

PART I: ASSESSING ARABIC TRANSLATIONS OF THE SCRIPTURES

Modern Arabic Translations and Their Witness to Christ

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Summary

The proliferation of Arabic translations of the Bible is a cause of both rejoicing and controversy. Most discussion about the relative merits of the four commonly available translations has more of the spirit of cheerleading than of objectivity. This article compares the translation of passages from the Old and New Testaments that have direct bearing on the deity of Christ. All four translations have some weaknesses in this area. The newest translation introduces variants for some of the titles of Christ, and these can cloud the witness to his deity. The comparison that follows is, therefore, intended to help evangelists and church planters choose a translation and to bear witness to the deity of Christ.

I. Introduction

The increasing number of Arabic translations of the Bible indicates the renewed energy of evangelicals to reach the Muslim world with the Gospel. In contrast to the situation before 1865, when missionaries had to contend with seriously deficient translations,¹ today's field workers now have recourse to the Smith–Van Dyck–Al-Bustani (SVDB) translation published in 1865, the *Kitaab Al-Hay-*

yaah (KH) translation published in 1988 (sometimes called the *New Arabic Bible*), the *Today's Arabic Version* (TAV) published in 1993 (sometimes known as the *Good News Arabic Bible*), and the *Al-Kitaab Al-Shariif* (KS) translation published in 2000.² But with the availability of so many translations, there will inevitably be controversy over the choice.³

1 J.A. Thompson, *The Bible Translator*, 6, 51-55; 98-106 (1955).

2 I used a copy of the KS from the 2003 printing. The KS apparently has undergone a number of revisions.

3 In July of 2008 a new translation of the Gospels and Acts was announced. It is not included in the comparison.

Choosing a translation requires a process of evaluation. One way to evaluate the translations for use is to consider the difficulty and ‘Christian-ness’ of the vocabulary.⁴ By ‘difficulty’ is meant the degree to which the words used are unfamiliar to the average reader. The other dimension, ‘Christian-ness’, measures how unique certain theological phrases are to those of Christian background. So, for those who feel that simpler language is better and who prefer to use neutral or Muslim terms instead of theological ones used primarily by Christians, the SVDB, which uses high Arabic and Christian theological vocabulary, is not a good choice. The KH uses simpler, but similarly Christian-specific vocabulary, while the TAV uses simple Arabic but makes an effort to choose neutral or Muslim words. The KS also uses simple vocabulary and grammar while using Muslim terminology.

The difficult-simple dimension is important when considering the state of literacy of the target audience. In general, it is safe to say that most field workers prefer simple over difficult

vocabulary and constructions. However, the choice along the Christian-Muslim terminology dimension is often driven more by ideology than by utility. The church planter needs criteria that are related to task. Of the myriad of choices made by translators, which issues have the greatest implications for evangelism, discipleship and the establishment of local churches?

I propose here to consider the various translations on the basis of their clarity in communicating the deity of Christ. Comparisons have not previously been made on this dimension, which is of the greatest importance for every stage of church planting. The other dimensions are very important and they cross-cut with the communication of Christ’s deity. But the Bible’s witness to the deity of Christ is so central to conversion, life in Christ and worship that it deserves special consideration apart from these other important issues.⁵

The approach is to review the main passages in both the Old and New Testaments that bear witness to the deity of Christ, and consider care-

4 See the excellent chapter ‘Qur’anic Arabic and the Protestant Arabic Bible’ in Sam Schlorff’s book, *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims*, Middle East Resources, 2006.

5 In Rick Brown’s article ‘What Must One Believe about Jesus for Salvation’ (2000), he summarizes saving faith as the belief that Jesus is Saviour and Lord, and concludes that belief in substitutionary atonement or the deity of Christ is not a requirement for saving faith. I agree with Brown that many people have added requirements to the Gospel, and that we cannot expect a newly converted person to have all the details worked out at the time of conversion. However, the Bible does not leave the terms ‘Saviour’ and ‘Lord’ undefined; the Saviour from sins is a divine Saviour, and Lord of All is a divine lord, and these are incentives to believe. Conversion brings growing understanding as the Holy Spirit speaks through the Word.

fully what each translation communicates.⁶ The study has been guided by Robert Reymond's excellent work entitled *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The Old and New Testament Witnesses* (hereafter referred to as *JDM*). For both the Old and

New Testament witness, attention is given first to general issues, then specific passages. The OT passages chosen for comparison are primarily those passages that the New Testament prominently identifies as Christological.

