

## The Dangers of Muslim Insider Movements and Translations With Dr. Ant Greenham

00:00:00:02 - 00:00:30:19

Dr. Ant Greenham

The missionary who wrote that particular chapter are critiquing the chat in Arabic. He pointed out that's what this is telling believers. In that context is that the people on Mount Carmel were actually good Muslims way back then. And really, that's the way you should go too. So it was a serious theological, implication.

00:00:30:21 - 00:00:57:15

Alex Kocman

Greetings and welcome to the Missions Podcast, the show that explores your hard questions on missions, theology, and practice to help goers think and thinkers go. I'm Alex Kocman, Director of Communications and Engagement with ABWE. We are joined once again by Scott Dunford, pastor of Western Hills Church in San Mateo, California. So glad that you've joined us, whether you're listening in your favorite podcast app or on YouTube, but however you've chosen to join the show.

00:00:57:18 - 00:01:27:21

Alex Kocman

Don't forget to leave a positive rating and review, especially if you're a podcast listener that will help other people discover this content. It's July, which here at ABWE, the Mission Organization, the parent organization that we're a part of, that's our Christmas in July. July is when we have our church planting training, EMC happening. We've got 35 new missionary candidates coming next week, and we always look forward to meeting, several of you who are coming to join a and take next steps in the Great Commission.

00:01:28:07 - 00:02:08:02

Alex Kocman

Some of you, because of what you've heard here on the show. So we're so thankful for each and every one of you. Scott, getting into today's topic just a little bit. We want to get into the theological weeds. This recurring theme that we've had on this show is how do we contextualize in a healthy way? We all recognize that we have to do work in order to bring the timeless, eternal, transcultural truths of Scripture into a locality, a language, a cultural context in a way where it lands, where it sticks, where it makes sense not to remove the offensiveness of the gospel that's always baked in.

00:02:08:04 - 00:02:32:22

Alex Kocman

That's just something that we have to wrestle with. This as Christians. But in order for unbelievers to understand the message and make a choice about whether or not to receive Christ, one of the things that we've talked about a time or two has been this idea of insider movements, this idea of those who identify, perhaps as Christian in some way, but they choose to remain Muslim in other ways.

00:02:33:00 - 00:02:54:16

Alex Kocman

And we have deep, deep concerns about that approach. We don't think that contextualization should mean compromise. We think Christ is exclusive, and we believe that if one is to follow Christ, one has to follow Christ alone and trust in him alone. And we think that that's critically important. But, you know, Scott, this idea of insider movements, it's not just about how you identify.

00:02:54:18 - 00:03:06:00

Alex Kocman

It's not just about whether you worship in a church on Sundays or visit a mosque on Fridays. It's also about the way that we approach our Bibles and the way that we translate Scripture itself. Right?

00:03:06:02 - 00:03:30:00

Scott Dunford

Certainly in the discussion of like, how can we make, the scriptures accessible in another language is one thing. It's another thing to say, how can we remove everything that's offensive to someone of another religion, maybe even a competing religion with Christianity, and remove all those things to help someone, be able to, accept Christ without any barriers, the barrier being maybe Christ himself.

00:03:30:02 - 00:03:56:10

Scott Dunford

And, so we this is something that obviously gets technical and we want someone to come in and help us, guide us through this discussion as to what's going on with insider Bible translations, but also how to approach, this whole topic. Because, as probably almost everyone has as notice on the news lately, there's been a whole lot of movement within the Roman Catholic Church, within the Orthodox tradition, about how do we even refer to Muslims, and Muslims worship the same God.

00:03:56:10 - 00:04:25:03

Scott Dunford

And all of those kind of questions come up and certainly are relevant to this discussion of insider Bible translations. And so, we reached out to an expert on this topic, retired professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Greenham. And we are so welcome. So happy to welcome you. You're a you're, a native of, South Africa, but I've been in the United States for a long time, have been teaching on Islamic studies for a long time at southeastern.

00:04:25:05 - 00:04:29:12

Scott Dunford

And we're excited to have you, join our show today. Where are you calling in from today?

