A CALL TO FAITHFUL WITNESS

- PART ONE -
LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON:
DIVINE FAMILIAL LANGUAGE IN BIBLE TRANSLATION

A PARTIAL REPORT (PART ONE OF TWO PARTS)
OF THE AD INTERIM COMMITTEE ON INSIDER MOVEMENTS
TO THE FORTIETH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
MAY 14, 2012

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**Note:** The study committee encourages everyone to read the *entire report*, as its contents serve as the basis for our conclusions regarding divine familial language in Bible translation. For those unable to work through the entire report, please read the following sections:

- Preface (p. 7)
- Executive Summary (p. 9)
- Preamble (p. 16)
- Recommendations to Organizations Doing Translation (p. 75)
- Recommendations to Churches (p. 78)
Whereas: the Church is called to take the gospel to all peoples, including those how have historically been resistant to the gospel;

Whereas: contextualizing the language and forms of the gospel, while remaining faithful to the truths of Scripture, is good and necessary for the advancement of the gospel;

Whereas: the Church must exercise wisdom in discerning appropriate expressions of contextualization, reserving its public corrections for genuine and substantive threats to the gospel;

Whereas: in recent initiatives known as “Insider Movements”, some groups have produced Bible translations that have replaced references to Jesus as “Son” (huios) with terms such as “Messiah” in order to be more acceptable to Muslims;

Whereas: some Bible translations of Insider Movements have replaced references to God as “Father” (pater) with terms such as “Guardian” and “Lord”;

Whereas: these Bible translations are harmful to the doctrines of the authority of Scripture and the deity of Christ, bringing confusion to people in need of Christ – concerns that are held by many national leaders and Bible societies;

Whereas: some PCA churches have knowingly or unknowingly financially supported these Bible translations;

Whereas: Muslims should not be denied a full and faithful witness;

Therefore be it resolved that the 39th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America:

- Affirms that biblical motivations of all those who seek the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have never heard or responded to the gospel should be encouraged;
- Repents of complacency or comfort that keeps us from a faithful witness;
- Declares as unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider Movement or any other translations of the Bible that remove from the text references to God as “Father”
(pater) or Jesus as “Son” (huios), because such removals compromise doctrines of
the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture;

- Encourages PCA congregations to assess whether the missionaries and agencies they
support use or promote Bible translations that remove familial language in reference
to persons of the Trinity, and if so, to pursue correction, and failing that, to withdraw
their support;

- Encourages PCA congregations to support biblically sound and appropriately
contextualized efforts to see Christ’s Church established among resistant peoples;

- Calls PCA churches and agencies to collaborate with each other and the broader
Church to discern and implement biblical authority in gospel contextualization.

- Authorizes the Moderator, as an aid to greater gospel faithfulness throughout the
PCA and the broader Church, to appoint a study committee to report to the 40th
General Assembly concerning Insider Movements, including but not limited to:
  o A summary and biblical assessment of Insider Movements’ histories,
    philosophies, and practices;
  o A biblical response to interpretations of Scripture used in defense of Insider
    Movements;
  o An examination of the theological impact of removing familial language for
    the Trinity from Bible translations;
  o An assessment of PCA missions partners regarding the influence of Insider
    Movement within them, including assessment of their theology of religion,
    ecclesiology, Scripture, and relationship to the Emergent Church;
  o An explanation of the relevance and importance of this issue for the PCA;
  o Suggestions for identifying and assessing the influence of Insider Movements
    among mission agencies, missionaries and organizations;
  o Recommended resources for faithfully training and equipping congregations
    to reach Muslims locally and internationally.

- Set the budget for the study committee at $15,000/year and that funds be derived from gifts
to the AC designated for that purpose.
**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BGG</td>
<td>Authors Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray, collectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>General Assembly (PCA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IJFM</td>
<td><em>International Journal of Frontiers Missions</em> or <em>International Journal of Frontier Missiology</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>Septuagint</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIT(s)</td>
<td>Muslim Idiom Translation(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCA</td>
<td>Presbyterian Church in America (<a href="http://www.pcanet.org">www.pcanet.org</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td><em>Qur'an</em>. The abbreviation “Q” is a standard format for referencing the <em>Qur'an</em>, in which Q is followed by the sura (chapter) and aya (verse).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE</td>
<td>Ruling Elder (PCA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCIM</td>
<td>Study Committee on Insider Movements, established according to Overture 9, “A Call to Faithful Witness,” which was passed at the 39th PCA General Assembly in June 2011.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIL</td>
<td>Formerly Summer Institute of Linguistics and now SIL International (<a href="http://www.sil.org">www.sil.org</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TE</td>
<td>Teaching Elder (PCA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEA</td>
<td>World Evangelical Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBT</td>
<td>Wycliffe Bible Translators (<a href="http://www.wycliffe.org">www.wycliffe.org</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCF</td>
<td><em>Westminster Confession of Faith</em></td>
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<td>WLC</td>
<td><em>Westminster Larger Catechism</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>WSC</td>
<td><em>Westminster Shorter Catechism</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>W/SIL</td>
<td>Wycliffe/SIL International</td>
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Preface

The Study Committee’s History

The 39th GA (June 2011) instructed its moderator, RE Dan Carrell, to appoint members to an *ad interim* study committee. Following the appointment of that committee in October 2011, the SCIM (Study Committee on Insider Movements) began its work through a series of video and telephone conferences from November 2011 through May 2012, in addition to regular e-mail correspondence. The committee met in person for three-day conferences in December 2011 and March 2012.

In December 2011, the committee divided the mandate of Overture 9, “A Call to Faithful Witness,” between matters of biblical translation and issues related to Insider Movements. The March 2012 meeting included personal and video meetings with a variety of biblical translation experts along with those directly affected by the biblical translations in question.

In January 2012, the committee’s first chairman, TE Wade Bradshaw, regretfully withdrew from the committee due to new and pressing commitments on his time. TE David Garner was elected as its new chairman. TE Guy Waters was appointed to fill the vacant seventh position in April 2012, and pending a year’s extension granted to the study committee, Mr. Waters will serve with the committee in preparing Part Two of its report.

Study Committee Recommendations to the 2012 General Assembly

The *ad interim* SCIM has carried out the first stage of its duties, investigating divine familial language and Bible translation. Stemming from the SCIM research, important points of action surface. These actions concern agencies and workers engaged in Bible translation, as well as the PCA churches that support the work of Bible translation. For the sake of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the SCIM unanimously presents Part One of its report, which follows, and presents the following five (5) recommendations to the 40th General Assembly:

1. That “Part One – Like Father, Like Son: Divine Familial Language in Bible Translation” serve as a *Partial Report* (Part One of Two Parts).
2. That the 40th General Assembly *declare* that, since social familial terms fail to capture the biblical meaning of “Son” (*huios*) and “Son of God” (*huios tou theou*)
applied to Jesus and “Father” (pater) applied to God, Bibles should always translate
divine familial terms using common biological terms.

3. That the 40th General Assembly make available and recommend for study “Part One
– Like Father, Like Son” to its presbyteries and sessions.

4. Pursuant to RAO 9-2, that the 40th General Assembly grant an extension to the
SCIM for one year to allow for completion of its mandate and to provide Part Two of
its report on Insider Movements.

5. That the 40th General Assembly set the budget for the study committee at
$15,000/for its second year, and that funds be derived from gifts to the AC
designated for that purpose.
Executive Summary

Introduction

The start of the twenty-first century marks a period of extraordinary opportunity for the spread of the gospel, the planting of churches, and the translation of the Holy Scriptures. Though 350 million people still await a Bible in their own tongue, with literally thousands of Bible translations currently underway around the world, that moment when all the world’s people might have opportunity to hear and read Scripture in their own language is increasingly within reach. With the mighty redeeming work of the Holy Spirit occurring in many places around the world, it is imperative to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send even more workers into his harvest – for the works of evangelism, church planting, and faithful Bible translation. Many engage faithfully in these kingdom tasks, but not all Bible translations faithfully present the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Scripture reveals overarching themes which explain the nature of God and the duty he requires of man (WSC Q. 2-3; WLC Q. 5). When translations fail to render accurately or consistently key theological terms woven into Scripture, the thematic tapestry of theology frays. Our sonship, whether of our human fathers or our Heavenly Father, derives its meaning from the rich dimensions of the Sonship of the Son of God himself. While Jesus’ eternal begotten-ness and incarnate Sonship lack the sexual connotations of human sonship, nevertheless Scripture employs common biological sonship terms to convey important truths about Jesus’ nature, function, and vocation. Readers lose this information when biological kinship terms are substituted either with a “social son” term (e.g., “Unique Beloved One” or “Representative”) or with a less comprehensive term like “Messiah.” Key theological terms belong in the main text of Bible translations, with additional explanations and connections reserved for the paratext, study guides and, especially, the teaching and preaching of the Word.

Section A: The Practice of Bible Translation

Missionary translation work in the eighteenth through mid-twentieth centuries generally involved a Westerner who embedded in another culture, learned its language, and translated the Bible into that language, while rendering material aid and pastoral leadership. In contrast, desiring more rapid and natural-sounding results, modern translation efforts primarily use nationals of varying degrees of Christian experience and theological training.

1 According to WBT (http://www.wycliffe.org).
Supporting these translators are Western consultants, generally more highly trained in linguistics and anthropology than in theology, who may provide seminars to frame the translation work as well as critique and/or approve the final product. This process generates complex webs of related organizations that have a hand in the work yet may not claim responsibility for the published Bible.

The Qur'an accords honor to Jesus as a man and a prophet but specifically denies that Jesus is God or Son of God, or indeed that the Creator has any children at all. The concept of divine begotten-ness seems blasphemous to the Muslim, who understands the unity and transcendence of the Creator to render divine sonship impossible. Some missionaries report great resistance among Muslims even to hear or read the phrase “Son of God,” a factor many claim inhibits gospel outreach. This challenge led to experimentation with various methods of presenting the Christian message to Muslims, including systematic substitution of Muslim idioms in the translations themselves. Bibles employing such substitutions are known as “Muslim Idiom Translations” (MITs), a phrase used to describe a wide variety of types of translations. While this report will provide recommendations for translation method, it focuses in particular on those familial language MITs, which render “Son” and “Father” with terms other than the most common biological terms in the target language.

Concurrent with these MIT developments, some Western Bible translations began to experiment with a greater degree of “functional” (so-called “meaning-for-meaning”) translation as opposed to the traditional “formal” (“word-for-word”) translation strategy. When applying the concept of functional equivalence to Bible translation in Muslim contexts, some alleged that the meanings of divine familial terms (e.g., “Son of God”) were best conveyed in some languages by non-familial terms (e.g., “Christ” or “Representative”). Such terms were held to convey the essence of the divine relationships without the sexual implications of the usual biological sonship terms. When objections arose that “Messiah” fails to convey accurately the filial dimensions of “Son,” some MIT proponents retrenched, proposing that instead of biological “Son” and “Father” equivalents in the national tongue, social or functional roles of “Son” and “Father” would suffice, such as “Uniquely Beloved One” and “Guardian.”

Examples of such familial language MITs include the “Stories of the Prophets” series of Arabic audio dramas; the True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ (Arabic Gospels/Acts); the Noble Gospel of Matthew, which features interlinear Greek/Turkish on

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2 The SCIM is not here inferring that the biblical God and Allah of Islam are the same deity; we intend to give this important theological point attention in Part Two of the report.
one page and a Turkish paraphrase on the facing page; and the Injil Sharif New Testament in
the Bangla language. Each of these projects was undertaken in a language in which at least
one Bible translation already existed. Organizations such as Wycliffe Bible Translators and
SIL (jointly, W/SIL), Frontiers, and Global Partners for Development played major roles in
shaping these translations. MITs are not simply the projects of field workers, but have been
actively promoted by key leadership within these organizations.

A series of articles in the Christian popular press publicized these activities, leading
to a recent flurry of denominational activity. The 39th (2011) General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church in America condemned “translations of the Bible that remove from the
text references to God as “Father” (pater) or Jesus as “Son” (huios), because such removals
compromise doctrines of the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture”
(Overture 9). The General Assembly also authorized the formation of the Study Committee
on Insider Movements (SCIM), whose work includes this extensive partial report, “Part One
– Like Father, Like Son: Divine Familial Language in Bible Translation.” Other
organizations investigating or speaking against familial language MITs include the
Assemblies of God, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church of
Pakistan, the Pakistan Bible Society, and TEK, a coalition of Turkish churches.

