

## THE PRESENT CONTEXT & FUTURE CLOUT OF THE GOD-BOOK

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636

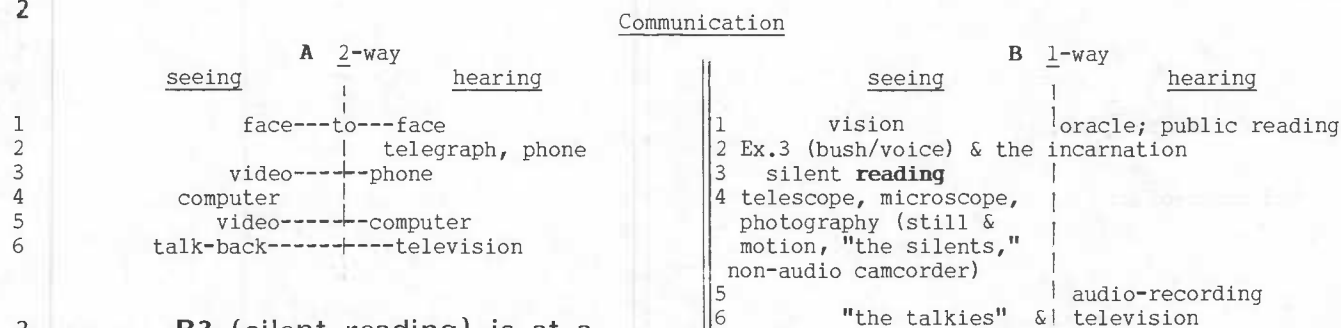
Phone 508.775.8008

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OCCASION: Saturday in Chappaqua NY a business executive, in our "Breakfast for the Hungry Hearted" discussion group, told of getting the right help, by video-Internet, to solve a complex mechanical problem. Learning that a man in Holland was the expert, he accessed him from NY & saw his lips speaking Dutch while our friend was hearing English--the Dutchman, of course, hearing Dutch while seeing the American's lips moving in English. The Dutchman showed (ie, videoed) the machine's problem-area & what was to be done. "I love that Dutchman," said our Hungry Hearted friend, "though I'll probably never meet him."....Surprised? Everybody in the group was, at this latest technology of **communication**. We all are concerned about taking the Bible seriously ourselves & helping others to do so. But given the communication-means competition, how manage this?

1 This passing century has radically altered the communication map. More than most of the East, the West (Judaism/Christianity/Islam) has **focused** on its sacred literature (respectively, OT/NT/Qur'an) as of divine origin & therefore most worthy to be heard/read. While these scriptures themselves variously claim to have in various ways come from God, apologists have by various means tried to heighten the internal claim, with the steady aim to render the particular scripture more impressive than any other literature--intra-communally, to put maximum persuasive pressure on the faithful to LISTEN/READ the holy-book; extra-communally, to compete with other religious communities' claims for their holy-book(s)....For wide-angle viewing now of this Thinksheet's subject, let's look at the **locus** of reading (& thus of Bible-reading) on the map I've constructed for this purpose:

2



3            **B3** (silent reading) is at a ||6            "the talkies" & television  
double disadvantage: (1) It's not 2-way (except in the sense that the thoughtful  
reader is in internal conversation with the author/text [pp.viii-xi,xii-xvii of my  
FLOW...]), & (2) As 1-way, it's only seeing (with, perhaps, the reader's subvocal-  
ized hearing). But note also the double advantage: As 1-way, readers (1) are free  
to give full attention to the text, without the disturbing interacting presence of any  
other party, & (2) can proceed at their own pace, at any point breaking off reading  
for time to think/ponder/meditate/pray....As you think about the eleven other  
communication-modes, what additional dis/advantages does silent reading have?

4 Some further **notes** on the "Communication" map: (1) Under **A**, the multiple hyphens are only to provide separate "seeing"/"hearing" columns: so read "face-to-face," "video-phone," "video-computer," & "talk-back television."....(2) **B1**: Our senses, esp. seeing & hearing, are media of super/natural communication. God-stories, narratives of what the devotee understands to be experiences of the divine, often include both visions & auditions, but more often either one or the other (thus seeing & hearing are here separated). The yearning for verbal divine guidance drives both the seeking out of oracles (in addition to nonverbal modes of divination) & the public listening to the reading of sacred writings (here "public reading," in contrast to [below] "silent reading")....**B2**: Moses looked (at the burning/not-burning-up bush) & listened (to the Voice from within it). NT parallel: Jesus' incarnation is a unique instance of the seeing/hearing combination in revelation....**B6**: Both are (1) both seeing & hearing, & (2) passive....**B3**: Think about the Third Party, the Holy Spirit, in your silent reading of Scripture (a doctrine especially well developed in Reformed [Calvinist] theology).