00:04:29:13 - 00:04:36:09

Dr. Ant Greenham

Well, thank you so much for having me on the show. I appreciate the opportunity. I am calling in from Raleigh, North Carolina.

00:04:36:11 - 00:04:42:06

Scott Dunford

So it's much hotter there than where it is here in California, but probably, well, it's probably hotter than South Africa as well.

00:04:42:09 - 00:05:01:08

Dr. Ant Greenham

Rating high 90s today and yes, also a lot hotter than South Africa. I often tell people in South Africa the winters are warmer and the summers are cooler, but we're not talking about whether we're talking about something foreign far more important. So any hand back to you for, the next thing.

00:05:01:11 - 00:05:22:17

Scott Dunford

So, so help us understand this idea of a Muslim Bible translation. I think a lot of people, when they think of a translation, they think of just going to the Hebrew or the Greek or the Aramaic and translating as faithfully as possible into the text of the people group that they're trying to reach. But Muslim insider Bible translations are a little different from that.

00:05:22:17 - 00:05:31:13

Scott Dunford

So what are Muslim insider Bible translations and what distinguishes them from what of traditional translations that we might be aware of?

00:05:31:15 - 00:06:07:18

Dr. Ant Greenham

Let me just back up, if I may, for a minute. And this talk about, two very different approaches in theology. And so one is what I want call the theological approach. The other is the anthropological approach. Now, both of these are important. We want to communicate the truth of God theological to people, anthropological. We need to make sure what the truth is uncompromised, and we need to make sure we making sense to the people we talking to.

00:06:07:20 - 00:06:33:14

Dr. Ant Greenham

Unfortunately, what happens sometimes a lot, of course I circle is that the anthropological side completely overshadows the theological biblical side. And I'm afraid this has been the case with, what we're going to be talking about, which is, was the medium translations. And one other point that ought to make you alluding to what's sometimes called the insider movement.

00:06:33:14 - 00:07:07:04

Dr. Ant Greenham

Earlier, the idea that a person can remain inside a knife only in their culture, but in their religion, and be a follower of Christ at the same time. And that becomes problematic when the religion concerns specifically. Islam in this case is quite frankly, inimical to the essential of the Christianity. And so this is, where we get to the phenomenon of Muslim idiom translations called Amrit for short.

00:07:07:06 - 00:07:48:19

Dr. Ant Greenham

And essentially the idea is you want to, translate the text in a way that will appeal or make sense to a Muslim audience. And at one level, of course, it always must be as intelligible as a as you possibly can make it. But the problem becomes when you are translating the text in a way where, where the visibly or invisibly or deliberately or accidentally, you are actually pandering to Islamic theology.

00:07:48:21 - 00:08:26:17

Dr. Ant Greenham

So perhaps the best example I can give of this is the, what sometimes called the divine, familial terms issue. Basically calling God Father, calling Jesus son. Now, Muslims have a visceral problem with God being father and Jesus being son, because they inevitably and incorrectly, interpret this in a sexual fashion. And so in some ways, they were immediately saying God in some way had sex with Mary in order to produce Jesus.

00:08:26:17 - 00:08:30:16

Dr. Ant Greenham

And so, they will reject that out of hand.

00:08:30:17 - 00:08:45:20

Alex Kocman

And that's and that's, that's the Koran itself that makes that claim as well. Essentially, that's the argument against Christianity, revealing that the author of the Koran really didn't even know what Christians mean by father son, those familial terms that you're describing, right?

00:08:46:00 - 00:09:21:13

Dr. Ant Greenham

Yes. And one of the one of the questions, of course, to me, looking at this whole thing is, what was the what was the basis of Islam? And, and this is a another, another topic, which is, how many we could get bogged down on, but this is very briefly the, the standard Islamic description of a history, what I like to call Islamic tradition, because that way you can be safe and say Islamic tradition says without committing yourself historically, one way or the other, I think is probably incorrect and quite a few areas.

