The Al-Munahhemana Controversy

Over the centuries our Muslim friends have accused us Christians of changing the text of the Bible and of corrupting it. Their standard accusation is that Jesus predicted the coming of Muhammad and no statement like this is found in the Bible, not even in those pre-dating Muhammad.

The Qur'an states, *"Jesus, the son of Mary, said, 'O children of Israel I am the apostle of God sent to you, confirming the law which came before me and giving glad tidings of an apostle to come after me whose name shall be Ahmed' "* [Surah 61:6 – Yusuf Ali translation].

The earliest known biography of Muhammad is called the **Sirat Rasul Allah**. (In English it is, The life of Muhammad.) It was written by Ibn Ishaq (d.767). This was later condensed by Ibn Hisham (d.827). His narrative began with creation and chronicled the history of the world until the time of Muhammad. It presented Muhammad's life as the fulfilment of the divine mission. A. Guillaume who was Professor of Arabic at SOAS translated it into English. He also taught Arabic at AUB in Lebanon and at Princeton.

Ibn Ishaq says that John 15:23-16:1 is the passage where Jesus refers to the coming of Muhammad (p. 103-104 The Life of Muhammad by A. Guillaume). However, a simple comparison between the New Testament version of John 15:23-16:1 and Ibn Ishaq's version shows a number of differences! For example:

- Four times (V. 23, 24, 26 twice) where Jesus says, "My Father" or "the Father" Ibn Ishaq's version uses "the Lord".
- In v.24 the NT version is, ***"But now they have seen and hated both Me and My Father."*** This is changed to, *"But they became proud and hated me and the Lord."*
- The word 'law' in v.25 is changed to imply the Angel Gabriel so that "They hated me without a cause" is not a quote from Ps. 35:19 or Ps. 69:4.
- The word 'both' has been removed from before 'seen' to remove any inference that those who had seen Jesus had seen God.
- Most importantly it is claimed in the Sirat Rasul Allah that "Al-Munahhemana (God bless and preserve him) in Syriac is Muhammad and in the Greek he is the Paraclete".

These are some of the discrepancies that Guillaume points out in his footnotes.

Here are two explanations by Muslim friends of how we corrupted and changed the meaning of this prediction.

The Al-Munahhemana Explanation

Guillaume suggests that the passage was translated from the Palestinian Syriac lectionary that was used in worship by Arab Christians long before the 7th century. Al-Munahhemana is an old Syriac word derived from Hebrew meaning 'comforter'. So the Greek word 'paracletos' (comforter/advocate) is translated in Syriac as Al-Munahhemana.

In the British Library in London there is a very early copy of the Palestinian Syriac lectionary. In fact, the exact wording indicates it was a translation of a Greek lectionary and not a direct quote from the New Testament. The Syriac New Testament agrees with the exact text of the Greek New Testament.

The Sirat Rasul Allah's claim that Al-Munahhemana and Muhammad have the same root and mean the same is not linguistically correct. Just because words have the same letters it doesn't necessarily imply the same root.

At best Ibn Ishaq received this information from an incorrect source or at worst he committed 'tahreef' (intentional corruption) in an attempt to make the Bible support the teachings of the Qur'an.

The Periclutos Explanation

The other approach used by our Muslim friends (see Ahmed Deedat's, 'What the Bible says about Muhammad') is to suggest that the paracletos/comforter/advocate in our Greek text of the New Testament is a corruption of **'periclutos'**. 'Periclutos' is defined in Liddel and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon (p. 628) as, "famous, renowned, glorious". Our Muslim friends say that this is similar to 'Muhammad' and 'Ahmed', which means 'praised one'.

The difficulty with this explanation comes when we look at the early Greek texts of the New Testament. This applies to **all** of them, including the Gospel of John fragments (~ AD 120). Some of the early complete Greek New Testaments dated before AD 360 are the Codex Vaticanus (the chief treasure of the Vatican library) and the Codex Siniaticus which the British government purchased from the Soviet government for £100,000 on Christmas Day 1933. It is now in the British Library in London.

When we look at **all** the Greek fragments and texts of the New Testament, they all agree on the word 'paracletos'. The word 'periclutos' **does not appear in any manuscript**. Bruce Metzger in **A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament** lists no variants for this passage.

Recommendation

Read the whole passage John chapters 14-16 with your Muslim friend. Especially go through and discuss in detail Jn. 14:15-31 and Jn. 15:18-16:15.

Follow-up reading for you

- **The Life of Muhammad** by A. Guillaume – an English translation of Ibn Ishaq's **Sirat Rasul Allah** (as edited by Ibn Hisham)
- **Is Muhammad foretold in the Bible?** by Larry Spargimino
- **Jesus and Muhammad** by Mark Gabriel (An Muslim background believer and former professor of Islamic history at Al-Azhar University, Cairo)
- **Christians answer Muslims,** by Gerhard Nehls – Chapter 8
- **Is Muhammad foretold in the Bible?** By John Gilchrist (a booklet)

Useful articles/websites on this issue:

www.ses.edu/journal/issue3_1/smith.pdf

www.answering-islam.org.uk/silas/comforter.html

www.answering-islam.org.uk/index/p/paraclete_and_periclutos.html

www.answering-islam.org.uk/index/a/ahmad.html

www.answering-islam.org.uk/gilchrist/vol2/9b.html p. 370