

What struck me is that the program of redemption is just like that. I'd say God does 98% of the work. But there is that 2% that is not just busy work to keep our hands out of mischief. It is real work. And that 2% is such that we can say, "Where would the program of redemption be without the 2%? That's the burden I received. But the story doesn't end there, just as it didn't end with those before me. There's a part that's mine and there's a part that's yours.

*Fisk was a Brethren missionary to Morocco earlier in the century.

FEEDBACK ON PROJECT SUNRISE (SIRA):
A LOOK AT "DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE" IN AN ISLAMIC CONTEXT

by the Editor

SEEDBED II/4 (Fourth Quarter 1987) featured David Owen's article on "Project Sunrise" or Sira, a gospel harmony in literary Arabic which makes use of the terminology, phraseology and literary style of the Qur'an. Responses were solicited from 18 or so knowledgeable persons, including missionaries and Arabic-speaking Christians of both Christian and Muslim background, whether favorable or unfavorable. Nine written replies were received, some very brief, as well as verbal remarks from several others. My sincerest thanks to all who responded; your comments were most helpful. These are editorially summarized or collated below. I hope that this discussion will help to advance the work of translating the Bible for Muslim audiences.

As could be expected, attitudes toward the project were mixed. Several respondents were fairly positive, a few others were rather negative, but many critiqued specific ideas, translation choices or other features without reacting either positively or negatively. Of the two respondents from a Muslim background, the one was negative and the other positive. One or two appear to have only responded to Sira without reference to the article, or vice versa. Unfortunately, no responses were received from Middle Eastern Christians.

I-General Comments

On the positive side, a North African Christian gave three reasons why he was favorable: it was prepared for Muslims ("It is the first time that such a [translation] has been undertaken specifically for Muslims"), by a "composer from a Muslim background," and it is presented as a literary form well known to Muslims (i.e. "Sira" or religious biography). With reference to this title he adds, "From my experience in answering letters of Muslim students from North Africa, they often ask on their own for the title Sirah al-Masih because they cannot really figure out who Jesus Christ is."

Some who had objected to calling it Injil and referring to it as a translation of Scripture found the title Sira more acceptable. Concerning this, one wrote: "As long as the translation was being presented as Scripture, I was most uneasy about the Harmony approach,

and believed ... that it would amount to tahrif in the eyes of educated Muslims. But now that the translation comes into the category of Sira one is dealing with a completely different ball game!"

The leader of a team that has been using Sira in its ministry to Muslims summarized his team's observations and experiences as follows: "The general consensus was that we needed more time to be able to use this biography of Jesus Christ with Muslims to really see how they felt about using it with others. We have found, generally, a very positive reception from the perspective that the language was much easier to understand, as well as Koranic and classical. But we also realize that it is just one tool. We find it doesn't fit all people in all situations. Some are extremely enthusiastic about it and others don't respond much at all. ... We find it to be a good bridge to the Scriptures. Many people's reactions or responses are that they would like to see what the Bible had to say after they had initially read the Sira."

Similarly, another observed: "I suspect that the Sira is best suited for ... people to whom the Koran constitutes most of their literary culture, pious people who pray daily and rarely watch TV, etc." Later he adds; "It seems less likely to be suitable for keen seekers already in contact with Christians and who are not troubled by the strangeness or plainness of other translations, Muslims who are already familiar with Christian translations and may reject the Sira out of hand as an attempt to deceive or to imitate the inimitable Quran, and Christians who identify strongly with Arab Christian culture and feel the need for distinctive forms."

On the other side of the fence, one acknowledged that "it is very evident that David Owen has done his homework and has put tremendous effort into the production of the Sira." "Overall," he adds elsewhere, "the text is in good Arabic and is easily readable." Nevertheless, there were things that made him--and others--uncomfortable. Since their critiques deal mainly with specific issues or terms, I shall treat them separately and number them for ease of reference.

