

PROJECT SUNRISE

by David Owen

Project Sunrise is an attempt to move beyond the segregating tradition of ecclesiastical styled Bible translations in the Arab world. Through the centuries of Christian-Muslim encounter, we have presented to our Muslim friends a translation of Holy Scripture that has stubbornly circumvented the rich style of religious language found in Islamic literature. These Bible translations have carefully avoided virtually all Islamic theological terminology and have employed an artificial style of Arabic that has been either fully colloquial, if that was the intended style, nor literary if that was their goal. The result has been a long tradition of colorless, ecclesiastical Bibles, theologically sterilized from Islamic influence which was prejudicedly assumed by the Church to be corrosive and unfit as a vehicle for Biblical meaning. All this for the sake of "faithfulness to the original" and the "purity of the Gospel."

There has always been a trickle of Muslims who have come to discover the living Messiah through ecclesiastical translations. No one can deny this fact. Neither can we deny that this translation style has developed into a unique and self-justifying body of Arabic-Christian literature that has been appropriate for internal use among the various Arab-Christian communities in the Middle East. But where does this leave the Muslim? Have we not left him to flounder through a sea of language that to him is both unfamiliar and unexpressive in order to find the Pearl of great price? Is the Lord of the Harvest satisfied with only this trickle of believers who have come to Him? Can this handful of followers of Christ from a Muslim background organize into indigenous fellowships and build a liturgy, community life and witness that will have a truly dynamic impact on their society while still maintaining this sterilized tradition of Bible translation as their cornerstone?

Project Sunrise grew out of a struggle with these questions and is hoping to provide the Body of Christ with a presentation of scripture for Muslim readers that will use idiomatic, literary Arabic of the highest quality, but free of obsolete and difficult expressions. It will employ Qur'anic vocabulary and phrasing in a careful interweaving of

language and style into the gospel text similar to the way Old Testament Hebrew was utilized in the writing of the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke. We are initiating this new style of Arabic translation by means of a thirty chapter Gospel harmony, using all the material from the four canonical Gospels joined in approximate chronological order. This has been under preparation for the past several years and will be printed in 1987. If this trial project proves effective, an entire New Testament or Old Testament employing the same style could be a next step.

THE PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE IN THE QUR'AN

by M.B. (North Africa)

If we asked the question the lawyer put to Jesus, "What must I do to receive eternal life?" how would the Qur'an answer it?

Those that believe and do deeds of righteousness -- those are the inhabitants of Paradise, there they shall dwell forever. (2:75)

So eternal life is granted to the one who: 1) believes and 2) does good.

A more complete definition of faith and goodness comes at 2:172:

True piety is this: to believe in God, and the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets, to give of one's substance, however cherished, to kinsmen and orphans, the needy, the traveller, beggars, and to ransom the slave, to perform the prayer, to pay the alms.

PARADISE, THE ULTIMATE GOAL

Life in Paradise is described in terms of the enjoyment of well-watered gardens, full of natural produce and young women as spouses (2:23). There is shade from the sun (13:35). The believer will rest on couches. He will be free from sickness (37:40). Conversation will be purposeful with no "idle talk". No cause of sin will be found

there (52:17). Above all the believer will live in security (76:10).

The overall impression is one of youthfulness and relaxation. The absence of sickness, sin and death is also very attractive. Certainly life in Paradise is worth aiming for. Very little is said of God in Paradise: 33:42 describes believers meeting God on the day of reckoning; 10:10 offers this description of Muslims worshipping in Paradise:

Their cry therein -- Glory to thee, O God; their greeting -- Peace -- and their cry ends -- Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all being.

PARADISE IS PROMISED

Almost 50 times in the Qur'an comes the promise of Eternal Life. The word used is "wa^cd" (واعد , = promise), found 29 times as a noun and 19 times as a verb. Wa^cd implies solid commitment, binding agreement. God's word is as firm as his character is unshakeable. Here are two examples. First in the noun form from 4:121:

Those that believe and do deeds of righteousness, them We shall admit to gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein dwelling forever and ever: God's promise in truth, and who is truer in speech than God?

Then in a verbal form from 47:16:

This is the similitude of Paradise which the godfearing have been promised: there are rivers of water unstaling, rivers of milk unchanging in flavour, and rivers of wine -- a delight to the drinkers, rivers too of honey purified.

In no case is the promise revoked. God's commitment can be depended on completely. Here is the strength of the Qur'an. It holds out a final destiny that no man can take away or disturb. It puts the frailty of this life into an eternal perspective. There need be no bar to the achievement of perfection in the next life.

WHO CAN ENTER PARADISE?

If Paradise is a rich experience that draws and attracts, who then will gain entry to those gardens? The answer lies