In response, W/SIL issued a series of statements, including the May 2012
commentary on the August 2011 Istanbul statement: “Without reservation, SIL’s Scripture
translation practice is to use wording which promotes accurate understanding of the
relationship of Father by which God chose to describe Himself in relationship to His Son,
Jesus Christ, in the original languages of Scripture.” 3 “Istanbul 3.0” affirmed the need for
faithful translation of divine familial terms but left room for social familial terms, or the
paratextual redefinition of biological familial terms, as described above. The WEA, at the
invitation of W/SIL, is convening a panel4 to evaluate W/SIL’s practice in these debated
areas, with a report to W/SIL intended for the end of 2012. In summer 2011, proponents and
opponents of familial language MITs also gathered at Houghton College for “Bridging the
Divide,” an event designed to seek accord. A second gathering at Houghton continues this
endeavor in June 2012.

Even among familial language MIT proponents, consensus is growing that although
“Son of God” includes the concept of Jesus’ messianic mission, nevertheless “Messiah” is

3 “SIL International Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms with
Commentary,” April 30, 2012. As this is the third iteration of the Istanbul Statement, this report will refer to
this version as “Istanbul 3.0”.
4 “WEA Announces Dr. Robert E. Cooley as Chairman of Wycliffe and SIL Review Panel,” May 9, 2012,
too narrow a term to convey accurately the dimensions of Jesus’ Sonship, not least because
Jesus’ messianic mission began with his incarnation, whereas his Sonship is “before all
worlds.” Some translations that replaced ἴος (son) with a word meaning “Messiah” are
being revised accordingly. Some related audio recordings have been withdrawn from public
access, but not all; actual recall of distributed media is generally unfeasible, so that the
problematic works are likely to continue circulating for the foreseeable future.

Some proponents of familial language MITs assert the propriety of “social” or
“functional” sonship terms, rather than biological terms. Despite claims that these
substituted terms possess familial meaning and avoid allegedly unnecessary biological and
sexual content, they remain inadequate for biblical translation. Only the common biological
terms effectively deliver the critical theological concepts discussed in the full report;
replacement with functional/social words creates critical theological problems.

Section B: Theological Implications

Muslim revulsion to divine biological/familial language does not lie primarily in
linguistic limitations which cause offense through misunderstanding. Rather, Islamic
teaching explicitly rejects any sort of divine begetting, whether sexual or otherwise, and
indeed any sort of conceptual analogy between the Creator and elements of the created
order. Yet when a translation avoids key terms in the inspired text, it does not engage merely
in appropriate sympathy with a particular culture’s allegedly neutral linguistic values, but
risks misrepresenting the divine meaning of Scripture and faces the threat of syncretistic
surrender to false belief.

Non-biological solutions avoid the sexual implications of “Son” and “Father,” but at
great cost. The traditional biological terms convey not only social relationships such as
protection and affection, but also concepts of shared nature and identity that actually
facilitate filial function. Contra some MIT advocates’ assertions, the original Greek terms
pater and ἴος are strongly biological, as are “begetting” terms of the historic Christian
creeds, such as natum and gennethenta, in the Latin and Greek versions of the Nicene Creed,
respectively.

Even in Greek, Latin, and English, such terms require explanation as to their non-
sexual meaning when applied to the Persons of the Godhead. Thus the potential for
confusion, and the need for explicit Christian teaching to accompany the distribution of
Bibles, should not prevent translations from following the example of the inspired Bible
manuscripts in using thoroughly biological terms to translate Greek pater and ἴος and
Hebrew ab and ben.
Despite the attempts of some recent theologians to limit the Bible’s testimony of Jesus as the “Son of God” to his messianic kingship, Scripture presents him as the Son of God, who not only leads his people as the ultimate Davidic king, but also reflects the nature of his eternal Father in his being, his calling, and his behavior. By analogy, Christians, as “children of God” by grace, image our Father’s nature by virtue of our vital and Spiritual union with the incarnate Son of God.

Translations which use idiosyncratic terminology for key theological terms eclipse integral themes across Scripture, such as sonship in general. Even some MIT proponents acknowledge that their labors can result in professions of faith by individuals who remain unable to conceive of God as a Father, or themselves as his children. The familial language MIT reader is divorced both from the confessional commitments of his neighbors in the visible church who use a translation which retains historic and faithful terms for Father and Son, and also from the invisible church across time.

Some MITs use biological “Son of God” language in the main text or the interlinear text but then sap the full meaning of such terms through footnotes, parenthetical disclaimers, parallel paraphrases, and other paratextual materials which limit the reader’s understanding of “Son of God” to social or functional sonship. As such, those solutions fail to answer critics adequately who find social sonship terms misleading when applied to divine familial relationships.

Scripture is a covenant document (WCF 1). According to God’s gracious will to redeem his people and to reveal himself by the written Word, Scripture belongs to all of his people from all the nations – those who, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, now believe and who will believe. With a view to the international scope of God’s redemptive message, the Bible calls not only for its own translation (WCF 1.8), but also for the faithful ministry of the people of God to evangelize, to teach, and to preach the Scriptures to the nations. Bible translation projects may recognize that a particular people is yet unreached, and such a fact should compel faithful proclamation of the gospel accompanied by Bible translation, rather than efforts to produce a self-explanatory or self-expositing Bible which over-interprets texts in simplistic, culturally accommodating, yet theologically anemic ways. The church bears responsibility to accompany the spread of Bibles with a parallel spread of Bible teachers, reducing the temptation for over-interpretive translations, especially when such translations are likely to be the only Bible used by a particular people.

More generally, some MITs cater too uncritically to postmodern reader-response theory which locates meaning in the reading community’s interaction with the text or to
receptor “acceptability,” rather than receiving meaning as a quality inherent in the text itself.
Evangelicals hold that the Bible does not simply contain or generate the Word of God; it is the Word of God. The verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture entails the necessity of faithful translation of key theological terms not only in broad strokes of meaning, but in detailed adherence to the idioms from which Scripture weaves large-scale theological structures. For instance, the respective ways in which Adam, angels, the Davidic king of Israel, Jesus, and Christians are all “son(s) of God” mutually inform each other and inform the various other sorts of spiritual sonship (of Abraham, of Satan, etc.). These relationships, while not literal in a biological sense, are also not simplistically metaphorical.

The meaning of Biblical “sons” is metaphysical and analogical, with the Trinitarian Father/Son relationship as the eternal reality which human beings image in a limited, creaturely fashion. Since Jesus the Son of God is the supreme Source and Meaning of the familial term huios (son), and the One into whose image we are conformed (Rom. 8:29), terms in Bible translations which possess a biological, genetic character are critical for expressing the biblical truths of divine, created, and redeemed sonship – in their rich array of theological meanings.

Conclusion

Bible translations geared for Islamic contexts should not be driven by concerns that Muslims may recoil from biological terms applied to God or Jesus. That revulsion originates primarily out of religious conviction, not any communicative limitation of the terms themselves. The essentially biological terms (Hebrew, ben and ab; Greek, huios and pater) are divinely given and therefore should be translated into comparable biological terms. Footnotes, parentheticals and other paratextual comments may be used to explain the biblical and theological riches of Scripture, while never subverting the important truths embedded in the biological contours of Scripture’s words.

Not all translation workers share these methodological commitments. Therefore, churches should carefully assess the philosophies and practices of translation workers whom they support. Churches should direct resources toward faithful translation and, if loving attempts at correction fail, away from projects and persons advocating problematic approaches to translation. For the honor of the God who has revealed himself in his Word, churches and agencies involved in translation should collaborate to improve the spread of the Christian message worldwide, ensuring that Bibles oriented towards those in Muslim contexts retain the fullest range of theological meanings resident in the original languages.
The responsibility for faithful translation and worldwide gospel proclamation rests finally in
the church of Jesus Christ.

“Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have
renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with
God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to
everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to
those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the
unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is
the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with
ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of
darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in
the face of Jesus Christ.”

- 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

5 Unless otherwise specified, English Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version, Wheaton, IL:
Preamble

Overture 9, as adopted in 2011 by the 39th General Assembly (GA) of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), called for the formation of a Study Committee on Insider Movements (SCIM) to report to the 40th GA (2012) concerning the related issues of (1) Insider Movements (IM) and (2) Bible translations which remove familial language from references to the Trinity. The SCIM found those two issues sufficiently weighty so as to merit individual attention. As a result, our report to the 40th GA deals only with the issue of divine familial language in Bible translation. Should the 40th GA allow a one-year extension for the SCIM, we intend to bring a report to the 41st GA (2013) concerning Insider Movements. As our work progressed in examining “the theological impact of removing familial language for the Trinity from Bible translations,” two realities emerged:

First, some languages have familial terms of a social nature (e.g., adopted sons, household members, dear friends, etc.) as distinct from familial begetting terms. Therefore this report discusses not only familial terms in opposition to non-familial terms, but also the implications of different sorts of familial terms.

Second, Scripture applies various familial terms to persons of the Trinity, such as “Father,” “Son,” “Brother,” and “Bridegroom.” The same and similar terms in Scripture refer to Christians, both individually and corporately: “children,” “sons,” “brothers,” and “bride.” For reasons of time and length, we have focused on the specific case of Jesus as the Son of God. While we recognize certain limitations of this focus, we trust that our presentation will show how similar reasoning applies to the other familial terms such as “Father.”

Our concluding principles also impact broader translation philosophy, methodology, and accountability discussions.

We live in extraordinary times of opportunity in the Muslim world, and as we lift our eyes beyond the arena of controversy, we cannot help but rejoice at what God is doing. Unprecedented numbers of Muslims are discovering Jesus Christ, as many formerly bound by fear are discovering the freedom of the gospel. In God’s providence, they are finding fresh courage to consider the truth as they give voice to physical and spiritual grievances and yearnings. In areas well beyond the Arab world, the Redeemer is drawing those in Muslim lands to himself. Yet we trust that he will do more. Daily news broadcasts remind us of

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6 While we recognize points of overlap between IM thinking and decisions concerning familial language in Scripture, advocacy of the one does not necessarily indicate advocacy of the other. Links between the two will receive attention in Part Two of the SCIM report.
suffering or strife among the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims who have great need for the truth and grace which are found in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

In adopting Overture 9, the PCA repented “... of complacency or comfort that keeps us from a faithful witness,” and thus called for correction in ourselves, not simply in others. Accordingly, rather than pull back into a defensive posture, we must pray that the Lord of the harvest would send more workers into his harvest (Matt. 9:36-37; Luke 10:2); and we must pray for and pursue the PCA’s greater role in the advance of God’s kingdom among Muslims. As a means of maintaining a faithful gospel witness, we believe explicit corrections for certain errors are fully in order. At the same time, we dare not so focus on the errant trees as to be blind to the forest of opportunity before us.

During the course of our work, the SCIM has read widely and interacted regularly with seasoned field translators and translation consultants, international Bible scholars, national church leaders affected by the biblical translations in question, translation organization leaders, and each other. As part of our due diligence, we submitted a late draft of this report to external reviewers from diverse backgrounds and with disparate views on the issues we have addressed. These reviewers included scholars, translation experts, and mission organization leaders – including selected leaders from some of the organizations named in this report. We genuinely appreciate their critiques and useful suggestions, as their input has proven very helpful in bringing this report to its final form. For the sake of the gospel and the church of Jesus Christ, we welcome continued serious analysis of the report and its conclusions, and for the sake of faithful translation of the Scriptures all around the world, urge others to give further rigorous scholarly and churchly examination to these themes.

In the entire process, we have grown in our appreciation of both the complexity and the importance of faithful Bible translation. Lacking expertise in the various contested languages, we would be remiss to offer specific recommendations about how particular words or phrases should be translated in those languages. Still, aided by the counsel of national mother-tongue speakers, this report illustrates various translation problems and suggests avenues for correction. But we limit our recommendations to principles to be applied across all translation efforts, and proffer associated recommendations to the churches in the PCA as they involve themselves in the work of missions and Bible translation.