5                   Awe being an open-to-the-holy feeling/attitude, sacred scriptures are buttressed by **awe-inspiring stories/stipulations**. Here, I'll limit myself to the West:

**Old Testament** The Sinai (torah-giving) event (Ex.20.22: "You have seen for yourselves that I spoke with you from heaven"; 24.12: God-written "tablets of stone"--+ 31.18["written with the finger of God"];34.1 [God to write also the second set];Deut.4.13,9.9): God spoke & wrote! This is the purest & supreme sanction for considering a body of literature sacred (in both senses: inviolable, & most worthy of attention). If we think of the sections of the Hebrew OT as planets at three distances from the Sun, thus each successive planet of less light & warmth, "Moses" (Torah in narrow sense, Pentateuch) is closest; then "The Prophets" (Neviim); finally "The Writings" (Kethuvim). And of course, on my analogy, further Jewish literature is accorded decreasing light/warmth.

This divine-sanctional "word-of-God" respect for the three planets is ritualized in the production, use, & disposal of synagogue scrolls. Mystical Judaism has the wonderful, beautiful belief that when a worn-out scroll is burned, the letters themselves are not burned: they fly up to heaven. Then, too, there are stories of how the scribes, making new scrolls, are preserved from copying errors--the message being that the text is pure, has integrity, so can be trusted letter after letter. (The reality is quite different: thousands of little puzzles, which however don't affect the Vision & Message.)

This sacral concern for purity applies even to the 3rd c. BC/BCE translation of the three planets into Greek, viz. the Septuagint (LXX, "The Seventy"). The Letter of Aristeas says that each of the 70, working separately from the others, produced--miraculously!--an identical translation. Message: You can trust the LXX (& accept no substitutes in Greek [or any other language]).

Conclusion: OT (Hebrew-Aramaic & LXX) is divine in origin, authentic in construction, & pure (has documentary integrity) in text. It's God's word, to be **obeyed** as content & **trusted** as medium....(The book-shy, eg African-Americans, are therefore economically-socially-politically weak: the book-friendly, eg Jews, are correspondingly strong. Farrakhan's Jew-hate is evil & understandable. Oral lore is the basis of, but can't compete with, written lore [sacred literature]. The [black] Nation of Islam has, in the Qur'an, a written lore that distances Farrakhan both from Jews & from black-&-white Christians: Qur'anic power!)

6                   **Qur'an** (I'm leaving the NT till last, though it was written 6 cs. earlier.) Christianity inherited from Judaism a high view of sacred literature & its purity, & Islam inherited both from both. With intensification: The angel Gabriel forced Muhammad to take dictation, writing the revelations which were to become the Qur'an. The legend that the devil slipped in a bit here & there became screaming headlines when Salman Rushdie's THE SATANIC VERSES resulted in Khomeini's fatwa (death sentence) against him for defaming the purity of the Qur'anic text (which he did) & insulting the Prophets' wives (which he didn't). The negative way to state purity is inerrancy: no impurities (by addition, distortion, or subtraction) in the text. The upside of this dogma is that, by exalting the text to the level of divine perfection, it renders the text as impressive, & thus as powerful, as possible. The downside is bibliolatry (the virtual worship of the text), dishonesty (the victimizing of truth, since text must be defended against fact at points where text is not errorless & content is not true), and cultural strangulation (the infanticide of emergent knowledge & perspectives).

7                   **New Testament** Among Christians, the infallibilists (believing positively that the Bible doesn't fail to convey God's word) are like Jews, & the inerrantists are like orthodox Muslims. From age 16 to age 19, I was an inerrantist & experienced all the upsides & downsides of that position until my prag-ma (experience of consequences) ran over my dog-ma & I became free from, as I was free through-in-with, the Bible (chap.35 of my FLOW...). Inerrantists support their view by a questionable leap from the inspiration of "all [or, "every"] scripture" to perfection (2Tim.3.16) & by an application to the whole canon of the (apocalypse-stylized) curses ending the Bible's last book (22.18-19). I suggest they apply to themselves the doctrine that the promise both precedes & succeeds the law (Gal.3.15-18), & the Spirit super-venes over the letter (2Cor.3.6; cp.Ro.7.6, 2.27-29).