II. Old Testament Christological Passages

General Issues

The first general issue concerns the translation of the various names of God in the Old Testament. The most common names of God in the Old Testament are *Elohim*, *Adonai* and *Yahweh*. In English translations, *Elohim* is translated 'God', *Adonai* is translated 'Lord'⁷ and *Yahweh* is translated and printed 'LORD', which accommodates the Jewish practice of reading *Adonai* in place of *Yahweh* while distinguishing it from *Adonai* typographically. SVDB, KH and TAV carry on this tradition, using الله (*Allah*) for *Elohim*, and الرب (*Al-rabb*) for *Adonai* and *Yahweh*, except that there is no typographical device in Arabic to distinguish between the two source words *Adonai* and *Yahweh*. The KS changes this practice and usually uses *Allah* for *Yahweh* as well as for *Elohim*. KS also tends to avoid the use of الرب *al-rabb*, for *Adonai*, using rather المولى *al-mawla*, or السيد *al-sayyid*.

Al-Mawla is one of the 99 names of God, but *al-sayyid* is typically used for humans, not God. Whatever the motivation was to avoid *al-rabb*, the lack of consistency in translation masks the consistency in the original text and can be misleading. Particular care must be exercised where the names and titles of God are part of the Old Testament witness to a divine Messiah.

Pentateuch

Exodus 3:14-15⁸

God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."

¹⁵God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.'

This passage is relevant to the deity of Christ because Christ uses its language in John 8:58 to indicate his

6 This article assumes the ability to read Arabic because it is intended to be an aid to those using the Bible in Arabic in ministry.

7 *Adonai* is used also as a title for human masters in the Old Testament. The discussion here concerns the translation of *Adonai* when it refers to God.

8 English Scripture references are from the *English Standard Version*.

pre-existence. The key phrase is translated in English by 'I am who I am'. The SVDB resorts to transliteration of the Hebrew, and the KH follows SVDB in transliterating, but then explains the meaning using parentheses inside the text (a questionable practice which KH perpetrates in other places as well). The TAV translates the phrase *أنا هو الذي هو* 'I am he who is he', which hints at the self-existence inherent in the Hebrew imperfect *ahya* and is partly reflected in the translation of John 8:58. The TAV has a footnote mechanism, but the connection between John 8:58 and Exodus 3:14-15 is not referenced. The KS translates the phrase, using *الله الذي اسمه أنا هو* 'The God whose name is "I am he"', which, while not being very literal, reflects the practice of identifying *Yahweh* and *الله* and further allows a clear identification of the parallel to *Yahweh* used by Jesus in John 8:58. However, the phrase misses the implication of self-existence. This situation will be considered again later in the discussion of John 8:58.

Passages from the Psalms

Psalm 2:7

I will tell of the decree:

The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'

This verse is a clear Messianic reference, and is quoted in the New Testament in Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 5:5. It is unquestionably one of the key verses that the New Testament used to explain the relationship between the Father and Christ. The Hebrew is not particularly tricky: a rigid rendering into English gives 'My son you are, I today have begotten you', which can lay over into straightforward Arabic, preserving even word order:

ابني أنت أنا اليوم ولدتك

With minor changes in word order, the SVDB, KH and TAV translate the phrase literally. However, the KS uses the phrase

أنت ابني، أنا اليوم تَوَجَّهْتُكَ ابناً لي

which in English is 'You are my son, I today have crowned you as a son for myself.' The NT citations of Psalm 2 in the KS reproduce this wording exactly.⁹ The most natural sense of this wording is that Christ *became* a son by appointment.

