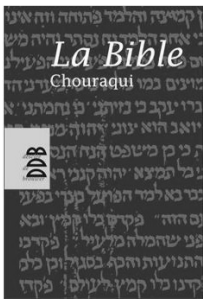

The Chouraqui Bible

A Unique Resource for Christians to Appreciate the Fundamental Jewishness of Jesus and of the New Testament

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Chouraqui's upbringing in a multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious environment and its impact on his life and ideas: "A Man In Three Worlds"

His perception of the shortcomings of the prayer and Bible translations he had grown up with – he was convinced that there was much more in the Hebrew than many translators brought out, and that he could probably do better – his early work as a translator of Biblical and religious texts in the 1950s

After his extensive political career, embarking in the early 1970s on what would become the Chouraqui Bible (La Bible Chouraqui)

For my studies, I compared Chouraqui's translation with 8 other mainstream French translations

The fundamental question of "What makes THIS translation different from all OTHER translations?" Where, and how, did Chouraqui translate differently from those who came before him? Vive la difference!

For Chouraqui, it was important that his translation highlight the fundamental Jewishness of Jesus and the Gospels, both for Christians and for Jews

Cutting through centuries of Jewish and Christian "orthodox" interpretations, to get at the "unvarnished" original meanings of words … which might be very different from the "institutional" versions that smoothed other difficult spots in the text

The willingness to coin new words in French, where necessary, to capture Biblical ideas more accurately – this approach made him the object of many criticisms by more traditional translators – the accusation that he was created a "fran-breu" (French/Hebrew hybrid) that was unrecognizable

Chouraqui's attempt to restore Hebraic/Semitic proper names to people and places

> Yeshua' instead of Jesus – the difference this makes, and the importance of grasping the linguistic roots of Jesus' original name, in order to appreciate references to "saving" throughout the Gospels
>
> Beit-Lechem (vs. Bethlehem); Shomron (vs. Samaria); Ha-Galil (vs. Galilee), etc.

Retroversion: the attempt to speculate about Semitic concepts that might lie behind our present Greek text

Father John Meier, "The Present State of the 'Third Quest' for the Historical Jesus: Loss and Gain," in *Biblica* Vol. 80, No. 4 (1999), pp. 459-487, quoting page 486:

> … I would suggest that one definite gain [from the search for the historical Jesus] that must be incorporated is … the true and thorough Jewishness of Jesus. From the Council of Chalcedon onwards, the touchstone of genuine Christian faith in Christ has been the formula "truly divine and truly human". Yet it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that, in defense of the "truly divine," the "truly human" has sometimes been obscured or swallowed up …
> What the third quest [for the historical Jesus] can supply as an aid to regaining the Chalcedonian balance is the [steady undercurrent] of "truly Jewish" as the concrete, historical expression and underpinning of the theological "truly human" … **<u>When the Word became flesh, the Word did not</u>**

> **simply take on an all-purpose, generic, one-size-fits-all human nature … The Word became truly flesh insofar as the Word became truly Jewish. No true Jewishness, no true humanity** … I think that a proper understanding of the Chalcedonian formula, illuminated by the third quest, necessarily leads to a ringing affirmation of the Jewishness of the flesh the Word assumed. Even if the third quest has no other impact on contemporary Christology, the emphatic reaffirmation of the Jewishness of Jesus will make the whole enterprise worthwhile. Something lasting will have been gained.

Chouraqui often deliberately avoided terms that he felt had become overly "sanctified" by religious authorities—especially if he felt there were *other* possible—even necessary—layers of meaning that were being suppressed. He used the French verb *décaper* to describe what he was trying to do—something like "sanding down" a piece of furniture, to get back to the original wood. Or he would speak of the *"dépoussiérage du vocabulaire"*—the "dusting-off" of vocabulary

> "Angels" or "Messengers"?
>
> "Apostles" or "Envoys/Ambassadors"?

Offering informed speculation as to cases where a particular Semitic expression might underlie our existing Greek—and might cast a particular colouring on how we understand and interpret it

> "Peace be with you!" vs. "Shalom!"
>
> "Teacher" vs. "Rabbi"

Chouraqui's invention of new French words to capture his understanding of the Hebrew or make a point

> *"Messier"* = "To messiah someone/something," instead of "anoint"
>
> Chouraqui's controversial translation of the Beatitudes: instead of "Blessed are" or "Happy are," Chouraqui argues that the underlying Hebrew phrasing
> *"En marche!"* – "Rise up!" "Forward!" or "Let's get going!"
> "Jesus did not say *makarioi* [Grk: Happy/ Blessed], but *ashrei,* an exclamation … from the root *ashar* which implies, not the idea of a vague and essentially hedonistic happiness, but the idea of uprightness, *yashar*—the uprightness of the person who is walking on a path clear of obstacles —the path that leads toward Adonai [God]" … a term of encouragement for the downtrodden!

His unwillingness as a translator to sweep awkward theological or linguistic questions under the rug, and to allow adults to grapple with possible explanations for themselves

> The most common Hebrew term for God: *Elohim* … but it seems to have a *masculine plural ending!* (For Chouraqui: Elohim**s**)
>
> The Hebrew term of Jerusalem: *Yerushalayim* …but it seems to have a *dual* ending! (For Chouraqui: Yeroushalayim**s**)

His effort to reproduce certain aspects of Semitic style that seem to shine through in our Greek text, but which translators have often glossed over to allow for smoother vernacular translations

> "cognate" forms—where verbs and nouns from the same linguistic "family" are used in close proximity, to amplify or emphasize meaning (but often not repeated in French or English, for stylistic reasons)

Chouraqui's Bible is admittedly controversial, and not everyone's cup of tea … Chouraqui definitely has the ability to make us stumble, in a good way … to stop and pay attention to a text that we perhaps assumed we have already understood just fine … to open our eyes to new and enriching possibilities … to rediscover its mystery, ambiguity and playfulness

Even today, Chouraqui's life and work model for us a different way of engaging across the barriers of difference, and of promoting reconciliation, even after centuries of mistrust, hostility and violence