II-Questions Concerning the "Guiding Principles"

Only four respondents commented on the author's Guiding Principles, one of them only very briefly. No one commented on specific statements concerning his "Spiritual Commitment," but all would doubtless have agreed with one who wrote that "any translation of the Scriptures should certainly begin with such a commitment." They registered their greatest disagreement with the statements giving his "Perspective on Islam." They also expressed reservations with reference to aspects of his "Approach to Translation."

His Perspective on Islam.

1. Is Muslim resistance to the gospel mainly the fault of the church (today it is popular to blame "missionary extractionism")? Several respondents took exception to Owen's conclusion. As one put it: "I in no way wish to absolve the church of her responsibility for effective witness to the Muslim world. But to ignore or minimize the

'unusual hardness or unresponsiveness' which Islam undisputably creates in its adherents is, in my opinion, a serious simplification which skirts the reality of the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged, and therefore risks increasing our ineffectiveness"

2. From the Christian perspective, may one say that in Islam "God has been sovereignly at work ... outside the initiative of the church to prepare the way for the Gospel message"? Certainly, according to many theologians at any rate, one may say that God works outside the church as a matter of "Common Grace." One can undoubtedly include here the Arabic language which, as the article puts it, has many "rich and untapped" resources for communicating the gospel.

Owen seems to be thinking of more than Common Grace, however, when he recommends considering the Qur'an to be a "prophetic witness to the unity of God" and to Jesus Christ Himself. Here is where a number of respondents draw the line. One writes: "This is enigmatic in view of the New Testament teaching of the Church as God's vehicle to reach out to the nations. Seemingly Owen fails to distinguish God's sovereignty in the affairs of the world and His purposeful working through the Church, the Body of Christ." With reference to the Qur'an, another points out that its witness to the Divine Oneness is vastly different from that of the Bible, and that its witness to Christ--as "someone who was not divine and did not die as sinbearer"--is really a "false witness." He adds, "there is a vast difference between an incomplete witness and a false witness."

3. Is it possible "to fulfill the Great Commission ... by encouraging a movement for Jesus inside Islam"? This idea brought vigorous comment from four respondents. It would seem to imply "that faith in Christ should grow out of the [Islamic] context and as part of Islam," as one put it. He adds: "I think we would feel that we had failed in our apostolic mission if we only see an Islamicized Christianity in Muslim lands. While people movements are an exciting concept, the New Testament church is still a "called out" body that seeks to live for God in a hostile world. This is true in so-called Christian countries as well as the more hostile Muslim ones."

Another comments, "It seems to me that those who see this as a viable approach ... do not have a radical enough concept of discipleship. It reduces [discipleship] to a profession of belief without exploring the question of membership of the people of God. ... We cannot simply postpone the need to build bridges between the Muslim convert and the existing (non-Muslim) church until some later point in his spiritual growth. Painful and difficult though it may be, there must be a consciousness that he is part of the church universal. It would be a tragedy if the version of scripture used most by Muslim converts were to perpetuate the divisions that already exist."

His Approach to Translation

4. Owen states that "Bible translation is the foundation of our mission." To this the respondents would agree, but the place he gives to the Gospel Harmony in the work of mission is another matter. One expressed reservations about the validity, theologically, of

using it instead of the Bible as the basic tool for presenting the gospel message to Muslims. "I believe that the existence of the four Gospels, and the process through which they came into being, are all part of what we mean when we say that the Scriptures are inspired by God. ... Any presentation of the whole that ignores the results of this inspirational process seems, to my mind, to lose something of importance." Another argued that the traditional Bible in ecclesiastical Arabic should still have the primacy. "Should a Muslim be introduced to Christ through the Sira, he would want to come to a fuller understanding of the person of the Son of God through the shared, more theologically accurate, translation used by the church. Should the Sira develop into a full Bible translation, then we would risk creating a division among groups who would opt for an Islamic Jesus other than of traditional orthodox belief."