The KS phrase is a fair interpretation of the phraseology as applied to David; but it does not do justice to the NT application to Christ. To replace 'begotten' with 'appointed' or 'crowned' is to reduce the meaning and change it. This verse, in its OT setting and in its NT application to Christ, played a key role in the rejection of adoptionism and

9 A version of the KS New Testament was published before the OT, and the earlier printings differ from the apparently revised text of the NT in the whole Bible.

modalism in all its forms.¹⁰ Furthermore, the verse is important to the affirmation of Christ's full divinity.¹¹ If this rendition is not explicitly advocating an adoptionist Christology, it has certainly opened the door to it. The fact that the passage figures heavily into the New Testament's teaching on Christ, especially in Hebrews 1, compounds its seriousness.

Psalm 45:6-7

*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.
The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of
uprightness;
7 you have loved righteousness and hated
wickedness.
Therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your
companions;*

The implications for the divinity of the coming King in this verse, which is applied to Christ in Hebrews 1:8, 9, lie in the identification/ differentiation inherent in the wording. In other words, the coming Messiah is called (vocatively) God, and yet differentiated also from 'God' by the use of the third person in verse 7 ('Therefore God ... has anointed you'). Numerous expedients have been employed to justify removal of the vocative ('O God') in verse 6, but

the reasons are more ideological than exegetical.¹²

The SVDB and KS make the vocative clear in verse 6, while the KH and the TAV suppress it.

Psalm 110:1

*The LORD says to my Lord:
'Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your foot-
stool.'*

This Psalm is the most-quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament. There are direct quotations of the first verse in Matthew 22:44, 26:64; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42, 43, 22:69; Acts 2:34, 35 and Hebrews 1:13, 10:13. Allusions include 1 Corinthians 15:25, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1 and Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12 and 12:2.

The witness of this verse to the divine character of Christ stems (as in Psalm 45:6-7) from the identification/differentiation motif, with God speaking to the Messiah both as God and yet distinct from Himself as the speaker: 'Yahweh says to my Lord'. However, communication of the 'identification' aspect depends on the translation of 'my Lord'.

The phrase 'my Lord' is the English translation of *Adoni*. The word is

10 See *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Chapter 16, by Robert Reymond.

11 The reader is encouraged to consider carefully the discussion of the Nicene teaching of 'the Father's eternal generation of the Son' and Calvin's insistence on the full, uncompromised deity of the Son, including self-existence, in *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, by Robert Reymond, pp. 324-330 (especially pp. 327-329).

12 JDM, pp 81-83.

used in the Old Testament to address God, but it can also be used to address a king or highly placed person, as in 2 Samuel 16:9. So whether or not the word is capitalized in English depends on whether the translator believes the referent to be God or a human. One could presumably translate the verse, 'The LORD says to my lord' (note the lower case) or equivalently 'The LORD says to my master.' However, to interpret the verse as 'The LORD says to my lord' or 'The LORD says to my master' requires a systematic denial of the New Testament use of the passage. Raymond's remark is right to the point: '[David] ascribes such 'lordship' to the Messiah that his superiority over David, as Jesus later would suggest in Matthew 22:45, cannot comport with merely human lordship.'¹³

The SVDB and KH commendably translate the phrase *قال الرب لربي* 'the Lord said to my Lord', whereas the KS substitutes *قال الله لسيدي* 'Allah said to my master', and the TAV uses *قال الرب لسيدي الملك* 'The Lord said to my master, the king'. The use of *سيدي* 'my master', obscures the nature of the three persons (God the Father, the Messiah, David as speaker) present in Psalm 110:1, but the TAV is particularly

troublesome, inserting material that alters the meaning and makes Jesus' use of the verse in Matthew 22:45 contradictory or incomprehensible.¹⁴

Passages from the Prophets

Some of the messianic highlights from the prophets are:

1. Isaiah 7:14-16, the virgin birth.
2. Isaiah 9:6-7, the wonderful names of the Messiah.
3. Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the song of the suffering, sin-bearing servant.
4. Daniel 7:13-14, the ascension and session of the 'Son of Man'.
5. Micah 5:2, the birthplace of the pre-existent ruler-to-be is Bethlehem.
6. Zechariah 12:10, the pierced Lord.
7. Malachi 2:17-3:1, the Messenger of the Covenant.