00:09:21:13 - 00:09:55:09

Dr. Ant Greenham

And probably what happened was that the place where Islam emerged was one where you had a theologically aberrant Christianity, a heretical Christianity, and unfortunately, that is exactly what the Koran captures. And, Islamic tradition has, propagated ever since. So back to the a divine familial terms issue, which would be one of the things you said to you with which would carry to rise Muslim idiom translations.

00:09:55:09 - 00:10:47:07

Dr. Ant Greenham

Mitt's is a desire to avoid using, God the Father language or Jesus the Son language. So often the word for them would be substituted with a word like, creator or ruler or lord. And then in turn, the word son could be, substituted for words like beloved or prince or, or chosen or even caliph, which of course is the word Muslims used as followers of Muhammad, and a problem that you have immediately when you start using you in doing this kind of thing is that you are tampering with the raw material, because it's very clear from the, from the texts themselves.

00:10:47:07 - 00:11:14:09

Dr. Ant Greenham

And we talking about the, how some references in the Hebrew, especially all through the Greek New Testament, that God is indeed referred to as father and indeed Jesus is indeed the third to refer to his son. And, Christians came up with the doctrine of the Trinity, 1700 or more years ago based on the testimony of Scripture.

00:11:14:11 - 00:11:52:00

Dr. Ant Greenham

And this is not a simple doctrine, but really, there was no other option given the biblical evidence. Now, it's important for a Christian community to do their own theology using. But the raw material they use must be accurate and authentic if they're going to do theology incorrectly. If you take the key elements of the evidence out of the equation, their chances of coming up with an Orthodox theology are going to be remote.

00:11:52:02 - 00:12:21:00

Dr. Ant Greenham

And so how are you going to come up with a good doctrine of the Trinity if you don't have father son language? And of course, references to the Holy Spirit being, being God as well. There's a quick word on that. And the and the Koran, Jesus is referred to as the Spirit of God. So, there is a confusion that is, involving the Holy Spirit, which isn't often emphasized, but it's also part of the problem.

00:12:21:02 - 00:12:56:10

Dr. Ant Greenham

And coming to, the understanding we have as Christians of who God is one God existing eternally in three persons. So this is one of the problems you have with, with, with Muslim idiom translations. And as I said earlier, it's an anthropological approach. The idea is you want to make the text amenable, appealing, understandable to the Muslim audience, but to the point that you actually pandering to make, Islamic doctrine.

00:12:56:10 - 00:13:17:18

Alex Kocman

We hope you're enjoying this conversation about missions, theology, and practice to help goers think and thinkers go. And you know, that part of the mission of this show is to do exactly that, to take people thinking about the great commissions and how to impact the world and actually help them go. My question is, is that you or is that a loved one, someone that you know?

00:13:17:19 - 00:13:38:08

Alex Kocman

If you're interested in learning what it looks like to take your next steps onto the mission field, even if you're afraid, our team would love to talk with you, to pray with you, not to pressure you into anything but to help you and your sending church discern the Lord's direction in your life. Go to [ab.org](https://ab.org) slash. Send me all one word there.



00:13:38:08 - 00:14:09:23

Alex Kocman

You can connect with our team. So the Lord's putting on your heart that maybe you need to take some of this listening and thinking, and put some shoe leather to your faith. Go to AB Dawgs, send me and connect with our mobilization team today. So let me let me cut in. And I think that's wonderfully helpful. In fact, just the way that you frame that by saying, well, there's an anthropological approach to mis theology versus a theological approach to mis theology, you just summed up the last 7 or 8 years of shows that we've done.

00:14:10:01 - 00:14:36:06

Alex Kocman

We agree, and we're convicted that mis theologically that that missions, excuse me, has to be fundamentally a theological endeavor. So, but, let me play the part of devil's advocate just a bit. What if some were just one were to say, well, you know, you're right. Yes. Muslims need to learn at some point that God is not just ruler and creator, but also father.