A third respondent questions including passages from the Gospel of John, in view of the intended Muslim audience. "How can you use the text of John's Gospel in exactly the same way as the Synoptics? I can understand how Tatian could do it. But if we have learned anything from the study of John in the last 100 years, must we not recognize that John isn't precisely the same kind of writing as the Synoptics? Putting them together, therefore, is not simply a problem of chronology. Thus, for example, the profound understanding of the Atonement implied in the words "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) is hard to square with the painfully slow process (as recorded in the Synoptics) by which the disciples came to understand the identity and work of Jesus. ... I cannot help feeling that using John in the way you have done alongside the Synoptics may create unnecessary stumbling blocks for Muslims."

With reference to having multiple Arabic Bible translations, still another acknowledged that "there is much to be said for" Owen's argument in their favor. He nevertheless cautions that the belief that multiple translations will fuel the Muslim charge of textual corruption "is a conviction held strongly by enough Arabic-language Christians, both from Muslim and Christian backgrounds, that it cannot simply be brushed aside as insignificant."

5. Most of the questioning centered around various aspects of contextualization. Take Owen's idea of a "Semitic interpretation" of the New Testament. While a knowledge of its Semitic background is of undoubted value in the translation of certain terms into Arabic, what does it mean to give the New Testament a Semitic interpretation? As one respondent observes, "Owen's idea of 'going behind' the language of the Greek New Testament could be a risky subjective type of thing" in that it can degenerate into "a guessing game that will be influenced by our own preferences as to what we think the reader ought to be 'hearing'." Unfortunately, Owen does not give examples from Sira so we cannot discuss the matter further.

6. According to Owen, "the goal [of the project] is a dynamically equivalent presentation of Scripture for the Muslim Arab readers of today." The "dynamic equivalence" (DE) Model to which he refers has been at the forefront of Bible translation theory in recent years. Most of the feedback is at bottom concerned with how the model is

applied in Sira. I shall therefore save it for a separate section where we can examine it in relation to the model.

His "Corrective Principles."

7. With respect to the principle of "continual testing and feedback," several suggest that the feedback Owen reports may not necessarily demonstrate the effectiveness of Sira in communicating the gospel. One points out that the important question is not so much whether Muslims found it clearer than other translations but why. Was it because it really makes the gospel message clearer, as Owen believes, or was it possibly, as some suspect, because it tends to confirm what Muslims believe already? It is not that clear. As the person states, "the answer to this question is crucial to determining its validity [i.e. that of Owen's testing method] in evaluating the Sira as an effective communicator of the true message of the Gospel."

III-A Look at Dynamic Equivalence in Sira

The DE model attempts to alleviate Bible translation problems caused by semantic differences between the source and receptor languages which in turn derive from differences of worldview. In the "Formal Correspondence" (FC) approach, for example, the New Testament "Son of God" is simply replaced by its corresponding Arabic form "Ibn Allah." Unfortunately, however, this expression is misunderstood by Muslims in terms of the polytheistic notion of the physical paternity of the gods, an idea which is just as blasphemous to us as to them. This shows how, in the cross-cultural situation, the FC approach can often cause semantic distortions in the mind of the receptor which result in his rejecting the message before he has understood it.

The DE model seeks to achieve a correspondence between source and receptor languages in terms of the meanings the forms stimulate in the minds of the hearers and the functions they serve, rather than in terms of the forms themselves. Some therefore feel that this model shows promise as a way to overcome the tremendous semantic gap that besets Christian-Muslim communication.

Sira represents the first attempt to apply this model in a thoroughgoing manner to the translation of the Bible into Arabic for Muslims. Not only does it use the "saja" literary form, etc. but, as Owen puts it, "the religious terminology used is as Islamic in form as we know how to make it. ..." To cite just a few of the more promising terms used, take those for baptism ("sibga" and related terms), the Ascension, Eschatology, many of its geographical terms, and "Lamb of God" (the Qur'anic "dibh 'azim"). Other terms were more problematic. Those that came in for the most criticism were the terms used to translate New Testament Trinitarian language and the concept of the "Kingdom of God."