We have also grown in our esteem for brothers and sisters who, in response to God’s call, have left family, career, and home to commit their lives to the rigorous work of faithful
Bible translation so that others may have access to the Scriptures. Bible translation is unlike any other kind of translation. Only the Scriptures lead us rightly into glorifying and enjoying their divine Author; only the Scriptures are self-attesting and self-interpreting; only the Scriptures possess ultimate authority. No other text possesses such distinction. Further, from Genesis to Revelation, the very words of the Bible reveal Jesus, the Son of God (John 5:39-47; Luke 24:13-49), by whom God has spoken in these last days (Heb. 1:1-2). This inscripturated revelation of Jesus Christ is critical, since “. . . there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). In view of Scripture’s unique quality, the ministry of Bible translation is both a tremendous privilege and a great responsibility.

The SCIM finds itself in the unusual situation of analyzing controversial translation practices during a period of rapid change within the world of Bible translation. Some organizations involved in the debated translation work are already re-evaluating their own policies and practices, or asking third parties to do so. We offer our report in a spirit of humble and corrective critique, not vilification. Prayer has been a foundation for our committee’s work, and we commend to all readers of this report the practice of faithful and fervent prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ involved in the work of Bible translation. Pray that they would be committed to faithful and accountable translation practice; that they would humbly discern any methodological errors and that such errors be fully corrected; that the work of faithful Bible translation would grow; and that through all of this, the Lord would use the PCA and her engagement with others to honor Christ and expand his kingdom.
Section A: The Practice of Bible Translation

Bible Translation in the Twenty-First Century

Many Western Christians today still think of Bible translation in its eighteenth through early twentieth century form: a Western missionary emigrates to a foreign land, learns the language and culture, and translates the Bible into that target language. In some cases, he must develop an alphabet and written grammar, as well as literacy training for the national audience. Often the missionary directly engages in other projects to help the people, including political advocacy, building public utilities such as schools and hospitals, aiding economic development, et cetera. In it all, the missionary accomplishes the translation efforts by personally investing in the target people, faithfully evangelizing, teaching, and ultimately church planting. Previous generations of Christians thrilled to hear of Marilyn Laszlo, Jim Elliot, and others, who devoted their lives to evangelism, living with small tribes in remote areas, and providing not only Bible translation but also Bible exposition and deeds of mercy which exemplified the truth and power of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Still, this history of Bible translation has birthed at least two criticisms. First, some have alleged that foreign missionaries cannot learn the subtleties of a new culture or language rapidly enough to translate terms like “sin,” “grace,” “repent” and even “God” with the correct nuances. Second, some worry that the process reeks of Western cultural imperialism. Even unknowingly, a foreign missionary might impose his own cultural norms beyond what the Bible alone would mandate.

Seeking to accelerate the process, to improve the understandability of the translation, and to avoid former errors and biases, current Western-aided Bible translation projects lean heavily on “mother-tongue” nationals who receive varying levels of proactive training and reactive critique from Western consultants, allegedly reducing the need for the consultants to have such a thorough understanding of the intricacies of the target culture and language: “Muslim language communities are much more receptive to a Bible translation if the major players in the translation team are themselves members of the community, participants in...

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their culture, and speakers of their language.”

The translators may be college-educated or not; theologically trained or not; mature Christians, new Christians, or even non-Christians.

The process involves translation consultants whose responsibilities vary widely. In some cases, they exercise veto power over final publication; in others they wield no authority but function as advisors. The translation team presents the text to national test-readers and then asks the readers comprehension questions about the text to determine whether the text properly conveys the intended meaning. The translators and consultants then must determine the source of any errors in the reader’s understanding: linguistic, cultural, theological, or otherwise. Work in Muslim areas poses a particular challenge in disentangling those factors.

**Muslim Belief: The Son of God in the Qur’an**

The Qur’an accords Jesus honor as prophet and Messiah but vigorously denounces all worship of him as God or the Son of God:

> O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles. Say not “Trinity”: desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs.

This complaint against Jesus’ divine Sonship should not surprise the Christian reader; Jesus faced the same objection personally from Jewish authorities during his earthly ministry (John 10:22-39). Muslims find the notion that God has a Son reprehensible for at

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10 SIL Consultative Group for Muslim Idiom Translation paper, titled, “SIL Internal Discussion Papers on MIT #2: The Relationship Between Translation and Theology, Version 2,” January 2011, p. 3. These SIL papers are not official SIL policy statements but illustrate positions which have shaped discussion of these issues within the translation community.

11 Some organizations are taking steps to improve the theological training of staff and consultants. Such steps are encouraging, but in the assessment of the SCIM, the theological contours of translation work as a whole has yet to take the prominence that it must have. The church should play a role in ensuring that integral theological oversight becomes a sine qua non of all Bible translation practice.


least two reasons. First, the Qur'an teaches that God\textsuperscript{14} is one. Any alleged manifestation of his deity as plural (vis-à-vis, Jesus\textit{ as} God) is regarded as blasphemously warring against the Islamic notion of divine unity. Second, the idea of God having a son is alleged to corrupt his transcendence; in fact, some Muslims have been taught that the divine Sonship of Jesus would crassly require divine \textit{coitus} with Mary. Muslims understandably reject this perverse idea, as indeed do Christians. Matthew 1:23 and Luke 1:34 establish the non-sexual nature of Jesus’ conception, and Jesus’ virgin birth actually constitutes a point of formal agreement between Christianity and Islam (Q19:19-21), though the sources of authority are distinct and the theological rationales for the convictions are wholly disparate.

\textbf{Functional and Formal Equivalence}

In the mid-twentieth century, Eugene Nida described Bible translation up to that point as work which aimed for “formal equivalence,” translating the words while seeking to maintain underlying grammatical structures.\textsuperscript{15} Over and against a formal equivalence approach, Nida first championed “dynamic equivalence” and later “functional equivalence,” with the explicit goal of achieving “meaning for meaning” rather than “word for word” translation. Although the secular academy has moved onto other terminologies and paradigms for the encoding of meaning and the process of translation,\textsuperscript{16} Nida still directly informs discussion about Bible translations. His approach bore fruit in the \textit{Good News Bible} (1966) and the \textit{Contemporary English Version} (CEV; 1987-1995), both published by his long-term employer, the American Bible Society. The difference between functional and formal translation, respectively, can be seen in a comparison of English translations of Psalm 8:4 below:

\begin{quote}
Then I ask, “Why do you care about us humans? Why are you concerned for us weaklings?” (ESV) \\
And the son of man, that you care for him? (ESV)
\end{quote}

Functional equivalence, with its “meaning for meaning” ethos, avoids translating idioms directly. English does not use the “son of . . .” idiom as often as Hebrew. Therefore the CEV renders “son of man” (Hebrew \textit{ben-adam}) in Psalm 8:4 as “weakling.” This injects

\textsuperscript{14} See footnote #2 above.
\textsuperscript{15} See, for example, Eugene A. Nida, \textit{Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating} (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964); Eugene A. Nida and Charles Taylor, \textit{The Theory and Practice of Translation} (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974).
a greater element of interpretation into the text than does “son of man.” In this case, the functional equivalence translation isolates a single perceived implication of the sonship metaphor in for this passage: God is great, whereas men are weak.

Functional equivalence translation may highlight one possible dimension of “son of man” in Psalm 8, but in the process, the reader loses insight into the Hebrew sonship idiom itself. The loss of this and other phrases pregnant with biblical cultural and/or biblico-theological significance, such as “you anoint my head with oil” (the CEV renders Ps. 23:5 as, “you honor me as your guest”) or “first fruits” (the CEV simply omits the second half of Ps. 78:51) exemplifies how functional equivalence impoverishes students of the Bible who lack access to more formally equivalent versions. The passage seems clearer to the first-time reader, who probably understands “weakling” better than “son of man,” but the text also loses its organic and theoretically critical connections to “son of man” elsewhere in Scripture, and “son of . . .” metaphors in general. The individual verse seems clearer in one respect, but such dynamic translation obscures the overarching meanings conveyed by biblical typology and organic biblical themes.

Nida himself appreciated the dangers of a translation which errs on the side of immediate clarity. Commenting on the interpretive challenges of John 3:13, he and Barclay Newman note, “It seems best, however, simply to translate this verse, along with certain of its exegetical obscurities and ambiguities, and to leave the interpretation to commentators. Even though the solution might allow some slight confusion for the average reader, there is at least no serious distortion of the truth through a more or less ‘close translation.’” One naturally wonders how “slight” an immediate confusion should be tolerated, in order to avoid how “serious” a distortion of the broader truth.

Vern Poythress has emphasized this balance between literal translations which neglect initial intelligibility, and translations which over-interpret in the name of immediate clarity “at the expense of richer representation of original meaning,” leaving, “a kind of ‘baby’ Bible that addresses primarily the most ignorant.” This arguably poses fewer problems in Western countries, blessed with a glut of competing Bible translations featuring varying levels of formal and functional equivalence, not to mention paraphrased Bibles, novelized Bible stories, children’s books, commentaries, and more.

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By contrast, most of the world’s languages only have a single Bible translation, or none at all. What becomes of a church whose only Bible translation is geared to the needs of the complete neophyte, rather than the long-term disciple who needs a Bible that preserves intra-canonical themes in the transparent fashion of the original languages? Although a degree of functional equivalence is good and necessary, a theological text like the Bible loses value by translating theological terminology inconsistently or inaccurately. Thus a different standard applies to “son of the bow” than to “Son of God” or “son of man,” because “son of the bow” carries comparatively little theological freight.19

Recent History of Missions to Muslims

When one surveys the last one hundred years of Christian outreach to Muslims, a pattern emerges. Faced with Muslim resistance to the concept of Jesus as “Son of God,” each generation of missiologists has recapitulated a similar discussion: one group avers that a formally equivalent “Son of God” translation invites misunderstanding due to the idiosyncrasies of some receptor language. Another group responds that the problem lies rather in religious resistance to any analogy between divine and human relationships, especially the father/son language proscribed by the Qur'an.

For instance, in 1953, D.A. Chowdhury proposed, “[W]e should no longer use the terms ‘Khodar Beta’ (God’s Son) and ‘Hazrat ‘Isa’ (Lord Jesus) in the literature meant for Bengal Moslems; because the two terms, I venture to think, do not represent the truth. ‘Khodar Beta’ and ‘Hazrat ‘Isa’ have entirely different meanings when used by a Moslem.”20 In rebuttal, L. Bevan Jones cited a nineteenth century Afghan missionary who instead recommended that when faced with Muslim definitions of Biblical terms, “We keep the name we find in use but seek to change the Muslim’s idea as to its content.”21

Fifteen years later, Kenneth Cragg argued “The phrase [‘Son of God’] itself is not important; another phrase would do if it communicated Jesus’ ready identity in action with the perspectives and purposes of the Divine mind in his ministry and passion.”22

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19 Section B of this paper explores the consequences when Jesus’ begetting by God loses its analogically-rich genetic connotations. Recently, some who avoid biological sonship terms in translation have nonetheless acknowledged the need for consistent terminology, as discussed in the “Contemporary Examples” section below. This is a proper but inadequate step.
Kraft cited Cragg approvingly and added, “the term ‘Son’ and its coordinate ‘Father’ should, in my opinion, at any rate, be avoided. . . . The concept of the Trinity can also in most cases be avoided.”

In 1977, Arie de Kuiper and Barclay Newman claimed that Jesus’ message “was the proclamation of God’s rule, not of himself as the Son of God,” and that, for example, the Malay language did not allow the concept of sonship to be presented in non-biological terms: “anak means child in the sense of a very immediate physical relation to the parents. Moreover this word cannot very well be used as a metaphor.” As a result, they avoided the phrase “Son of God” by presenting Scripture passages to Muslims only selectively rather than try to “impose on the Muslim reader from the beginning a complete gospel where the problem of Jesus’ Sonship immediately confronts him. The Muslim reader would then be free to use some other description of Jesus, and one just as real to him as is the term Son of God to other communities of believers.” Jesus’ sonship, virgin birth, and bodily resurrection were suggested as true but supposedly optional components of Christianity, which converts might later pick up, after reaching “a more mature level of belief.”

