

C. Jonn Block's Response to
Mark Durie's "The Qur'ān and the Bible: Continuity or Discontinuity?"

I only have a few casual remarks in response to Mark Durie's presentation.

1. Critical historians such as myself, Gabriel Reynolds, and others mentioned by Mark are not reading the Qur'an through our frame as characterised, but we are reading through the Qur'an's own frame. We are actually going to tremendous lengths and depths in excavating the context of the Qur'an in order to determine its frame. There is some blurring of this professional line when I take my historical research into application missiologically as a practitioner, or in BtD dialogues, but from a research perspective, what we present is historical, not philosophical in nature. I welcome critique of my methodology and sources, but it seems exaggerated to dismiss the historical disciplines summarily as subjective commentary.
2. Using Mark's linguistic metaphor in the definitions of 'inherited' and 'borrowed' from his paper: the Qur'an describes itself as using inherited rather than borrowed concepts from Christianity and Judaism, and yet Mark describes the Qur'an as borrowing those same concepts. This is a fair evaluation from Mark's lens. However, the best precedent in pre-Islamic history for a religious text specifically describing itself as 'inherited' that others described as 'borrowed', is the Jewish view of the New Testament. I wonder if Mark hasn't simply 'borrowed' the Jewish view of the NT in his treatment of the Qur'an. Is this an acceptable double standard, that we dismiss with precision from the Jewish commentary on the New Testament, exactly what we claim of the Qur'an? I appeal to Hugh Goddard on this: "No criterion of judgement can be applied to the faith of the other that has not already been applied to one's own faith. There must, in other words, be no double standards." (from *Christians and Muslims : From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding*, p.9).
3. Mark writes that, "it is irrelevant for the Qur'ān and for Islamic theology what *al-Masīh* means," as there is no Son of God metaphor in the definition of Messiah. In fact the definition is so highly relevant that it is made redundant in light of the Qur'anic leanings toward validating Nestorianism, and indicating the "previous books" (Torah, Injil, etc.) as the source material for further definition. The Qur'anic tendency is to understate Christian theology or narratives that are already understood among Muhammad's contemporaries. Often the Qur'an speaks of itself as a reminder of what came before it, and indeed, much of the Qur'an's biblical subtext is the body of work that it reminds its readership to recall.

The humanising of Jesus in the Qur'an is informative of its implicit definition of the term Messiah. Further, Arthur Jeffrey (historian), Fayruzabadi (classical Islamic scholar) and Faruk Zein (modern Islamic scholar), for example, all include the Hebrew original meaning "to anoint" in their definitions of Messiah. It is true that Islamic tradition has widely divorced itself from the Qur'an on the importance of the definition of Messiah. The

context of the previous books was indeed stripped away due to centuries of war, but that's a tragedy of commentary, not because Messiah was unimportant in the Qur'an. I do concede however that continued study is needed on the meaning of Messiah in pre-Islamic Syriac liturgy to establish a clearer view of what the contextually implied definition likely was.

4. Mark suggests that in my fear of Islam, I am, as a dog might, befriending and tending Islam in order to avoid potential harm. Fear in all three forms as described by Mark is only one possible reaction to stimuli. Once stimuli is defined as a threat, then Mark's fear responses are valid options. And it is conceded that the human tendency is to fear first what we do not understand. However, there are other possible responses to input: ambivalence in the case that the input is not valued, and curiosity in the case that it is valued and not feared. One's approach to Islam may be a product of fear because the chosen reaction to Islam as input is to view it as a threat, as Mark might. But how might that view change if one were to approach Islam out of curiosity, as I do?