8. Sira avoids the expression "Son of God," and Father-Son language is largely replaced by that not susceptible of "crude, anthropomorphic misinterpretation." This approach troubled a number of respondents. One objects to calling Father-Son language metaphorical, which he interprets to mean not "revelatory" and therefore replace-

able. "We may yet discover that earthly relationships of father and son are only pale reflections of the real (non-metaphorical) relation of the Father and the Son. The words Father and Son are words of Biblical divine revelation ... and must be believed and accepted." Another examines passages where Father-Son language is translated "according to its dominant shade of meaning in the verse concerned," as Owen puts it, and is likewise convinced that something is lost in the process. He feels that the translators "have tried to do what I think is impossible, to tie down the meaning of terms that are deliberately enigmatic." A North African Christian of Muslim background calls the result an "expurgated version [which] distorts the perspective of Biblical revelation" and risks sending the wrong signal. "Muslims are not fools. They know we use this title of Jesus."

9. As a dynamic equivalent of the Biblical concept of the Kingdom, Sira uses the important Qur'anic term "din" [religion]. Several object that this cuts the idea of the Kingdom loose from its Old Testament Jewish Messianic associations and expectations. One respondent points out the semantic dissonance inherent in such an identification: "I would have thought that din Allah means one thing to the Muslim, namely Islam. How can one possibly move from this to the concept of God establishing His kingship in the world - a plan which Christians believe involved completely different methods from those adopted by the Prophet in establishing the din of Islam."

10. Respondents see similar problems in the various terms used for Messiah. One asks, "how can 'Son of man' ever be translated 'Messiah?' The title Masih is familiar to the Muslim, but in the Quran the word is meaningless." For another the translation of "Christ" by "al-Mahdi" is more serious because the Mahdi concept of popular Muslim eschatology "is radically different, if not diametrically opposed to the concept of 'Saviour' in the Gospel." He sees the problem compounded when al-Mahdi is said to have "come to fulfill all 'din'."

11. Many of the respondents raise the question of the limitations of dynamic equivalence. As one put it, "Do you have any limits to the use of Islamic terminology? If so, what are they?" Are we only limited by the number of terms in the Muslim repertory? The problem, as already intimated, is that it is possible to use language that is so "equivalent" that we are no longer communicating Biblical meanings. For this reason, another asks, "at what point do we slip into an Islamic, rather than a Christian world view?"

A third mentions "two considerations" which make him uncomfortable. "(1) The first concerns our view of Scripture. Are we justified in changing those parts of Scripture that present difficulties to the Muslim (Father, Son of God) and substitute them with more acceptable words for the Muslim? What then can we say about the revelatory aspect of Scripture, namely that the Holy Spirit has given us these words to reveal God and Christ to us? Second Corinthians 4:1 and 2 indicates that we should present truth in clarity and good conscience. (2) What effect will this translation have upon the Muslim? Will it lead him to the truth of the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of Christ without using these words? Or will it only confirm the Muslim concept of God and of Christ to him? I believe that these

questions must be honestly faced." For much the same reasons, a fourth goes so far as to "question whether 'Islamic theological terminology,' with the unavoidable connotations of such to the Muslim mind, can ever adequately express a true understanding of Christian theological concepts."

12. One respondent felt that something is also lost by the use of "anachronistic language." While it is true that "every translation is also an interpretation," he maintains that translation and "tafsir" [interpretation] are nevertheless distinct functions which should not be confused, as happens when anachronistic language is used. The task of the first is to "transport the reader back to the original life-setting of the revelation" while that of the second is to "make the message contemporary." He writes, "I am unhappy with readings like Priest = Imam, Highpriest = Mufti, Pharisees = Fuqaha'. For although they are immediately comprehensible to the Muslim, they do not convey anything of the New Testament world. Perhaps in some cases we have little alternative: kahina is a most unfortunate word for priests; fuqaha' is at least as good a term as kataba for scribes, but I would still prefer to have Pharisee transliterated, with a footnote or explanatory glossary."