They proposed that “Son of God” might be rendered as abdi Allah or Abdullah (both meaning “servant of God”) in Arabic translations, whereas God’s declaration in Mark 1:11 (“You are my beloved Son”) could be rendered, “You are like a son to me,” perhaps with a footnote limiting the sonship language to the sense applied to the Davidic king in Psalm 2.

Matt Finlay, a missionary in Southeast Asia whom de Kuiper and Newman quoted extensively in alleged support of their approach, responded in rebuttal:

Every Muslim from the Grand Mufti to the most ignorant peasant knows that the Bible calls Jesus ‘the Son of God.’ To produce a version in which this most controversial term has been removed would create uproar. One of the most common accusations against Christians by Muslims is that we have corrupted our Scriptures. . . . Thus to delete SON OF GOD from our New

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25 Ibid., p. 434.
26 Ibid., p. 436.
27 Ibid., p. 434.
28 Ibid., p. 437.
29 Ibid. Cf. p. 438: “Sometimes, of course, there may be reasons of tradition and church policy to retain the literal rendering of ‘Son of God’. In such cases, a helpful note might be introduced explaining that the focus of meaning is not upon biological descent but upon identity of nature.”
Testament would lay us open to further charges of changing our Text because
we know and now admit that the Bible is corrupt.  

Finlay then offered numerous Malay idioms which used “son” in a non-biological manner,
disproving de Kuiper and Newman’s claims to the contrary.

The most recent iteration of this debate begins in a similar manner, with vigorous
debate on all sides. “Experimentation” with avoidance of “Son of God” and other divine
familial terms first began in the field, but also has been promoted from high levels within
some missions agencies. In 2000, Rick Brown, influential translation consultant and former
SIL Eurasia area director and board member, claimed that Muslim resistance to sonship
language in Scripture stemmed from a misinterpreted sexual connotation:

For Muslims [the phrase “son of God”] has a single well-entrenched meaning,

namely physical offspring from God’s sexual union with a woman. . . .

[M]ost of the common people in Muslim communities are so afraid of the
term that they refuse to read or listen to anything that affirms it. Some will
not even touch a book if they know that term is affirmed in it.  

Brown proposed alternative means of describing the relationship of Christians to
God, including “the righteous servants of God” and “those close to God.”  He endorsed
translation solutions which in English would be rendered “Christ of God” or “Christ sent
from God” as possible substitute descriptions for Jesus as the “Son of God.”  According to
Brown, when the framers of the Nicene Creed identified Jesus’ Sonship with his divine
origin and nature, “although they were theologically correct, they were exegetically wrong”
because, he contended, Scripture does not defend Jesus’ divine nature through sonship
language.  He described his approach to Muslim evangelism directly:

I gently explain that ‘Son of God’ is merely a title for the Messiah, meaning
God loves him and sent him as the Messiah with power from God, so that all
people should honor and obey him. . . . If they say we worship Jesus as God,
I ask if Jesus is God’s Word whom he cast into the virgin Mary to be born as

30 Matt Finlay, “Jesus, Son of God- A Translation Problem. Some Further Comments,” The Bible Translator
31 Rick Brown, “Delicate Issues in Mission Part 2: Translating the Biblical term ‘Son(s) of God’ in Muslim
42.
33 Rick Brown, “Delicate Issues in Mission Part 2,” pp. 139-140.
34 Brown, “The Son of God,” p. 49.
a man called ‘the Messiah’. . . . Many Muslims who have read the Gospel and come to faith in Jesus cannot bring themselves to call him or themselves ‘sons of God.’

David Abernathy noted that such errant thinking resurfaces, among other concerns, the ancient heresy of adoptionism:

An even larger problem looms for us theologically if “Son of God” and “Christ” are essentially equivalent in meaning in the New Testament. If there is little difference in semantic meaning between them, then it follows that Jesus became the Son when he became the Christ. This would then mean that he is not eternally the Son, an assertion that denies a basic tenet of Christian faith held from the earliest times, even in the first century, long before the deliberations of the ecumenical councils.

As late as October 2010, SIL personnel published extended defenses of “Messiah” as an appropriate substitute for “Son of God.” More recently, Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray (hereafter, BGG) acknowledged a distinction: “terms like ‘Christ/Messiah’ should be used only to translate Christos/Meshiach and should not be used to translate huios/ben [i.e., ‘son’].” The revised version of the 2010 SIL paper mentioned above stated, “We do not recommend translating ‘Son of God’ simply as ‘Christ’, making no distinction between the terms.” For situations in which “Son of God” is either “completely misunderstood” or simply “not natural and not clear,” that paper suggested “spiritual Son of God,” “God’s Beloved,” “God’s only-one,” and “God’s beloved Christ.”

BGG still posit the inability of some languages to avoid sexual connotations for their common familial terms: “Such wordings are inaccurate because they add a procreative meaning that was absent from the original, and this obscures the important interpersonal

35 Ibid., p. 49-50. As mentioned, Brown has modified some of these ideas more recently. We include his earlier thoughts to show the contours of this debate over time.
relationships that were expressed in the original text. "  

Although some cite specific languages as unable to use biological familial terms in non-physical ways, others have provided counterexamples of these procreative terms being used metaphorically, as Finlay showed in his day with respect to the Malay language. Missionaries reported to our committee that Muslims in some areas of the world simply do not react in the emphatic, negative manner described in such universal terms by Brown, and other Muslims take offense for reasons unrelated to a perceived sexual slant in sonship language. 

To date, few national speakers have engaged in this debate in Western periodicals, making scholarly citations of their perspectives elusive. Furthermore, facing fund-raising challenges and citing potential risks to their security and harmony, translation agencies have at times discouraged their workers from openly challenging colleagues and superiors on these matters. We are aware of three missionaries who were told by their organization’s leadership that if they were concerned with the organization’s direction, they should simply quit rather than question. Some have done so.  

These accounts present a crucial question. When a Muslim says, “I must not even read this book because it calls Jesus the Son of God,” have we just witnessed a linguistic failure or a religious clash? Anecdotes prove notoriously unhelpful in settling this debate, or any debate for that matter. For every story about a Muslim who rejected the Bible until sonship language was expunged, a counter story surfaces about a former Muslim who cherishes the familial treasures of the gospel, claiming that God’s Fatherhood of Jesus and of believers actually convinced him to become a Christian. In addition, as Poythress has noted, a perpetual battle of the experts produces a very unsatisfactory situation for Christians interested in the international progress of the gospel.  

Complicating matters further, some authors publish about these issues under one or more pseudonyms, obscuring personal identity and institutional affiliations, and perhaps 

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41 See the account of David Irvine in Emily Belz, “Holding Translators Accountable,” World Magazine, October 8, 2011. SCIM also has corroborating personal correspondence from missionaries with major organizations. 
unintentionally giving their views an apparently wider base of support, as several different
names promote similar ideas. As a result, publications from the last decade have tilted
lopsidedly in favor of those who would avoid begetting terms of sonship. That tide is
turning, but in the meantime, solid and actionable primary data from the field proves both
difficult to obtain and conflicting in its findings.

Bibles for Muslims

Bible translations used in Muslim-dominated societies can be categorized in a variety
of ways, including a “church-oriented” to “Muslim-oriented” spectrum as well as
breakdowns related to who is doing the translation, and for what audience, and for what
purpose. Translations contextualized for Muslim people groups are sometimes called
“Muslim Idiom Translations” (MIT). This loose descriptor covers a wide variety of
translation types, ranging from simple substitutions of Allah for God and Isa for Jesus to
the use of a much broader range of Muslim terminology and phraseology that risks inviting
the Muslim background reader to read the Bible through an Islamic worldview.

Some translations avoid terms found in the Qur’an (e.g., “Allah” and “Isa”) while
others embrace and redefine the same terms. Some specifically avoid language associated
with the indigenous church, hoping to avoid stereotypes and reminders of local
Muslim/Christian tensions. For example, in some parts of Pakistan, “Masih” (a
transliteration of “Messiah” used in the traditional Urdu Bible) has become a surname
adopted by Christians of low-caste Hindu origin, so that the application of that word to Jesus
carries unintended associations. Another word meaning “anointed” or a transliteration of
“Christ” might skirt that problem while retaining Biblical linkage. One Turkish Bible uses
quranic diction, a practice that our Turkish pastoral respondents judged acceptable so long
as the similarity to the Qur’an remained a matter of style rather than content. However, the
style-versus-content distinction operates better in theory than in practice, and accommodative

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44 SIL-affiliated authors have proposed a Bible translation taxonomy that manifests conceptual overlap
between IM and MIT. See SIL Consultative Group for Muslim Idiom Translation, “SIL Internal Discourse
Papers on MIT #1: A Typology of Bible Translations for Muslim Audiences, version 2,” January 2011.
45 The Qur’an encourages Muslims to hold Jesus in high esteem, though the truth-claims associated with that
quranic esteem differ substantially from the Christian view of Jesus. Our committee intends to explore this
further in our subsequent work.
46 The descriptor MIT has recently been replaced, within W/SIL, by DFT, “Divine Familial Terms.” This
substitution has the advantage of identifying the central point of contention; the potential weakness, however,
is that such the narrowing of the MIT discussions could divert attention away from larger theological,
epistemological, and methodological issues associated with such translations (see Section B of this report). At
this point, as best as the SCIM can discern, the term MIT remains more common outside of W/SIL.
translations might facilitate the reading of scripture through the Muslim lens or worldview
with which the reader may be more familiar, potentially opening the door to even an
unwitting syncretism.47

Current Events 2011-2012

Debate over the “Son of God” language in Scripture entered the public evangelical
consciousness in the last eighteen months through articles in lay presses such as World
Magazine,48 Christianity Today,49 and World News Daily.50 When Overture 9 (“Toward a
Faithful Witness”)51 from Potomac Presbytery to the 39th PCA GA (2011) requested the
appointment of a Study Committee to review Insider Movements and current trends in the
translation of familial language in the Bible,52 Larry Chico authored a response,
“Considering Overture 9,” on behalf of Wycliffe/SIL.53 That response was not received
formally by the General Assembly54 but became itself a subject of analysis.55 The 39th PCA
GA (2011) adopted Overture 9, declaring “as unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider
Movement or any other translations of the Bible that remove from the text references to God
as ‘Father’ (pater) or Jesus as ‘Son’ (huios), because such removals compromise doctrines
of the Trinity, the person, and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture.”56

A consultation at Houghton College on June 20-23, 2011, entitled, “Bridging the
Divide,” agreed that Bible translations must practice “fidelity in Scripture translation using
terms that accurately express the familial relationship by which God has chosen to describe

47 Whether syncretism actually occurs remains a question the SCIM intends to address in Part Two of its report.
48 See, for example, Emily Belz, “Inside Out,” World Magazine, May 7, 2011,
2012).
49 Collin Hansen, “The Son and the Crescent,” Christianity Today, February 4, 2011,
50 Joel Richardson, “New Bible Yanks ‘Father,’ Jesus as ‘Son of God,’” World News Daily, January 30, 2012,
http://www.wnd.com/2012/01/new-bible-yanks-father-jesus-as-son-of-god (accessed April 2012), and Michael
51 See p. 4 of this report.
52 Minutes of the 39th PCA General Assembly, 2011, pp. 61-63.
53 “Considering Overture 9” has not been published formally, but its text is included in the Seaton response
cited below.
54 Minutes of the 39th PCA General Assembly, 2011, pp. 16-17.
55 Scott Seaton, “In Pursuit of a Faithful Witness,” Reformation21, November 2011,
56 Minutes of the 39th PCA General Assembly, 2011, pp. 16-17.
Himself as Father in relationship to the Son in the original languages.” 57 The Houghton
delegates formed three committees to study related issues further, and another consultation
will occur in June 2012.

