

Martin Lings: *The Holy Qurʾān: Translations of Selected Passages*

Cambridge: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought and
The Islamic Text Society; 2007, xvii+237 pp;
ISBN 978 1 903682 52 4 HB; 978 1 903682 53 1 PB

When he passed away on May 12, 2005, Martin Lings was working on a translation of the Qurʾān commissioned by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute of Islamic Thought in 2004. It seems that he had barely started on the project when he made his passage to the other world. After his death, his widow granted permission to the publisher to put together all the translations of the Qurʾānic passages found in his published and unpublished works. The result is *The Holy Qurʾān: Translations of Selected Passages*. The book is, however, not what one assumes from its title; rather, it is a painstakingly collated work of what can be called a valuable collection of Ling's Qurʾān translation project in progress. The collator of this bi-lingual posthumous publication, Aftab Ahmed, has gathered together all the variant translations of Qurʾānic verses found in Martin Ling's published and unpublished works and presented them in an orderly manner, clearly indicating the source where they first appeared or else marking them as previously unpublished.

The result is a book that is of more interest to a future biographer than an ordinary reader. The nature of this book demands that all variants be included, rather than making a choice, hence there are different translations of the same verse. This provides a wealth of material for a future biography of this unique and gifted scholar whose "stunning classical English"—as Hamza Yusuf states on the back cover—"and brilliant scholarship made him an ideal candidate for a new translation of the Qurʾān." As it is, one can only imagine the eloquence, beauty, depth, and scholarly acumen of the translation had Lings himself finished it; what we have in the present work is merely a taste of what was to come.

Even though these selections are merely a foretaste, there are some longer passages of rare qualities:

And of men there are some who say: We believe in God and in the last day, yet they are not believers. And when it is said to them: 'Cause not corruption in the land,' they say: 'We are nothing if not reformers.' Nay, unknown to themselves they are workers of corruption. When they meet those who believe they say: we believe. And when they go apart unto their satans, they say: Verily we are with you; we did but mock. Give glad tidings unto those who believe and do deeds of piety that verily

*they shall have gardens of Paradise watered by flowing rivers.
Whenever they are given to eat of one of the fruits thereof they
say: This is that which we were given aforetime, and they were
given a likeness of it... (4)*

One can cull insights into Lings' own process of internalization of the message of the Qur'ān through different versions of translations of the same verses that are done over a period of time. For instance, there are four different translations of verse 28 of *al-Fajr*; each of these expresses a certain degree of intimacy and refinement unique to it:

Return unto thy Lord, glad in His Gladness!
Return unto thy Lord with (in) gladness that is thine in Him and
His in thee.
Return unto thy Lord, pleased thou and whelmed in His good
pleasure.
Return unto thy Lord gladly and accepted in mutual gladness.

The book contains, in an appendix, Lings' translation of the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God. The appendix lists the Names, providing their transliteration, Arabic text, and translation. Like the translation of the verses of the Qur'ān, many Names have more than one translation.

These translations of the Beautiful Names of Allah are simply peerless; they are the fruit of a lifetime of reflection on the Names. It would be more appropriate to list them all, but space limitations only allow a few examples: *al-Raḥīm*, "The Boundlessly Merciful; *al-Quddūs*, All-Holy; *al-Razzāq*, The Ever-Providing; *al-Bāsiṭ*, He Who expands, The Munificent; *al-Muqsit*, The Equitable, the Requirer; *al-Jāmi'*, The Assembler, the Uniter; *al-Ghanī*, The Infinitely Rich; the Totally Independent; *al-Mughnī*, The Enricher, The Availer; *al-Māni'*, The Preventer, The Shielder, The Defender.

With its easy to read Arabic text, aesthetic design, and beautiful cover, *The Holy Qur'ān: Translations of Selected Verses* is a choice selection for both researchers and general readers. One only wishes that the title of the book was more consonant with what is between the covers; Lings himself would have preferred a Qur'ānic epithet for the Qur'ān instead of "Holy".

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