00:14:36:08 - 00:15:00:11

Alex Kocman

And at some point they need to learn that Jesus is not just the Messiah or a prophet, but is also the Divine Son. Sure, we agree we're Christians too. But maybe, maybe this person would say, well, and you said yourself that the doctrine of the Trinity, it wasn't completely codified in the understanding of the of the church, ecumenical, for those early centuries of the church, it was being developed in some sense.

00:15:00:11 - 00:15:23:21

Alex Kocman

Now we would say, well, it was the church was always Trinitarian. And technically that's true. But, you know, you said yourself it took some time for them to arrive at that conclusion. Why can't we translate these words in such a way as to not alarm the

sensibilities of Muslims so that they can read, so that they can not trip over these terms, and then they can embrace the gospel.

00:15:23:21 - 00:15:38:12

Alex Kocman

And then as we're discipling them, well, then we can introduce these concepts a little bit later on. What would be your concerns with that type of an approach that wants to affirm orthodoxy, but wants to space things out a bit?

00:15:38:18 - 00:16:10:14

Dr. Ant Greenham

I think the important thing is to, underline integrity here, because very often the kind of, message will be sending as well. We, we didn't want to tell you the truth because, this would have disturbed you. But now, actually, what we believe is, is that God is father, he is son. And, I think one uses the term bait and switch sometimes.

00:16:11:05 - 00:16:34:18

Dr. Ant Greenham

That might be a bit crass in this instance, but essentially, let's take an example of, two neatly dressed young men who will knock on your door and introduce themselves as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints. They're not going to tell you all the doctrines that they believe in, like him becoming God.

00:16:34:18 - 00:17:05:00

Dr. Ant Greenham

And produce seeing children, and eternity and multiple wives and eternity. They're not going to tell you all that stuff until you're part of the organization that once you part of your organization, then you start to discover, all the implications. As Christians, we mustn't do that. Paul and, two Corinthians, he spoke of not presenting the gospel and underhand, deceitful ways.

00:17:05:02 - 00:17:38:13

Dr. Ant Greenham

Now, I agree that, very often the way with the, the words will come across will be, misunderstood by Muslims. And I think the simple answer to that is, to say, well, are you interested in knowing more? This is not the way that it comes across. So one of the, one of the ways I like to talk about, sonship is, for example, is a, there's an Arabic proverb that something goes something like, the son of a duck is a floater.

00:17:38:15 - 00:18:02:01

Dr. Ant Greenham

And, that is the Arabic description of a chip off the old block. No, you know, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. So, basically Arabic, you would use that phrase literally using, the term son. They're not implying that the little guy they're talking about, who's just like his father, is actually some kind of bird.

00:18:02:03 - 00:18:35:05

Dr. Ant Greenham

So, the fact that they can understand in their own language that that the, the divine, but the but the familiar language could be understood in a different way. I think was a pointer that anybody who is, having an intelligent conversation and, is prepared to listen and, has a normal give and take of a, a word of a decent conversation would be, would be prepared to say, well, what do you mean when you, you say what God is father and what God is, son?

00:18:35:07 - 00:19:03:05

Dr. Ant Greenham

Unfortunately, what's often the case is, is just this knee jerk reaction and refusal to listen. But I don't think that Bible translation should now be beholden and, become slaves to the fact that some people refuse to listen. I think we need to be, focused upon accuracy and integrity from the very beginning, but then also seek to, sort of sapling from the very beginning.

00:19:03:07 - 00:19:29:09

Dr. Ant Greenham

I've, I've made a point often and, this talking to Muslims and explaining these things and, say that, this is a misunderstanding but is quite incorrect. And, Muslims are being quite happy to listen to me, but, often this is in the context where some kind of relationship is being established already. So we already in the in a setting where is good give and take, between the parties.

00:19:29:11 - 00:19:46:21

Dr. Ant Greenham

So I would say it's the bottom line here. It's really important, not to give the impression that you're actually deceitfully hiding. Right. Elements of the, the essential truth, only to introduce them later.