13. Several saw a conflict between calling the work "Sira" and using a distinctive Qur'anic style. In a letter to Owen one wrote, "I found your explanation for presenting it as a Sira reassuring, but was still confused as to why a Sira should be presented in Qur'anic style (use of saja', division into 30 parts, Qur'anic type titles at the head of each chapter, etc.). Are you not mixing two different genres of literature? The style of Sirat Rasul Allah by Ibn Ishaq (Ibn Hisham was only the editor) is not at all like that of the Qur'an." To Owen's comment that the work is an attempt to create a new literary form, he replies, "I would still ask whether a discerning Muslim reader would see the Sira as a new style, or just an attempt to imitate the Qur'an."

14. Finally, one cannot help but notice from the responses how widespread is the perception that Sira may be "just an attempt to imitate the Qur'an." This puts it in conflict with its declared goal. As is well-known, Islam considers the Qur'an to be a "literary miracle"; this is the doctrine of "I'jaz" or "inimitability" which holds the Qur'an to have no equal in style or literary power. All other literature is measured by it and found wanting, or, if one should dare to come close, suppressed. There is therefore a risk involved in using Qur'anic language and style; it may get the translation rejected as an attempt to imitate the Qur'an. As one respondent put it (confessing his irritation at the inconsistency of it all), "Islam challenges others to produce something like the Koran, and also effectively forbids such an effort. A work that uses the related larger forms and only part of the literary method can be condemned either because it is like the Koran, or because it isn't."

It is noteworthy that in the Arab World people tend to view the attempt to imitate the Qur'an in Bible translation as deception. Reports indicate widespread rejection of Sira among North African Christians--all from a Muslim background--for this reason, although

few have really read it! Their concern, expressed even by one who was otherwise favorable to Sira, is "that [Muslims] may feel we are trying to trick them into thinking that the book was written by Muslims." Similarly, it was reported that when Sira was sold at a book fair in the gulf area, "Muslims attacked this translation so strongly that the bookstand was almost closed down. The objection was particularly to the resemblance to the Qur'an. They said that if the author was trying to copy the Qur'an, it was a poor attempt."

Curiously, one North African Christian goes on to argue, on the basis of the gift of tongues at Pentecost, that "man is not called to learn a sacred language [i.e. that of the Qur'an] in order to know God; it is God who approaches him and calls him in the language he understands." He goes on to state that "the Sira may give them the impression that the Koran is so powerful that the Gospel must be adapted to its language and style." What makes this argument rather strange is the fact that the ecclesiastical Arabic of the present translations is likewise a sacred language which Muslims find hard to understand. The argument cuts both ways.

IV-Some Conclusions by the Editor

I shall now try to draw some conclusions. From here on, the opinions expressed are mine alone, not those of the respondents who may not agree with me, just as they have not always agreed among themselves. For most of the points discussed already, I shall not add to what has been written. Note that I have purposely omitted discussing whether a special Scripture translation for Muslims is really needed. This is a pertinent question to be sure, but could not be included here for lack of space (see I/4:50-56 and II/2:18-23). Suffice it to say that some respondents were not convinced of the need for such a translation, while others were favorable but had reservations about Sira for other reasons. While preparing this summary, I ran across an excellent article that treats some of these questions, to which I will occasionally refer (Carson 1985).

I wish to comment on several matters arising from the discussion. These center around the concept of dynamic equivalence as applied in Sira to Bible translation for Muslim audiences (#III). Note that I am not calling into question the concept of dynamic equivalence per se. I would agree with Carson that, rightly understood and applied, "dynamic equivalence is essential for good translation" (p202). Some respondents may not agree with me, but I would also agree with Owen's goal of "a dynamically equivalent presentation of Scripture for the Muslim Arab readers of today," and that it is appropriate to use the "rich and untapped resources" of Islamic Arabic to this end. I must acknowledge, however, that the respondents have put their finger on several real problems in the way the model has been applied.