PCA Pastor Scott Seaton served as lead author for an online petition, sponsored by
the Biblical Missiology coalition, which has to date gathered over 13,000 signatories from
around the world requesting that Wycliffe, SIL, Frontiers, and others “not support any
translation that replaces or removes ‘Father,’ ‘Son,’ or ‘Son of God’ from the text.” 58 The
Presbyterian Church in Pakistan voted to “sever its nexus with SIL,” 59 and the Pakistan
Bible Society ended twenty years of cooperation with SIL as well. 60 SIL denied any
intention to remove familial language in the first place 61 and suspended approval of the
debated translations, pending further discussion with interested parties. 62 The Assemblies of
God denomination presented Wycliffe with a May 15, 2012, deadline for redressing its
previous policies and actions related to familial language translation. 63 The Evangelical
Presbyterian Church is also investigating these issues, with plans to make a preliminary
statement upholding traditional divine familial terminology at its June 2012 General
Assembly. 64

In August 2011, members of W/SIL along with selected scholars gathered in
Istanbul, and produced a statement of “Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine
Familial Terms,” hereafter referred to as “Istanbul.” The initial version of Istanbul posted on

57 Text of the “Bridging the Divide” report available at George Houssney, “Assessment of the Bridging the
Divide Consultation Houghton College, NY. June 20-23,” Engaging Islam, July 2011,
http://engagingislam.org/articles/2011/7/13/assessment-of-the-bridging-the-divide-consultation-houghton-
college-ny-june-20-23 (accessed April 2012).
58 “Lost in Translation: Keep Father and Son in the Bible,” Change.org, January 2012,
Seaton was also the original author of Overture 9, the wording of which was refined and ultimately adopted at
the 39th PCA General Assembly.
59 As reported in an online letter to “Christian leaders and believers worldwide” dated February 8, 2012, by
Rev. Dr. Altaf Khan, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, http://biblicalmissiology.org/wp-
61 “SIL Responds to False Accusations,” SIL International, January 2012,
62 “SIL announces additional dialogue with partners on translation practice,” SIL International, February 6,
63 Ben Aker, Jim Bennett, Mark Hausfeld, Jim Hernando, Tommy Hodum, Wave Nunally, and Adam
Simnowitz, “The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology in Scripture Translations for Muslims,”
Executive Summary of “The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology in Scripture Translations for Muslims,”
64 Personal correspondence with George Carey, EPC World Outreach director.
the SIL website in 2011 stated that translators must avoid “any possible implication of
sexual activity by God.”65 A revision published in January 2012 omitted that overly broad
verbiage but left room for the previous policy’s allowance for alternative translations of
divine familial terms in Bibles for languages in which “a word-for-word translation of these
familial terms would communicate an incorrect meaning (i.e. that God had physical, sexual
relations with Mary, mother of Jesus. . . .).”66 No examples were given, and the only
problem cited in the statement was that controversy had arisen, without admitting the
possibility that translation misjudgments had occurred.

In February 2012, W/SIL committed to discontinue or correct all translation work
prior to August 2011 which did not meet their current policy “for the literal translation of
divine familial terms to be given preference” (their emphasis), allowing for “the few cases
when a literal translation would create an inaccurate meaning.”67 No examples were given.
In March 2012, W/SIL announced that a panel from the WEA would evaluate W/SIL’s
practices related to divine familial language translation by the end of 2012.68 W/SIL and
WEA did not mention whether the resulting report would be made public.69 Throughout all
these discussions runs the thread not only of mere scholarly disagreement, but also of
heartfelt passion and concern on the part of all concerned for those who do not know and
believe the gospel of Christ.

SIL released another longer version commentary on Istanbul shortly before our
SCIM report Part One became public. The pre-publication version of “Istanbul 3.0”70 the
SCIM received affirms Trinitarian orthodoxy and expresses a welcome dedication to “filial”
language to describe Jesus, presumably as opposed to “messiah” substitutions for huios.
Throughout Istanbul 3.0 runs a laudably worded commitment to accurate Bible translation

65 This excerpt from “SIL International Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial
emphasis ours). This excerpt is no longer available online in its original wording.
66 “SIL International Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms,” SIL
68 Tom Breen, “Bible Translator Criticized over Word Substitution,” Associated Press, April 26, 2012,
http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gRn1SS9EbhzzoyxW7cIb3OdCDyw
69 “WEA to Form Independent Review Panel on Wycliffe and SIL Bible Translation,” March 2012,
Evangelical Alliance Agrees to Lead Review of Wycliffe and SIL Translation Practices,” Wycliffe Bible
70 As noted in the Executive Summary, “Istanbul 3.0” is our designation, to distinguish this version from the
two previous Istanbul Statement versions. The April 30, 2012 version we received did not indicate the fact that
at least two previous versions have been released, each articulated as a new expression of SIL policy, with
substantive differences between the versions.
and to the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ: “Without reservation, SIL’s Scripture translation practice is to use wording which promotes accurate understanding of the relationship of Father by which God chose do describe Himself in relationship to His Son, Jesus Christ, in the original languages of Scripture.”71

Many will surely seek to honor by motive and method the heart and substance of these improved policies, translating divine familial terms faithfully. As documented above, however, the members of the translation community hold a diversity of viewpoints as to what constitutes such faithful translation and faithful application of such policies, and only the future will disclose how the translators will apply such guidelines to the thirty to forty disputed current translation projects72 as well as to any future ones.

Pastoral Concerns

Organizations such as W/SIL73 and Frontiers have served for decades as a vanguard, taking the gospel and the written Word into formerly inaccessible and neglected regions. This trailblazing effort goes underappreciated in some cases, and sadly, like many good works, is more often noticed in the occasional breach of duty than in the usual fulfillment of duty. Such work requires a pioneering mindset which brings with it the occupational hazard of potentially inadequate interface with the broader church in at least three ways.

First, the notable advances through Christian evangelism worldwide render new translation efforts successively less likely to plow totally untilled ground, introducing a new array of factors that must inform the translation work. Suppose, for example, that over generations, a church grows in a region’s major language group. Minor language groups in that same area remain unreached, sometimes due to a state of mutual animosity with the culturally dominant group which can impede evangelization. Moreover, although the smaller group may know the language of the dominant culture, the group may resist reading a Bible not written in its own language. If that new Bible translation leads its readers to believe doctrines incompatible with those of the historic church (and the larger group in the region),

71 “Istanbul 3.0”.
72 Belz, “Holding Translators Accountable.” A Florida journalist more recently reported that 200 translations are “in dispute” (Jeff Kunnerth, “Wycliffe criticized over Bible translations for Muslims,” Orlando Sentinel, April 29, 2012). This 200 figure represents W/SIL’s assessment of the scope of languages possibly impacted, rather than the actual disputed translations.
73 Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL (originally known as the Summer Institute of Linguistics) are closely intertwined organizations, with the former name more commonly used in the US and UK, and the latter used elsewhere. See http://www.wycliffe.org/About/AssociatedOrganizations/SILInternational.aspx.
it not only induces them to embrace theological error, it also runs afoul of the Bible’s insistence that faith in Christ requires all Christians dwell as members of a single body (Rom. 12:3-5; 13:8-15:12; 1 Cor. 3 and 12; Eph. 2:11-22; Gal. 3:26-29), saved by a common confession in a common Lord (Eph. 4:1-16). Furthermore, significant theological differences between the two translations may lead bilingual readers of both to wonder what the Bible really says.

Such a scenario illustrates how evangelizing relatively unreached subgroups requires pastoral sensitivity, intentional and humble proactivity toward the already-established church in that region, as well as biblical foresight for building relationships between the new church and the global church. These factors must also influence the way in which organizations develop and deliver new translations of Scripture. In the 1970s, the Lebanese Christian scholar and translator Georges Houssney took these dynamics seriously when he embarked on a new Arabic Bible translation only after receiving support from 300 affected Christian leaders and organizations. The subsequent acceptance of his finished work shows the importance of a strategy of such pastoral engagement, whereas, as Poythress has noted, “to introduce a second translation with considerable differences from the first, must be done with thoughtfulness, lest it cause division among Christians and confusion among non-Christians as to what the Christian Bible really says.”

The schisms between the Western and Eastern churches, and between the Roman and Protestant churches, revolved largely around debates about authority. On a smaller scale but with similar destructive power, when a new Bible translation discusses core concepts in terms alien to the broader international church and the already-existing indigenous church, the seeds of schism are either sown or fertilized. It may require many prayerful years to break down unwholesome cultural separations, “that they may be one even as we are one” (John 17:22).

Second, the vanguard function of Bible translators in global evangelism can generate undue pressure for the translation itself to perform the work of exposition which more properly belong to teachers and preachers of the church. The self-interpreting authority of the perspicuous Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; WCF 1:7, 9) does not relieve the church of its privilege and duty to accompany the distribution of the Word with faithful preaching.

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(Luke 24:27, 32). It is, in fact, the very Word of God that mandates not only evangelism, but also disciple-making and preaching (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). Thus, Bible translators must produce non-expository translations, recognizing the role of pastors and church leaders, and thereby serving the long-term needs of the nascent local church.

But given that expectation, if there is to be an initial church to grow long-term in the first place, churches such as the PCA must serve the work of translation by sending and supporting theologically trained long-term field workers who are equipped to respond to those who ask, “How can I [understand the Bible], unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30-31). Surely translation agencies would benefit greatly from persons and groups who, out of concern for proclaiming the gospel and for the preservation of Biblical teaching overseas, commit to sending two or four or ten field workers to each of the 2,000 peoples currently the subject of translation work. Absent that commitment, armchair criticism justifiably breeds ill will. A translated Bible, unaccompanied by faithful gospel witnesses to preach and explain that Bible, also hamstrings faithful gospel expansion and compels new Christians around the world to limp along by unnecessary and improper self-reliance.

Third, one wonders whether an evangelistic process maintains a proper eschatological vision when it aims for short term gains in the form of professions of faith, while cementing long-term problems in the form of schismatic believing communities, divorced from the global and historic church due to their immoderate local autonomy, immaturity, and sectarian theology. Those who neglect long-term planning by misapplying the doctrine of Christ’s imminent return (Rev. 22:20) may dismiss such a significant downside. Others, whether consciously or unconsciously, may carry out shallow but broad evangelism to “every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev. 14:6; similarly in 5:9 and 7:9) out of a desire to hasten the return of Christ, citing Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” But belief in an imminent Second Coming should not preempt concern for the long-term consequences of church planting or Bible translation methodology.

76 See Section B: Theological Implications.
77 John Calvin refocuses our understanding of this passage when he writes, “Christ does not absolutely refer to every portion of the world, and does not fix a particular time, but only affirms that the gospel—which, all would have thought, was immediately to be banished from Judea, its native habitation, would be spread to the farthest bounds of the world before the day of his last coming” (Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke, vol. 3, translated William Pringle, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, http://www.ccel.org/cCEL/calvin/calcom33.ii.xvi.html; [accessed April 2012]).
Caveats

Naïveté may tempt the amateur critic to assess a Bible translation’s acceptability based on some particular translation of its words back into English. Poythress warns against jumping to conclusions based on such back-translations: “[S]trictly speaking, they [readers in some national language] are not misunderstanding [the English phrase] ‘Son of God,’ but rather an expression in their native language. That expression does not have exactly the same meaning that ‘Son of God’ has in English, or the analogue in Greek. And that is the problem, not the English phrase ‘Son of God.’”\(^78\)

Few non-national speakers possess the linguistic and cultural experience to assess adequately assess the fruit of a translation in a distant language, particularly when doing so relies upon a back-translation which itself may display the bias of the back-translator. Barring some way to verify the adequacy of the back-translation itself, such an analysis of a translation essentially asks the back-translator for his opinion of the original translation while giving the reviewer a false sense of certainty about what the translation really communicates to its recipients. Therefore, although this report provides examples of back-translation in Arabic Bibles, it does so cautiously and only with the input of several native speakers. Due to the inherent limitations of back translations, we do not recommend that churches attempt to police the work of translators by scrutinizing back translations. Rather, churches should investigate the translation philosophy of translators whose work they support, employing the types of questions listed at the end of this report.