In the four translations, the treatments of Isaiah 7:14-16, Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Zechariah 12:10, and Malachi 2:17-3:1 clearly communicate the testimony to the deity of Christ. Certain aspects of the other passages need comment.

¹³ JDM, p 88.

¹⁴ One field worker reports that a group of believers from Muslim backgrounds was much confused by the TAV rendition of Psalm 110:1 when they compared it with Matthew 22:45.

Daniel 7:13-14

*I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.*

*¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.*

This passage is the origin of Jesus' 'favourite self-designation,' the *Son of Man*.¹⁵ The phrase *son of man* occurs in other places in the OT (e.g. Psalm 8, Ezekiel) and is usually idiomatic for 'a man'. However, the usage in Daniel is carried over literally by Jesus into the Gospels. It is also clear that Jesus used the phrase in the sense that Daniel meant it.¹⁶

The significance of the phrase is recognized by the SVDB, KH, and TAV, which translate it ابن الإنسان (the Son of Man). However, the KS translates the whole phrase 'like a son of man' as واحداً يشبه البشر or 'one resembling humankind'. In the *New Testament*, the KS translates the phrase *The Son of Man* as

الذي صار بشراً

or '[he] who became human' (see for example Luke 5:24, John 5:27). This makes it difficult to show the deliberate connection between the Son of Man of the Gospels and Daniel's 'one like a son of man'. Furthermore, the connection should not be discounted as esoteric or unimportant; at least three field workers in my city begin the study of Mark with seekers by reading Daniel 7:13-14 to show the meaning of the title 'Son of Man'.

Micah 5:2

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans
of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.*

The messianic nature of the prophecy is clear, it being the basis of the expectation that a ruler would be born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:3-6). Beyond this, there is the implication of the Messiah's pre-existence. This is seen in the time phrases 'from of old' and 'from ancient days' (or 'days of eternity'). The phrases can mean 'a long time ago', or 'eternity preceding the ... creation'.¹⁷ But the critical point concerns the interplay between 'go out' ('come forth' in the ESV) and 'goings out' ('origin' in the ESV). The Hebrew words have the same root. This latter phrase, which

¹⁵ JDM, pp 182-193.

¹⁶ See Matthew 26:64, where Jesus ties 'the Son of Man' to 'the right hand of God', a clear reference to Daniel 7 and possibly Psalm 110:1.

¹⁷ JDM, p 132.

occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible, is often translated ‘origins’, but this obscures the play on the root. Raymond translates the latter part of the verse:¹⁸ ‘From you for me will go forth the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, even from days of eternity.’

The SVDB translates the last part of the verse (starting with ‘For from you...’):

فمنك يخرج لي الذي يكون
متسلطاً على إسرائيل ومخارجه منذ
القديم منذ أيام الأزل

This makes clear the eternal nature of the time phrases and furthermore shows the relationship between ‘go out’ and ‘goings out’. As such, it points to a *pre-existent* divine ruler to come out of Bethlehem. In contrast, the KH, KS and TAV all make clear the eternal nature of the

time phrases, but the connection between the phrases ‘go out’ and ‘goings out’ is not as clear. TAV and KH use يخرج for ‘go out’ and KS uses يأتي KH and KS use أصل ‘origin’, for ‘goings out’, but the TAV skips the ‘goings out’ phrase altogether, translating

يكون منذ القديم منذ أيام الأزل

To summarize, these passages, upon which the New Testament erected its Christology, bear a strong and remarkable witness to the divinity of the coming Messiah. However, the witness is carefully expressed, and care must be taken for it to come through clearly. Evangelists and disciples should be familiar with the treatment of these passages in the translation that they are using and be ready to help the reader where the translation is not clear.