The first concerns Owen's approach to the problem of translating New Testament Trinitarian language for Muslims (#8). To begin, in all fairness it should be said that when he calls Father-Son language metaphorical this does not mean that it cannot therefore be revelatory. All it means is that it is not to be interpreted literally, as Muslims understand it, in the sense of physical procreation. Scrip-

ture makes frequent use of metaphor, especially when the reality being described transcends human experience, but this is not to say that the truth communicated by metaphor is not therefore revelatory. Indeed, to say that the human relationship is only a "pale reflection" of the "real" Father-Son relationship in the ontological Trinity is to use the terms "father" and "son" metaphorically.

It should likewise not be supposed that in substituting other expressions for Father-Son language, Owen is trying merely to "be acceptable" to Muslims. He is trying to find a solution to a real problem rooted in important semantic differences between Christian and Muslim language, and the goal is commendable, however one might view his solution. In the past, when the Bible has been translated into Arabic this problem has generally been ignored, it being assumed that a translation made for Christians will communicate to Muslims what it does to Christians. This, alas, is not the case.

Having said all that, I must also acknowledge that Owen's approach to the problem leaves something to be desired. It may be possible to avoid Father-Son language on a limited basis in oral witness and Christian literature. We cannot, however, take such liberties when translating the Bible; we must stay close to the terms, sentences, concepts, and peculiarities of the original text. A translation must serve, moreover, not just for evangelism but also for discipleship and for the life and worship of the church as well. What is needed, then, is an all-around solution to the problem.

The fundamental problem with the avoidance of Father-Son language is that it hits at the very heart of the Biblical message, and New Testament Christology suffers in the process (cf. Carson p210). No other metaphor used in Scripture comes close to depicting all that is involved in the Father-Son relationship, not to mention the Father-believers relationship, with such power and clarity. It can be understood in all cultures because the father-son experience is universal. In sum, it is an integral part of the New Testament message and cannot be omitted without adversely affecting the reader's understanding of that message. The "Word of God" metaphor used in *Sira* is of course Biblical as well as Qur'anic. In the Bible it points to the deity of Christ, to be sure, but it supplements rather than replaces the Father-Son metaphor. It is ambiguous at best, and does not have anywhere near the range of meaning found in the Father-Son metaphor. Possibly for this reason, in the Qur'an it conveys nothing about who Christ is.

Also to be considered is the fact that Muslims know very well that Christians call Christ "Son of God" and that this goes back to the New Testament itself. There is no real long-term advantage, then, in omitting it. Indeed, if we do, it can only lend credence to the charge Muslims love to make that Christians have "corrupted" the Bible. It thus impacts negatively on the credibility of the Bible and its message.

There are other dimensions to the problem as well. It is not insignificant that Muslims are the only religious group to insist that Father-Son language must be understood literally in terms of physical

sonship. Does not the Bible indicate, however, that man can understand the Trinity enough to benefit from the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in salvation, even though he can never fully comprehend the divine nature? The main reason, then, that Muslims distort Trinitarian language is that they have learned this from the Qur'an. Not only does it have a radically different worldview, which accounts for the semantic gap already mentioned, but it misleads Muslims as to the meaning of Trinitarian language. Add to that the fact that Satan blinds men's hearts, and one can see why we continue to hear the same old distortions no matter how often they are refuted.

It is clear, then, that linguistic solutions alone cannot solve the problem. An approach is needed that tackles the problem from several directions. There are no simple solutions. One can no longer ignore the semantic gap between Christians and Muslims, to be sure, but to rely solely on linguistic solutions is equally erroneous, and may even make matters worse (see Carson p212). For this reason, I tend to feel that a better solution would be to stay closer to the text, using Father-Son language carefully, perhaps with qualifiers and the like so as to minimize misunderstanding, but to rely more on footnotes and commentary, etc., to explain the terms used and deal with the usual Muslim misinterpretations.