Also, such a lengthy and resource-intensive project as Bible translation necessarily involves a wide variety of scholars, experts, field workers, and native speakers whose views may conflict on any particular questions. For this reason, the church should hold translation agencies accountable for the specific advice its staff renders to outside organizations, but not for all final products which involved the organizations. The church should not assume that a particular person’s views are shared by every organization with whom he interacts, nor that such views will affect every product of those organizations. The collaborative nature of translation projects, combined with the perceived or real need for secrecy in areas hostile to Christianity, makes it difficult for observers to discern where responsibility lies. One group completes a translation after receiving translation training from a second group, only later to invite critique from a third group before finally distributing the finished product through a fourth. At the same time, for good or ill, such collaboration between organizations also

cross-pollinates policies and philosophies, making it difficult to isolate the source of a single idea or method in the translation process. Ultimately, the entire process begs for greater involvement of the worldwide church to provide much-needed (and in some cases, much-wanted) accountability in translation work and more field workers who evangelize, preach, teach, serve and plant churches.

This committee also wishes to acknowledge the limitations of its investigations. Because of the aforementioned security concerns or perceived fears of organizational backlash, numerous relevant witnesses did not feel free to share their experiences and perspectives with us. Some who chose to write or speak explicitly asked for their communications to remain confidential. These factors create an opportunity for bias in our investigation and conclusions. We have attempted to mitigate such tendencies through charitable readings, secondhand sources, and corroborative evidence. Still, the rapid developments in the last two years alone make it possible that new information will shed a different light on elements of our analysis.

**Contemporary Examples**

Of the two hundred translation projects currently underway in Muslim contexts, thirty to forty translate divine familial terms in non-biological ways. Of these few dozen, four examples from the present and recent past will suffice. Note that each of these four projects targeted languages (Arabic, Turkish, and Bangla) in regions where another Bible translation already existed. In each case, the new functionally equivalent translation intends to reach people who do not read the existing translation. If a new, functionally equivalent translation intends to supplement an existing translation, particularly if the existing translation is of formal equivalence, this fact may mitigate concerns that the recipients of the functionally equivalent translation lack access to the Bible’s original thematic language. However, to the extent that a new functionally equivalent translation supplants rather than supplements the earlier allegedly inferior translation, it remains potentially subject to the “baby Bible” criticism raised above. In any case, nothing warrants illegitimate translation practice.

1. **Bangla: Injil Sharif**

In 2005, Milton Coke’s organization Global Partners for Development published 10,000 copies (described by some as a “trial version” despite the large print run) of the *Injil*.

79 Belz, “Holding Translators Accountable.”
80 Poythress, “Bible Translation and Contextualization: Theory And Practice in Bangladesh.”
Sharif New Testament in the Bangla language of Bangladesh. The Bangla New Testament translated Scriptural references to Jesus as “Son of God” using a Bangla word approximating “Messiah.” A 2008 revision substituted the wordy “Ekanto Prio Mononito Jon,” meaning “God’s Uniquely-Intimate Beloved Chosen One.” The accompanying glossary explained the phrase only as a title of favor for Israel’s kings, without any mention of Christ’s divine nature.\(^{81}\)

W/SIL initially reported, “Neither Wycliffe USA nor SIL had any involvement in the Injil Sharif project.”\(^{82}\) However, in 2002, Milton Coke reported to one of his supporters:

> Recently, the Wycliffe senior VP for Eurasia (Muslim Languages), Rick Brown, presented two full sessions at our workshop in Bangkok last month on the subject of how to translate Son of God and other delicate Biblical expressions for Muslims. I agree with his proposals . . . [I]t boils down to fact that the Arabic language demands that a son can only mean a biological offspring . . . I think Messiah is a good New Testament translation for Son of God, and Rick Brown argues this forcefully in the article I will send you. But his argument briefly is this, looking for example at Mark 1:1, we see an equation Christ = Son of God (=Messiah).\(^{83}\)

And indeed, Injil Sharif’s original “Messiah” solution for translating “Son of God” lines up with Brown’s writings circa 2002, and the newer “wordy” solution lines up with the sort of non-biological yet allegedly filial terms which Brown’s more recent writings promote. More recently, W/SIL admitted indirect involvement in Injil Sharif:

> Neither Wycliffe USA nor SIL had official involvement in the translation. The translation team for Injil Sharif decided to use the equivalent of “Messiah” in place of “Son of God” in their first edition based upon their understanding of published articles written by an SIL consultant. In 2005, the team sought advice from the SIL consultant who had published the articles. The SIL consultant recommended that they stop using “Messiah,” and instead find a word or phrase that conveyed the divine familial relationship. After more than two years of discussion and testing in the local community, the

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\(^{82}\) “Divine Familial Terms: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions,” Wycliffe.org (accessed January 2012). This was later amended to deny any “official involvement,” as discussed below.

\(^{83}\) In an e-mail received by one of his supporters on June 17, 2002.
team settled upon a phrase that when translated back into English, reads, “God’s Intimately-Unique Loved One.”

This explanation not only omits Brown’s workshops in Bangkok; it also leaves the impression that the problem arose due to “[the translation team’s] understanding of published articles,” rather than admitting that at the time, Brown actually (and even “forcefully,” in Coke’s opinion) advocated an approach which Brown himself later disavowed.

Talk of “trial versions” of translations can confuse or deflect readers. To some degree, every published Bible translation is a “trial version” subject to revision as wisdom and experience dictate. Crossway Bibles published the original English Standard Version in 2001 and then a revised version in 2011. The New International Version of 1984 revised the New Testament of 1973 and the whole Bible of 1978. However, once a work enters the public realm through sales or free distribution and is used by churches and individuals, it loses its “trial” status. Electronic distribution makes recall of such “trials” even less feasible than for printed copies.

Furthermore, the Qur’an conditions Muslims to see changes in Bibles as vindication of the Qur’an’s claims about the corrupt, unstable nature of the Bible, compared with the allegedly divinely dictated Qur’an. Such concerns should not completely squelch a healthy desire to improve previously published translations in Muslim-dominated societies. One must not allow unbelievers to dictate the terms of Bible translation, the very thing to which we object concerning divine familial language. Even so, translators must show proactive sensitivity to all manner of culturally conditioned perceptions, including the concept of revising a holy text.

2. Arabic: “Stories of the Prophets”

In the 1990s, W/SIL participated in the production of the “Stories of the Prophets” Arabic New Testament audio dramas translating the Greek pater as “rabb” (used with the non-familial meaning “Lord” throughout the Qur’an) instead of a word closer to English “father.” Examples of word replacement solutions in particular verses include:

(a) Luke 1:32, 35 - “Son of the Most High” and “Son of God” become “the awaited Christ.”

(b) Luke 4:3 - “If you are truly the Son of God” becomes “If you are truly the Messiah of the most high God.”

(c) Luke 4:9 - “the Son of God” becomes “the Messiah of God.”

(d) Luke 6:36 - “your Father is merciful” becomes “God is merciful.”

(e) Luke 11:2 - “Father” in the Lord’s Prayer becomes “Our loving heavenly Lord.”


(g) Luke 24:49 - “I will send the promise of my Father upon you” omits “of my Father.”

(h) Mt 28:19 - “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” becomes “in the name of God and his Messiah and the Holy Spirit.”

The “Stories of the Prophets” recording of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans also omitted Romans 1:2-4, which refers to Jesus as Son of David and Son of God, as well as the explanation of Jesus’ propitiating sacrifice in Romans 3:25-31, and more. It is not uncommon practice to remove sections of a text when adapting it for in a dramatic or audio presentation, but the omissions cited above unavoidably reflect intentional word avoidance of familial language for the Godhead due to a faulty translation paradigm and strategy.

In response to complaints, expansion of this audio series has ended, and some of the debated recordings have been withdrawn from SIL-affiliated web sites. However, some problematic recordings remain available. W/SIL staff members have also issued conflicting statements about whether the dramas should be considered a sort of Bible or not.

This audio series exemplifies the fuzzy and debated boundaries between formal translation, functional translation, paraphrase, and derivative products such as Bible storybooks. Westerners show varying degrees of tolerance for calling Bible paraphrases a “translation” or “The Bible.” Many Muslims, in contrast, believe that the Qur’an ceases to be the Qur’an once it has been translated from Arabic into another language, and thus even common translations like that of Yusuf Ali receive the title, The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an, rather than the Qur’an. In general, paraphrases ought to distinguish themselves explicitly from Bible translations in their titles. But even then, readers unaccustomed to the Western availability of multiple approaches to sacred texts may not appreciate such a

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87 These particular verses of introduction to Paul’s “gospel” are arguably paradigmatic for our understanding of Jesus as the Son of God. We will consider this passage more fully in Section B: Theological Implications.

88 Arabic recordings in some dialects for some passages (e.g., 2 Samuel 7, some gospel versions) are available from http://alanbiya.net and http://www.sabeelmedia.com as of late April 2012. Adam Simnowitz provided English back-translation of these recordings to our committee. See also “Reviews and Reports,” Answering Islam, http://answeringislam.org/reviews.html (accessed April 2012).

89 See alanbiya.net and sabeelmedia.com (accessed April 2012).

distinction. Indeed, the uneducated reader (or listener) for whom these paraphrastic works are intended may also be the reader least likely to distinguish between the authority status of such works and the authority of the Bible itself. This ill-acquaintance could be overcome with education and experience—but, then again, so could ill-acquaintance with the phrase “Son of God.” The potential for the hearer or reader’s theological maturing does not absolve translation organizations of their responsibility in promoting insufficient or misleading renderings of key biblical concepts, especially the revelation of God the Father in his Son.

3. Arabic: True Meaning

The Syrian Arabic novelist Mazhar Mallouhi, who describes himself as “a Muslim follower of Christ,”91 spearheaded The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ.92 This Arabic language version of the four Gospels and Acts formally translates “Son of God” as ibn Allah (using the most common Arabic word for “son”) but routinely follows it with a parenthetical expression meaning “God’s Loved One.” The translation also avoids calling God “Father” (the most common Arabic word for “father” is ab) in favor of words connoting “Lord” or “Guardian,”93 as shown in the following examples:

(a) Matthew 5:16 - “your Father” becomes “God your supreme guardian.”
(b) Matthew 6:9 - “Our Father” in the Lord’s Prayer becomes “Your Lord.”
(c) Matthew 6:18 - “your Father” becomes “Your Lord.”
(d) John 3:13 - “the Son of Man” becomes “the Master of humanity.”
(e) John 3:17 - “his only Son” becomes “his only-beloved.”94
(f) John 17:11 - “Holy Father” becomes “My Holy Guardian” (“al Muhaymin”).

David Harriman, who formerly served for 18 years as the director of development/director of advancement with Frontiers, shared with our committee that Mallouhi was a Frontiers staff member. Harriman also reported, “During my tenure at Frontiers, some 600 Frontiers donors contributed more than $214,000 to publish this volume [True Meaning].”95 Frontiers support for this work continues. In January 2012, Frontiers’ United States Director responded to a concerned U.S. pastor by describing the Biblical

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92 Hereafter referred to as True Meaning.
94 This verse provides only a substitution, and no parenthetical.
95 By personal correspondence with David Harriman.
Missiology online petition\textsuperscript{96} as a “serious false witness to the truth.”\textsuperscript{97} He also forwarded to the pastor an extended e-mail by SIL staff member Larry Chico, defending \textit{True Meaning} and the other translations which this report critiques.\textsuperscript{98}

An online report of Mallouhi’s publishing company, Al Kalima, announced the publication of \textit{True Meaning} in March 2008 and featured a testimonial about the beauty of a bound copy.\textsuperscript{99} Interviews with Mallouhi and Rick Brown described its linguistic excellence and successful sales.\textsuperscript{100} When objections arose, W/SIL described the current as merely a “draft text” that was “unfinished and is still being revised,”\textsuperscript{101} and that, “[b]ased on user feedback and discussion, the local translation committee made the decision to revise the first edition and include the traditional divine familial terms at the recommendation of the SIL consultant.”\textsuperscript{102} However, as seen in the current edition, even “the traditional divine familial terms” can be subverted when redefined by parentheticals which govern their interpretation.