III. New Testament Passages and Considerations

General Issues¹⁹

The first general issue is the treatment of ‘The Son of Man’ title, and one that was raised in the discussion of Daniel 7:13-14 above. The details will not be repeated here, except to reiterate that the translation of ‘Son

of Man’ in the NT should make clear the connection to Daniel 7:13-14. The Gospels use the title 82 times, so this is not an arcane point.

The second general issue is related to the translation of *kurios*, which our English versions translate as ‘Lord’.

¹⁸ JDM, p 132. *Emphasis supplied.*

¹⁹ Much of this section deals with the titles of Christ, especially ‘Son of Man’ and ‘Lord’. Rick Brown has discussed these titles and alternatives to the title ‘Son of God’ in his article ‘The Son of God: Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus’, *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17 (Spring 2000) pp 41-52. The KS partially implements his suggestions. The article cannot be considered in detail here; I am preparing a response to Brown’s proposals.

This word, along with ‘Christ’ (anointed one, the Greek equivalent of ‘Messiah’), is one of the chief designations of Jesus in the New Testament. Its translation is therefore an issue not confined to one or two passages. There are two lines of thought to consider, one concerning the Greek background of the word, the other concerning the use of the word by Greek-speaking Jews, through the influence of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

That the Greek word *kurios* meant ‘lord’ is not in dispute. It was used of both gods and men. The best-known example of its use for a man is the phrase, ‘Caesar is Lord,’ a phrase that Paul seems to allude to when he writes to the Corinthians, ‘[...] no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12:3). However, while acknowledging the use of *kurios* with men, it must be remembered that there was still often an implication of deity: Caesar was considered a ‘god’.

However, the use of *kurios* among Greek-speaking Christians of the first century, whether Hellenistic Jewish background believers or pagan background believers, was far more specific, owing to its use in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old

Testament. In the Septuagint, *kurios* is used to translate both *Adonai* and *Yahweh*. The use of *kurios* for the latter reflects the Jewish practice of reading *Adonai* in place of *Yahweh*, but it also gave a unique status to the word among Jews and Christians that discouraged its use – in an absolute sense – for men. It is a matter of history that many Christians were martyred because they would not confess, ‘Caesar is lord’ (*kurios*).²⁰ If the demand had been to acknowledge Caesar as king or master, there would have been no issue of conscience.²¹ But for the early church, Jesus was *kurios* in a way that excluded all others.

Having said that the early Christians used *kurios* differently from non-Christian Greek speakers, it is necessary to affirm that Christian usage was not so narrow and private that pagan Romans simply failed to understand the significance of the Christian use of *kurios*. The deaths of the martyrs cannot be construed as an unnecessary tragedy due to regrettable differences in ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ usage.

In the Arabic translations, the SVDB, the KH and the TAV almost uniformly translate²² *kurios* using *الرب* *al-rabb*. In contrast, the KS has an apparent

20 See *Christendom* by Roland H. Bainton, Volume 1, pp 51-58.

21 See, for example, Luke 20:25.

22 More than 15 occurrences were reviewed in the Gospels and the Epistles.

23 See footnote 9 above.

policy of translating *kurios* using *sayyid* or *mawla*.²³ For example, in Acts 2:36 ([...] God has made him both Lord and Christ.) the KS translates

جعله الله المسيح سيّد الكل

‘God made him the Christ, Lord (*sayyid*) of all’. In Philippians 2:11, (‘Jesus Christ is Lord’), the translation is

عيسى المسيح هو مولانا

‘Issa the Christ is our lord (*mawlana*)’. Occurrences of ‘The Lord Jesus Christ’ are translated using *sayyid* or *mawla* for *kurios*. Notable exceptions²⁴ to this general rule in the KS is Thomas’ exclamation in John 20:28, where the translation is

يا ربي والهي

and 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14 and 19:16. The last three references

have the important phrase

ملك الملوك ورب الأرباب

‘King of kings and Lord of lords’, applied to God the Father in 1 Timothy and applied to Christ in Revelation.