A second question concerns the limits of dynamic equivalence in using Qur'anic/Islamic terms and phrases in Bible translation (#11). The problem of Trinitarian language is really a part of this whole question, but was considered separately because of its importance. When it comes to Islamic theological terms, one respondent goes so far as to say that he doubts that they can ever adequately express Christian concepts. This is doubtless an extreme view, although there is much truth to it. Theological terms are abstractions the meanings of which derive from the worldview they express. They are therefore very specific to a particular theological system. Probably few Islamic theological terms are close enough in meaning to Biblical terms to be used in Bible translation (although they may be widely used e.g. in apologetic works to clarify the nature of the gospel over against Islam). By contrast, names (of places, etc.) and terms for material objects, institutions, practices, etc., are generally more concrete and less specific to a particular system than theological terms, and therefore more often usable as equivalents.

A key determinant of dynamic equivalence is the "semantic field" (or "components" of meaning) of the terms and phrases being translated. Semantics is too technical a subject to adequately treat here. Let us just say, rather imprecisely, that for a term in one language to be considered the equivalent of a term in another, there must be considerable, if not total, semantic "overlap." To return to the case of Father-Son language, the problem with Owen's approach is that the terms used in its place do not come near matching its content. As a result, the approach tends to "mask the development of and internal relations within salvation history" (Ibid. p210), and thus to transgress the limits of dynamic equivalence.

The translation of "Kingdom of God" by "din Allah" is a good case in point. One may no doubt find parallels between the Islamic concept

of "din" and the Biblical concept of the Kingdom. But parallelism is not semantic equivalence or overlap. Islam defines din essentially in terms of what man does--the five "Acts of Worship" (e.g. ritual prayer), personal ethics, inter-personal relationships (e.g. marriage), and the like. It is man who brings in God's rule by religious, political, social and military action according to the Shariah (Islamic Law). The Kingdom, by contrast, is defined exclusively in terms of what God does. He alone can rule over mankind with perfect equity and justice because He alone is sinless. The Kingdom is established only when God intervenes in history at the end of time in the person of Messiah. At present, it exists in "mystery" form where God's redeemed people submit to His rule in their lives. I agree, then, that the term malakut is not an equivalent translation in the Islamic context, but then neither is din.

It seems clear, then, that an in-depth study of the semantics of Qur'anic language in comparison to that of the Bible will be needed before much progress can be made in the use of Qur'anic language in Bible translation for Muslims. Semantics is a rather new field of study and is quite complex and technical; it must, however, take its place in Bible translation for Muslims if they are to give the Biblical message a hearing without reading into it the usual distortions.

Finally, a word about the perception that Sira may be "just an attempt to imitate the Qur'an." I must confess that there are grounds for this perception. A number of features, such as the use of the basmalah and geographic designations at the beginning of each chapter, are there solely because they are Qur'anic. Given Muslim attitudes and beliefs about the Qur'an, one can understand how some of them might resent this, feeling that someone is trying to deceive them. This does not need to be, however. If our objective in using Qur'anic language is to improve the communication of the gospel, then whatever fails to do this should not be used. If this were the criterion for using an Islamic form, Muslims would be much less likely to view it as an attempt to imitate the Qur'an.

To conclude, I wish to commend David Owen for this pioneering work in the use of Qur'anic language in Bible translation for Muslims, and thank him for his article and for giving us the opportunity to discuss and critique his approach. There is risk involved, to be sure. By the nature of the case, our discussion has focussed mostly on what respondents have perceived to be problem areas. I do not want to let this obscure the importance of his work, however. While problems exist, he introduces a number of promising Islamic forms which may well help us interpret the Christian message to the Muslim mind. It deserves our serious consideration and study, and there is much we can learn from it.

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