

THE FAMILIAL LANGUAGE DEBATE IN MUSLIM BIBLE TRANSLATION

The idea for this edition came from Rev. Michael Langford, the director of the Institute for Islamic Studies on the APTS campus in Baguio City, Philippines, who told me that the Familial Language issue in Bible translations for Muslims is the hottest topic among missionaries in Islamic contexts today. Certainly most evangelicals would agree that Bible translation is foundational to any kind of ministry. How that translation is done, however, is a subject of intense debate. In the matter of the Familial Language issue, the theological implications are stupendous.

The participants in the discussion are the Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT) and their partner organization, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), who contend that removing the biblical title of Jesus as the “Son of God” may be necessary in some cases to avoid misunderstandings among Muslims about what is meant by the term. The Assemblies of God World Missions USA (AGWM) takes the opposing position, insisting that this terminology be retained. In addition to their official position papers presented here, both WBT/SIL and AGWM were given the opportunity to add further reflections. WBT/SIL respectfully declined because their current positions are under revenue. Dr. Mark Hausfeld, the primary author of the AGWM document, has written an editorial further summarizing the AGWM position. I have placed this at the end. I would add that all three organizations have a long track record of commitment to the fidelity and inerrancy of the Bible, which is reflected in their documents.

My purpose here is to allow these organizations to speak for themselves without taking sides. Because these documents were written by the participants themselves, our editorial team made only limited corrections in order to ensure that their voices are fully heard. All participants endorsed these corrections.

Because the AGWM paper is largely reacting to what Wycliffe/SIL have written, the pertinent Wycliffe/SIL documents will be considered first. But before we get into the debate itself, Joe

Cumming's article reminds us that whatever our position may be on the familial language issue, loving, respecting and developing friendships with Muslims is critical to our witness. I might add that the priority of love and respect between Christians who might disagree on the subject at hand is also important for the same reason.

Special thanks to Dr. Jack Chesnut of WBT/SIL and Dr. Russ Turney of the AGWM for providing the documents of their respective organizations. I would also like to thank my old friend Rev. Rick Knoth of the *Enrichment Journal* for permission to use Dr. Cumming's article.

As always, your comments are welcome. You can reach me through our website, www.aps.edu.

I hope you enjoy this edition.

Dave Johnson, D-Miss, Managing Editor