The decision in the KS to not use *rabb* to translate *kurios* impacts the New Testament witness to the deity of Jesus Christ. The impact of *sayyid* and *mawla*, especially the possessive form ‘our lord’ is much less,²⁵ causing the reader to put Christ on a level with the prophets when the text is pointing to something higher. Furthermore, the non-uniform treatment of *kurios* as a title of Christ is distracting and confusing to the person searching the Scriptures to see who Jesus is.

IV. Consideration of Specific Passages with Implications for the Deity of Christ

Jesus’ self-witness

The following discussion focuses on the two instances in which Jesus claimed absolute identity with Yahweh of the Old Testament. Those two passages are John 8:58 and John 13:19.

John 8:58

Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’

John 13:19

I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

There are many ‘I am’ sayings in John’s Gospel, including ‘I am the good shepherd’, ‘I am the door’ and ‘I am the vine’. But the particular form of John 8:58 and John 13:19 is simply ‘I am’, which has a direct relation to the revelation of the name *Yahweh* to

24 Again, there is considerable difference between the earlier printings of the KS, which use predominantly *al-rabb*, and later printings, which prefer a form of *sayyid* or *mawla*.

25 The possessive forms of *sayyid* and *mawla* (*sayyidi*, ‘my lord’ and *mawlana*, ‘our lord’) are the common forms to address men. The definite form *al-mawla* is one of the 99 names of God.

Moses in Exodus 3. The last two Greek words of both verses are *ego eimi* (I am). The Septuagint translation²⁶ of the name of God in Exodus 3:14 is *ego eimi ho on* (I am the being [one]). The use of 'I am' without a complement in John 8:58 and 13:19, and the use of the Septuagint's wording, show that the connection is not spurious.

The SVDB, as mentioned previously, resorts to transliteration in Exodus 3, and uses *أنا كائن* for 'I am' in John 8:58 and *أنا هو* in John 13:19. The KH also expresses the idea of pre-existence in 8:58 using *كائن* but in a subjunctive phrase and with a significant reordering of the words. Its wording in John 13:19 is *أنا هو* as in the SVDB. The TAV uses *أنا كائن* for 'I am' in John 8:58 and *أنا هو* in John 13:19. The KS uses *أنا هو* in both John 8:58 and John 13:19, paralleling its treatment of Exodus 3:14-15.

There are two basic approaches, either to transliterate or to explain the meaning. The problem with transliteration is that the Hebrew verbs are unknown in Arabic, and so the connection between Exodus 3:14-15 and John 8:58 cannot be made without some external commentary. Giving the meaning of the phrase has the

potential to make the connection apparent. KH tries to do both transliteration and explanation in Exodus 3:14-15, but puts additional remarks in the text (as mentioned previously) raising new problems. The TAV wording in the Exodus 3:14-15 is not paralleled in John 8:58, but is paralleled in 13:19. The KS phrase lacks the implication of self-existence, but it makes the parallelism between the passages obvious.

Other witness from the Gospels

John 1:18

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

In the United Bible Societies' critical Greek text of the New Testament, 4th Edition, the phrase translated 'the only God' differs from the *Textus Receptus*, which has 'the only Son'. The manuscript evidence for 'the only God' was first put forward by F.A. Hort in 1876.²⁷ Since then the discovery of more high quality manuscripts has strengthened the conclusion that 'the only God' is the original phrase.²⁸

As in Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 45:6-7, it is the identification/differentiation motif that points to the deity of Christ.

The SVDB, the KH and the KS base their translations on 'the only Son'

26 The Septuagint can be viewed online: <http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/online-bibel/septuagintalxx/lesen-im-bibeltxt/>.

27 *Two Dissertations*, F.J.A. Hort, 1876, cited in *JDM*, p 515.

28 *JDM*, pp 513-516.

phrase, while the TAV bases the translation on 'the only God' phrase. The complete SVDB was published in 1865, eleven years before Hort's work, so it is no surprise that it uses 'the only Son'. However, it is not apparent why KH and KS would use 'the only Son'.