\textit{True Meaning} contains 100 pages of essays covering the inspiration of Scripture, the cultural background of the New Testament, and the relationship of Jesus to God. One essay recognizes that those who are born again will “express many of the characteristics of God’s essence.”\textsuperscript{103} Another essay rightly says that “If, therefore, we want to know what God is like, we need to look at Jesus,” but this quality of Jesus is not connected to his Sonship.\textsuperscript{104} Apart from these two references, the essays consistently teach that Jesus’ Sonship means that he is “God’s vice-regent”\textsuperscript{105} who has a “deep spiritual bond”\textsuperscript{106} with God. Jesus is once

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{96} See Section A, “Current Events 2011-2012.”
\textsuperscript{97} Our committee has received other reports of MIT critics being accused of “false witness” when the author under critique felt his argument was not accurately described. To be sure, such accusations travel both directions. While we affirm the importance of careful representation of the views of others (%LC 143-145; \textit{WSC} 77-78), allegations of misunderstanding are part and parcel of complex academic exchanges and ought not to be occasions for ready accusations of sin.
\textsuperscript{98} By personal correspondence with pastor Jim Baugh.
\textsuperscript{101} The original, unpublished Wycliffe document is quoted in “Fact Check: Biblical Missiology’s Response,” p. 6 (accessed April 2012).
\textsuperscript{103} “Kinship and the Question of ‘God's People’” (essay #18) in the \textit{True Meaning} Preface.
\textsuperscript{104} “The Ideas of Inspiration and Revelation in the Injeel, the Tawrat, and the Writings of the Prophets,” (essay #3) in the \textit{True Meaning} Preface.
\textsuperscript{105} “Titles of the Messiah” (essay #10), “The Relationship of Jesus to God” (essay #11), and the separate introductions preceding the respective texts of the four Gospels in \textit{True Meaning}.
\textsuperscript{106} “What is the Meaning of the Expression Son of God?” (essay #12) in the \textit{True Meaning} Preface.}
called “the eternal Word of God,” but his eternal Sonship receives no discussion. Primed with this understanding, the reader who encounters repeated references in the Bible text to “the Son of God (God’s beloved one)” seems likely to interpret Jesus’ Sonship in purely messianic and social ways. \(^{108}\)

Responding to objections publicized by the Arabic-fluent Assemblies of God minister Adam Simnowitz, Al Kalima circulated a letter \(^{109}\) explaining its position: *ibn Allah* required the parenthetical “God’s Loved One” disclaimer because (1) “it means ‘biological son,’ whereas the original Hebrew and Greek words [i.e. *ben* and *huios*] meant ‘social son,’” and (2) the target audience perceived a sexual connotation in the phrase.

Al Kalima used a similar argument for the outright substitution of *ab*, the usual Arabic term for “father,” with “*wali*,” whose range of meaning includes “helper, legal guardian, manager, tutor, crown prince.” \(^{110}\) One of the ninety-nine names of God in the *Qur’ān* (Q13:11, *inter alia*), *wali*, in Arabic speech and thought, describes a role of either God or a human adult, but with no concept of begetting. A man may be a *wali Allah*, (Q10:62), a “friend of God” \(^{111}\) and thus a “saint.” The *Qur’ān* applies *wali* to a human friend (Q4:173; 41:34), an avenging relative (Q17:33), a man serving Satan (Q19:45), and Satan himself (Q4:119; 16:63). *Wali* relates to *ab* as “guardian” does to “father” in English, and as *kritēs* (judge, protector; cf. Heb. 12:23; 2 Tim. 4:8) in Greek does to *pater* (e.g., Ps. 68:5 LXX); although in some instances the term may refer to the same entity. However, identical referentiality does not entail indistinguishable meaning.

Uniform translation of *pater* as *wali* thus has the same contorting effect as if “Son of Man” were translated “weakling” throughout the whole Bible, or if “Messiah” were substituted for “Son of God” globally. To support its claim that the original Biblical familial terms are primarily social rather than biological, Al Kalima cited two articles in which BGG \(^{112}\) state, “to express divine familial relationships, the Bible uses Greek and Hebrew

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107 “The Ideas of Inspiration and Revelation in the Injeel, the Tawrat, and the Writings of the Prophets” (essay #3) in the *True Meaning* Preface.
108 Section B: Theological Implications addresses “social” sonship terms.
109 Received from Simnowitz by the SCIM.
social familial terms that do not necessarily demand biological meanings.” For a response to the idea that *ben*, *huios*, *ab*, and *pater* are primarily social familial terms, see “Section B: Theological Implications” below.

W/SIL downplayed their consultant’s role as simply “a single voice among many” who offered opinions on the process, with the implication that W/SIL should not be held responsible for deficiencies in the product. However the SIL consultant in question, who uses various pseudonyms in published articles, defended the usage of *wali* as “closer to the Biblical meaning” of *pater* precisely because *wali* is social rather than biological. This suggests (1) that the SIL consultant supported the conclusions of BGG, and (2) that the translation of *pater* followed the “single voice” of the SIL consultant on this matter, rather than acting against it. Indeed, the solution for which the SIL consultant originally lobbied (i.e., omitting *ibn Allah* in the main text) was arguably worse than the compromise solution eventually adopted (i.e., including *ibn Allah* along with the vitiating parenthetical limiting the term to mean, “God’s Loved One”). But, as we will see more fully in Section B: Theological Implications, this parenthetical fails to deliver the critical essence of the biblical concept of *huios theou*, Son of God.

4. Turkish: *Noble Gospel*

Sabeel Media, an American company staffed by SIL members, distributes *The Exalted Meaning of the Noble Gospel Written By the Disciple Matthew*, a Turkish version of Matthew’s gospel translated with assistance from Frontiers staff. Turkish-language Bible paraphrase appears on right page adjacent to the Greek-Turkish interlinear on the facing page. This left-side interlinear page, surrounded by a decorative border intended to emphasize the Greek text’s status as the original Biblical text, provides the usual Turkish words for “son” and “father” with respect to Jesus and God, but the same verses on the paraphrastic

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115 By personal e-mail correspondence.

116 Hereafter referred to as *Noble Gospel*.

117 An interlinear Bible contains the Hebrew or Greek text in its original word order, with a translation below each word (and between the lines of original text, thus “interlinear”), so that the translated words appear in an order which does not form a coherent thought in the target language. In addition, due to the nature of an interlinear the translation to the target language, interlinear Bibles provide wooden, non-contextual definitions of each term, usually based upon the primary lexical usage.
page sometimes uses the Turkish words *vekil* and *mevla*, meaning “representative” and “protector,” respectively.\textsuperscript{118} Western translators who worked on this project explained their rationale: “The messenger should do whatever he can to remove unnecessary obstacles that hinder the recipient from fully engaging with the message.”\textsuperscript{119} Since Muslims are less likely to willingly receive divine familial language, and would likely require explanation of what it did and did not mean, formal translation of such language was seen as an “unnecessary obstacle.”

Accordingly, *Noble Gospel* renders the Trinitarian baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19 as, “. . . the name of the Protector, his Representative (deputy, agent) and the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{120} In discussing this text, Brown invoked Justin Martyr’s description of baptism in his “First Apology,” concluding that in the early church, “[W]hen the Trinity was invoked at baptism, there was flexibility with regard to the way the persons of the Trinity were named.”\textsuperscript{121} Brown believed this information should influence the translation of the Bible itself.

Sometimes *Noble Gospel*’s footnotes use a traditional familial term such as “son” but restrict its meaning. For instance, in the English version of Matthew 3:17, God declares of Jesus, “This is my beloved Son.” *Noble Gospel* translates “son” with *vekil* and includes a footnote which explains how the translators wish their readers to understand “Son of God”:

God Almighty speaks from heaven and calls Jesus Christ ‘my beloved son’, which has the meaning of ‘my one and only Representative who is my Beloved’. . . The title “Son of God” was a widely used expression used to portray the Messiah, who was a king chosen by God . . . According to the Jews, “God’s Son” means “God’s beloved ruler” and is equivalent with the title ‘Messiah’. . . Because this king makes authorized announcements as

\textsuperscript{118} According to SIL’s “SIL Internal Discussion Papers on MIT paper #1” (p. 9), the Baluchi New Testament published in 1999 by the Pakistan Bible Society used a similar interlinear approach, with the paraphrase text containing a term meaning “Beloved of God” instead of “Son of God.” The SIL paper notes that this “Beloved” term was “used primarily for an only Son.” Section B of the current report discusses potential problems with this solution.

\textsuperscript{119} By personal communication received directly from the translators to the SCIM in early 2012. The translation committee of this Turkish Gospel of Matthew also crafted an English translation of the book’s preface, and granted the SCIM permission to reference it here.


God’s representative, it has been deemed appropriate to use the expression Representative of God.122

The interlinear pages were included “to facilitate research done by those who are researching monotheistic religions.”123 The Noble Gospel’s preface describes the regular Turkish-language translation within as a paraphrase, saying, “Such a translation does not use a ‘word for word’ translation but instead focuses on the meaning that was intended in each sentence. The question asked here is; ‘If someone tried to communicate this thought in our language, Turkish, how would they express it?’”124 This directive leads the reader to rely upon the paraphrastic interpretation as the most basic source of understanding and underscores the primacy of the allegedly clearer paraphrase against the wooden literalism of the interlinear. Whether or not the paraphrase succeeds in that aim, the preface makes clear which page controls the meaning of the other. As with the in-text parentheticals in the True Meaning translation in Arabic, readers who see “Son” (interlinear page) but then understand it to mean only “representative” (paraphrase page) will gain little from the interlinear. Again one must wonder whether the interlinear tool effectively serves the target audience most likely to need an explanation of biblical sonship language.

A coalition of thirty Turkish churches protested against the distribution of this Turkish translation starting in 2007, to no avail.125 In February 2012, Bob Blincoe of Frontiers defended the Noble Gospel, arguing that the combination of paraphrase, interlinear translation, and explanatory footnotes “help a conservative Sunni Muslim audience know what the Bible really says.”126 In contrast, a translator with three decades of field experience reported, “As I understand Turkish, Islamics, and the Bible, I can say the [Noble Gospel] Turkish Matthew is worse than the New World Translation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.”127

**Footnotes, Glossaries, and Other Paratextual Solutions**

BGG have suggested that “priority should be given to wordings that express the familial components of meaning in the text, while supplying the other components in the

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123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
127 Personal communication from this translation worker who requested to remain anonymous.
paratext.”¹² Eight notes and other paratextual apparatus may indeed be necessary and helpful. But the main text should feature a formally equivalent translation for key theological terms, leaving accurate functional interpretations for paratext or footnotes, rather than the other way around, especially when the reader is likely to have access to only one translation. This is so for at least two reasons:

First, as the Injil Sharif and Noble Gospel examples show, a brief footnote on the topic “son of God” oversimplifies, and depending on the interpretive commitments of the translator, can even mislead. Such an overarching biblical theme, while it can be accurately summarized, cannot be effectively unpacked for any reader in a few words or even a few sentences. More detailed approaches (e.g., prefatory or appendiceal essays on various theological topics) conceptually could work, provided that the theology articulated in those essays expressed accurately the Scripture’s teaching as represented in historic, confessional orthodoxy. The narrow theological perspectives of the essays accompanying the True Meaning exemplify the practical pitfalls facing translation projects which engage in extended exegesis without input from the constituencies that underwrite the entire translation project. Yet satisfying all the various constituencies supporting the translation effort proves essentially impracticable. Would an article on baptism or tongues or church structure meet with the simultaneous approval of Presbyterians, Assemblies of God, and Anglicans? Translators might well breathe a sigh of relief to hear that churches do not expect Bible translators to navigate those waters. Given the respective liabilities of both short and long footnotes on such key topics as “Son of God,” a formally equivalent translation of key theological terms, without a controlling footnote which overly restricts the main text’s meaning, best achieves Nida’s ideal to avoid “serious distortion of the truth.”

Second, the mediatory effect of the paratext upon the main text remains a subject of ongoing debate,¹²⁹ and over-reliance on footnotes may engender lack of confidence in the main text.¹³⁰ As with paraphrases and more formal translations, one cannot assume that worldwide readers will properly apprehend the authority relationship between footnote and main text. Some readers may treat footnotes as effectively inerrant; others may ignore them

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¹²⁹ E.g., “Throughout the twentieth century, it is in the paratext that the struggle over who has the right to mediate and who maintains the authority to present and interpret this literature is fought” (Richard Watts, Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005], pp. 3-4); “[T]he terrain of the paratext poses intriguing problems for any speech-act analysis . . . ” (Richard Macksey, “Foreword,” in Gérard Genette, Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997], p. xix).
¹³⁰ BGG (“The Terms of Translation,” p. 111) make this very point about text and paratext: “If the two are in conflict, readers become distrustful of the translation.”
entirely. This confusion simply underscores the serious stakes raised by translation methods: matters of Scripture, the Persons of the Trinity, and salvation.