00:19:46:23 - 00:20:07:09

Scott Dunford

Well, we've been talking on our show even just recently about the importance of missionaries seeing their role as essentially theological and being theologians themselves. And I wonder how many times I can speak to, you know, some experience of this with, with missionary colleagues, not with our organization, but with others that just simply weren't very well grounded in theology.

00:20:07:09 - 00:20:33:08

Scott Dunford

And so having a having a having a Bible translation that, that doesn't, you know, spark up all of these, controversies and force them to get into the theological depths with their Muslim friends. It's kind of a copout. And I do think that's it's something that is, it's a it's a tragedy, really. So what kind of pushback or feedback do you get from the broader evangelical community?

00:20:33:10 - 00:20:46:12

Scott Dunford

And certainly the mycological community, when you put out ideas like, hey, an over contextualize Bible translation toward Muslims or an insider Bible translation isn't helpful. What kind of response have you gotten?

00:20:46:14 - 00:21:15:00

Dr. Ant Greenham

I'm sorry to have to say this, but the kind of pushback we've had is been largely, silence. As you know, I coauthored the book Farming the Bible, which is specifically focused on, Muslim idiom translations. And one of the things we did when we, solicited various people to write with rocks for us, and we got 20 people to write chapters.

00:21:15:09 - 00:21:57:01

Dr. Ant Greenham

In the end, we did want to have people who were, advocating for, Muslim idiom translations, even though we are vehemently against. And the reason for this is there was a book put out, about ten years ago that was entitled Understanding Insider Movements. And what we weren't happy about with that book was that they presented the story from one side only, which was pro insider movements, whereas there been a lot of, evangelical writing, including by people with the caliber of discourse and, and others who were vehemently against it.

00:21:57:01 - 00:22:31:07

Dr. Ant Greenham

So the question is, how can you use a term understanding when you're not allowing the other side right, to, at least present their view? So we did try to get, people who took a opposing view. We got about four, four writers who did, and they are included in the book. We were hoping to get a lot more, but the, the approach was essentially, people who were having this view were told by their superiors, don't touch this, don't engage.

00:22:31:09 - 00:22:36:19

Scott Dunford

I don't ask you to speculate too much, but why do you think that is? Why do you think they didn't want to engage?

00:22:36:21 - 00:23:05:03

Dr. Ant Greenham

I'm afraid it's a bit of a power thing. You've got this idea that the experts in this whole area are the people on the field, and you don't want churches who are actually the supporters of these organizations to start, getting, getting involved and telling mis geologists or in this case, Bible translators, how to do their work.

00:23:05:05 - 00:23:33:04

Dr. Ant Greenham

Basically, the attitude is we are the experts. We know how to do Bible translation. We understand anthropology, we understand linguistics. You people on the pews, we appreciate you. We are saying to you our support is supporting newsletters, the supporting, requesting newsletters. But we don't want you getting involved in the, I'm a technical practice of the, of the translation.

00:23:33:06 - 00:23:59:22

Dr. Ant Greenham

And so the simple way of doing this is you Skip, have you run a tight ship and you don't allow a discussion on, on the kinds of things that we just been talking about, which were being go out to the Christian public at large. So, I know a number of cases of people who have been threatened to, to have their positions terminated or, or that it has actually happened.

00:24:00:00 - 00:24:18:01

Dr. Ant Greenham

So this has been, this I think is the, the reason behind it. They simply want to avoid the, the kind of discussion that, could cause all kinds of complications, especially from a funding point of view. If it was, rampant in the Christian public at large.

00:24:18:03 - 00:24:43:07

Scott Dunford

So. And help me understand, because I, I worked in a Muslim context, I'm aware of some of these issues. I saw it with my own eyes. But I think if you talk to pastors, in churches that are supporting missionaries, they're shocked when they hear the description of an insider movement. They're shocked when they hear about insider Bible translations that would remove concepts like Jesus being the Son of God.

00:24:43:22 - 00:25:02:21

Scott Dunford

How can you help our listeners understand how prevalent is are these views, how I mean, we know there's more than one Bible translation of Arabic or other, languages that are predominant in, in Muslim contexts. But how predominant is it how widespread are these views and how much are these translations being used?