Pauline Christological passages

The following passages were reviewed in the four translations: Romans 9:5 and Titus 2:13, Colossians 1:15-20, 2:9 and Philippians 2:6-11. In general, the four translations clearly witness to the deity of Christ in Romans 9:5, Colossians 1:15-20, and Colossians 2:9. The reader is encouraged to study the passages and think through their discussion in JDM. The other two passages need some comment.

Philippians 2:6-7

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

The SVDB, KH and TAV all translate the phrase 'form of God' by

صورة الله

which is also the phrase used to translate 'image of God' from the Old Testament. The KS uses the phrase

طبيعة الله

which according to one believer from a Muslim background, is a very strong statement. However, it can also be problematic because طبيعة is normally used only for created beings.

Titus 2:13

'[...]waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,'

The translation of this verse presents a difficulty in Arabic. The key point is that 'God' and 'Saviour' refer to the same person.²⁹ However, the most straightforward way to handle the Greek phrases in Arabic is to use a chain of possessive nouns, but this can obscure from the reader that 'God' and 'Saviour' refer to one and the same person.

- SVDB : منتظرين الرجاء المبارك وظهور مجد الله العظيم ومخلصنا يسوع المسيح
- TAV: منتظرين اليوم المبارك الذي نرجوه، يوم ظهور مجد إلهنا العظيم ومخلصنا يسوع المسيح
- KS: بينما ننتظر أن يتحقق أملنا السعيد، بمجيء إلهنا ومنقذنا العظيم عيسى المسيح في جلاله
- KH: فيما ننتظر تحقيق رجائنا السعيد، ثم الظهور العلني لمجد إلهنا ومخلصنا العظيم يسوع المسيح

²⁹ JDM, pp 471-473.

The SVDB is very direct, but that leads to an ambiguity. Is it 'the appearing of the glory of our great God and [the appearing] of our saviour, Jesus Christ', with two 'appearings' and two different persons, or is it 'the appearing of the glory of the great God and our saviour', with 'great God' and 'saviour' referring to one and the same person? Likewise, it is not clear from the grammar of the TAV if 'God' and 'saviour' refer to the same person. The KS makes 'God' and 'saviour' refer to the same

person with 'great' as an adjective for both. The KH succeeds in showing the connection by breaking up the chain of possessive nouns with *ثم*

This may be the best solution to show that 'God' and 'saviour' refer to one and the same person (although that solution has other effects that represent a departure from the text). The evangelist or discipler can overcome any lack of clarity here; the important point for the deity of Christ is that one and the same person is meant.

V. Conclusion

The SVDB, the KH and the TAV give clear translations of the key Christological passages, with some failures of varying degrees as noted. Revisions that remedy these failures would be welcome. However, the KS witness to the deity of Christ is mixed. In many of the Christological passages, the KS treatment is very strong and accurate; in others, the treatment limits the application of the verse to its OT setting (especially Psalm 2:7) making NT use of the passage misleading or unclear. Some difficulties stem from the treatment of the titles of Christ. A revision of the KS that addresses the specific issues discussed above would strengthen the translation and make it more useful to church planters.

One aspect of the Bible's witness to the deity of Christ has not been

considered here. It is those passages in which the 'NT unhesitatingly applies'³⁰ to Jesus OT passages in which Yahweh (either as the speaker or one referred to) is the subject. Examples include Joel 2:32 by Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13, Isaiah 8:14 by Romans 9:32-33, Isaiah 44:6 by Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 22:12-13, Isaiah 45:23 by Romans 14:11 and Philippians 2:10. I commend them to your study and witness.

The deity of Christ is a precious truth of the Gospel, and ultimately one of the greatest attractions of the Gospel to Muslims. In a day when the deity of Christ is often viewed as an embarrassment or spurious, may God grant that our translations and appeals give clear and unashamed witness to our divine Saviour and Lord.

30 JDM, p 160.

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