00:25:02:23 - 00:25:33:17

Dr. Ant Greenham

Yes, this is an important question. What I want to distinguish here is the difference between Bible translations and Bible based products. There was a discussion about 13 years ago. And with came a result of objection the spire, the Presbyterian Church of America and the Assemblies of God. Over divine familial language and the World Evangelical Alliance.

00:25:33:17 - 00:26:10:16

Dr. Ant Greenham

WBA eventually brokered a resolution or resolution, a an agreement whereby translators would use father son language of those who the most appropriate terms available in the local language. That's pacifically refers to translations. Unfortunately, it said nothing about Bible based products. A Bible based product would be, for example, the Jesus from The chosen, the series.

00:26:10:16 - 00:26:53:23

Dr. Ant Greenham

It's been, quite popular like the, children's children material, a child's Bible, Bible storybook. These are all Bible based products. And because it is under no obligation whatsoever to keep to the agreement to include the, the divine familial language in those and, that's is one of the problems. It's highlighted, specifically by one of the chapters in our book where he just points out that, in some ways, there's a bigger problem with Bible based products than there was, and the whole, controversy leading up to the World Evangelical Alliance decision of 13 years ago.

00:26:54:01 - 00:27:29:00

Dr. Ant Greenham

I don't know that answers the question, but, there are some translations in Arabic. Arabic. An example in chatty in Arabic. Chad, a country, landlocked country in West Africa. An example of which is what's telling is you have a situation of the prophets of Baal meeting Elijah on Mount Carmel. And when fire comes down from heaven, the way they translated is not the Lord, he is God the Lord, he is God.

00:27:29:02 - 00:27:57:20

Dr. Ant Greenham

But la la la la is no God but God, which is the first part of the this statement to say. And so the, the Muslim missionary who wrote that particular chapter, critiquing the chat in Arabic, he pointed out. That's what this is telling believers in that context is that the people on Mount Carmel were actually good Muslims way back then.



00:27:57:22 - 00:28:07:12

Dr. Ant Greenham

And really, that's the way you should go too. So it was a serious theological, implication, that Chadian Arabic translation.

00:28:07:18 - 00:28:30:06

Alex Kocman

And that's deeply troubling. And, but in the minute that we have remaining maybe give us just a final warning or an encouragement and I want to pick up this conversation and right where we left it off in our bonus segment for our premium subscribers, I want to get into maybe what the correct path forward is. But I also want to get into some other issues about what we call God.

00:28:30:06 - 00:28:40:11

Alex Kocman

Do we call God Allah or not? If we're ministering among Muslims. So. And, 30s, what would be just one closing encouragement or warning for our listeners?

00:28:40:13 - 00:29:09:07

Dr. Ant Greenham

Basically, you want to focus on the text. The text is here in the original languages. You want to make that text as clear as possible. And the translation, yes, you must contextualize or do context. You contextualize so that the people in that culture understand God's word. Kelly. The bad news about themselves and the good news about what Jesus done and die on the cross for our sins and rising again from the dead.

00:29:09:09 - 00:29:33:07

Alex Kocman

Well, we appreciate that exhortation and we want to pick this up. So if you're not a premium subscriber, there's two ways you can get access. One is in your Apple Podcasts app. You can click on the subscription that is up at the top of your feed for this show, and join for your gift of \$9.99 per month or \$100 per year.

00:29:33:10 - 00:29:55:08

Alex Kocman

Your donation. We will thank you and reward you with access to our premium content. Or you can go to [Missionspodcast.com/premium](https://missionspodcast.com/premium) and also get access to this, in video form, not just in audio form as well. So we hope to see you there. You also get other exclusive benefits like membership in our chat and a exclusive thank you gift just for joining.

00:29:55:12 - 00:30:05:23

Alex Kocman

We'll be rejoined by and for the rest of you, go make disciples of all the nations and learn more about [abwe.org](https://abwe.org). Take care.