Istanbul 3.0 correctly insists that translators test the effects of paratext, to ensure that readers derive the intended meaning from the translation as a whole. And indeed, the translations discussed above did undergo field-testing for meaning. However, if translators settle for an inadequate meaning for divine familial relationships, testing will not ensure that the translation affirms and promotes an orthodox Trinitarianism. We turn therefore to consider the theological implications embedded in the proper translation of Jesus as Son of God.
Section B: Theological Implications

Introduction

Scripture’s origin as a divinely out-breathed revelation (2 Tim. 3:16-17; WCF 1.4, 1.8, 1.10) sets it apart from any other writing. Originating from God himself (2 Pet. 1:19-21), Scripture deserves unique treatment in its translation with a methodological stewardship warranted by its divine substance and inherent divine gravitas (WCF 1.9-10). WCF 1.4 underscores the sweeping implications of the Bible’s divine authorship: “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.”

Accordingly, belief in and obedience to this received Word of God must comprehensively shape our handling of Scripture, including the task of its translation. Put otherwise, Bible translation work must operate under the perpetual scrutiny of Scripture’s unique authority and self-interpreting contours (WCF 1.9), with a self-conscious and methodological submission to the divinely given words of the text. Only such a posture respects God’s given revelation to us, as we receive his authoritative and clear speech, delivered in human words (by divine condescension and gracious accommodation). Such humanly accommodated speech cannot be severed from its divinely orchestrated, intended, and revealed essence; the divine context governs and comprehensively shapes the condescended (human) one. In short, any handling of Scripture must never extract the human from the divine, in a way that treats the historically accommodated form of a text apart from its divine character. Thus, both translator and translation methodology must submit methodologically to Scripture’s authority, as faithful translation starts and ends with Scripture as divine Word.

Contemporary Translation Methods and the Authority of Scripture

During and after the Reformation, the matter of Scriptural authority was more than a conceptual, epistemological debate. Expressing its implications beyond an intramural ecclesiastical power struggle, Gregg Allison summarizes the practical and missiological import of biblical authority: “At stake was the translation of the Bible into the languages of

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the people, encouragement to read and study personally the Word of God.”¹³³ For the
Protestants, who captured the vision of Tyndale and Wycliffe, the task of Bible translation
was a matter of evangelical and missionary obedience. The Protestant’s “audacious
willingness . . . to translate Scripture into thousands of vernacular languages around the
world”¹³⁴ stemmed in part from the conviction that since the Bible was in the lingua franca
of its original recipients, it ought be translated into contemporary tongues of all peoples.
Convinced that human language in all its tongues and dialects was a sufficient vehicle to
express the truth of the gospel accurately and adequately, the Reformers elevated both the
Word preached and the Word printed. Each one demanded the other.

The mission agencies that participated in the currently disputed Bible translations
require their staff to affirm the ultimate authority of the Bible in faith and practice.¹³⁵ To our
knowledge, no translation worker has openly denied or criticized this policy; to the contrary,
concerns about the accuracy of these translations immediately are met with clear
declarations of intent to translate the inerrant Scriptures faithfully. However, because no
bright white line separates reasonable cultural accommodation from syncretism, when an
audience finds elements of Christian teaching incomprehensible or reprehensible, each element
must be assessed with Christian wisdom and a multitude of counselors (Prov. 11:14). All
parties in the recent controversy surely recognize at least potential danger for a translation to
yield turf to offended readers, neglecting the theological and ecclesial¹³⁶ consequences
which ensue when critical biblical terms are abandoned.

Naturally, one asks which terms are critical, lest religious and cultural outcry
functionally silence the authority of Scripture as the divine Word of God. A translation
which avoided cultural offense at theological expense would effectively eclipse Scripture’s
intra-canonical interpretive authority (WCF 1:9).¹³⁷ Again, no translation worker sees
himself in that position or intends to denigrate Scripture’s authority. But self-evaluation never
replaces internal and external oversight. As Blincoe notes, churches and denominations
should monitor parachurch organizations “in the same way that county governments or state

¹³³ Gregg R. Allison, Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,
¹³⁴ J. Todd Billings, The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of
Scripture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 119.
¹³⁵ E.g., Wycliffe UK’s Statement of Faith, http://www.wycliffeassociates.org.uk/faqs.htm#belief, (accessed
May 8, 2012), and Frontiers’ U.S. Statement of Faith,
¹³⁶ See below for more discussion about the theological implications of altering biblical language concerning
Jesus’ Sonship, including the understated effects upon the Church. Unity of Christ’s body is, in part, upheld by
the biblical terms which sustain our shared confession.
¹³⁷ See David B. Garner, “Did God Really Say?” in Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and
governments monitor private industry.\textsuperscript{138} Missions agencies which accept such oversight recognize that those industriously working on board the boat do not always notice when it drifts off course.

To Whom Is the Bible Written?

The \textit{WCF} begins not only with a chapter on Scripture, but more specifically with the Scripture’s \textit{necessity to the church}. Scripture’s necessity is wed to its intended audience. So, \textit{WCF} 1.1, having established the inexcusability and helplessness of mankind, declares,

\begin{quote}
It pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manner, to reveal Himself, and to declare that will \textit{unto His Church}; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of that the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort \textit{of the Church} against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary . . . (emphasis added)
\end{quote}

Scripture is necessary “\textit{for the church’s salvation};” and thus “\textit{the Bible was given by God to his church}.”\textsuperscript{139} To borrow again from the \textit{WCF}, it is the \textit{worldwide people of God} “who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures.”\textsuperscript{140}

Since it is revelation, or more particularly \textit{redemptive} revelation, Scripture purposes to disclose the divine will of God, to expose the meaning of the salvific works of God, to preserve his people in holiness, and in it all comprehensively to point to the person and work of Jesus Christ on behalf of his church. A covenantal document, Scripture intends particular content – it conveys authoritatively, sufficiently, and clearly the redemptive message necessary for the people of God. Divine purpose includes Scripture’s recipients – that is, its audience is those to whom God intends to communicate his redemptive revelation. This latter conclusion derives clearly from the necessary work of God in saving his elect people, and also from the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination (\textit{WCF} 1.6), enabling hearers/readers to receive \textit{understandingly} and to understand \textit{receptively} the Word of God.

With the divinely revealed expansion of the covenant from Old Testament to New Testament, wherein God purposes to redeem people from all tribes, tongues, and nations

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{WCF} 1.8.
\end{flushright}
(Gen. 12:1-3; Rev. 4-5), the scope of the covenant extends beyond its Hebrew contours. The gospel message comes to people of all languages and nationalities (cf. Acts 2). In keeping with the covenantal organism of Scripture (WCF 7.1-6), the gospel preached to the nations is the covenantal gospel – one in which the sons of Abraham from all nations are his children by faith (Rom 9:6b; Gal. 3:26-29). Three key implications quickly surface.

First, the worldwide people of God also need the Word from their covenant God, and hence, by good and necessary consequence, the task of Bible translation becomes an essential component of the expansion of the church around the globe. “Scripture came . . . in concretely human and localized languages, limited with respect to their intelligibility. This fact gave rise to the immediate necessity of translating God’s Word into other languages as it goes out into the world to testify of ‘the mighty acts of God’ (Acts 2:11).”¹⁴¹ Divinely revealed covenant expansion compels the church to translate Scripture for those who do not yet have God’s Word in their tongues. Accordingly, the Westminster divines called explicitly for Bible translation (WCF 1.8), recognizing the expanded character of the covenant community – one whose Word comes to all true sons of Abraham regardless of their tongue (cf. Acts 1-2). Because of God’s gracious will to redeem his people and to reveal himself by the written Word, Scripture belongs to all of his people from all the nations – those who, by the work of the Holy Spirit, now believe and who will believe.

Second, the fact of Scripture’s intended readership ought shape the character and method of translation. In other words, unnecessarily archaic, so-called “ghetto,” or incomprehensible language ought be meticulously avoided. Precisely because Scripture possesses divine meaning embedded in the divine words to his people, meaningful translation must always concern itself with understandability. The divine purpose in communication should comprehensively govern Bible translation. The proper frame of reference for translation method is Scripture’s divine purpose to his appointed hearers, and to preserve the integrity of this thoroughly divine and theological revelation, formally equivalent translation of key biblical terms like “Son of God” and “Father” should prevail.

Third, translation decisions governed by conceptual adaptation to unbelieving audiences threaten the integrity of Bible translation. While a vast variety of books, booklets, and tracks should combine with oral proclamation to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to unbelievers, methods of Scripture translation ought not be driven or shaped primarily by evangelistic zeal. This qualification ought not dampen missiological fervor nor compromise the goal of understandability of biblical translation. On the contrary, motivation for

evangelism and disciple making springs directly from the clear Scriptures. Yet because unbelievers naturally and willfully suppress the revelation of God (cf. Rom. 1:18-32), it is only the Spirit freely given by God who redeemingly illumines their understanding (1 Cor. 2). Saving comprehension of Scripture comes by the Spirit changing the unbeliever, not by the translator inappropriately modifying the Spirit-authored Scriptures – even out of well-intended motivations. Thus, while understandability is a vital component to faithful translation, redemptive understanding of the divine Word is a divine gift, delivered successfully not by theologically weakened translation but by the Spirit’s power in applying divine redeeming grace. Applying to Bible translation what Nabeel Jabbour assesses as the frame of reference for gospel proclamation, we affirm that “we should not tailor our message to fit the Islamic theology or their system of reasoning and thus possibly compromising the doctrine of the Triune God.”

When Bible translators honor the divinely intended audience of Scripture and submit to Scripture’s own teaching about the essential role of oral messengers, they can avoid the unnecessary burden of ill-advised, unbelieving or untaught receptor-governed adaptations of Scripture. Faithful witness to the nations involves the preaching and explanation of the written revelation of the Father about his Son, as the Spirit takes the written Word and opens the eyes of his people to its saving truth (1 Cor. 1-2). Thus, proper understanding of the shared duty of gospel messengers with translators protects (and restores!) translators from yielding to the temptation of ungodly over-reliance upon anthropological, cultural, and linguistic analysis. Instead, the written Scriptures commend persevering oral witness (Matt. 28:18-20) and patient oral exposition (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 4:1-5).

In summary, while the Spirit of God surely has drawn many converts to the Lord Jesus Christ through Bible reading alone, Scripture itself presents speech (preaching, teaching, and evangelism) as the ordinary means of gospel proclamation (cf. Rom. 10:10-15; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). Faith ordinarily comes by hearing, not by reading. Scripture translation then ought not seek to bear the weight of exhaustive explanation on its own, as oral proclamation must complement Scripture’s written form. Not foremost a book of evangelism, Scripture comes to God’s covenant people to disclose his gracious work in their redemption. As God’s book for his people – both current and future sons and daughters of God – Scripture possesses its own theologially infused language which frequently co-opts existing terms that, in their inspired use, require explanation of their divinely revealed content (e.g., redemption, adoption, glory, etc.). Building upon the foundation of apostles and prophets

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143 The Gideons, for example, have dedicated themselves to Bible distribution in public facilities, hospitals, and hotels. They have selected translations that possess the wide Church’s affirmation (KJV, NIV).
(Eph. 2:19-22), God raises evangelists, pastors and teachers in the local expressions of his church (Eph. 4:11-13) to carry out the necessary tasks of preaching, teaching, evangelism, and apologetic defense (1 Pet. 3:15). The Word proclaimed draws people to the Word written; the Word written compels the Word translated to the nations – for those who already believe and for those who will.

**Translation Method and “Acceptability” Parameters**

As discussed in Section A, while certain components in “dynamic equivalence” theory possess plausible value, typically the theory establishes reader-centric “acceptability” parameters as determinative for proper translation, creating significant and inevitable abuses when cultural hegemony confronts Biblical authority. A receptor group’s resistance to a particular biblical translation does not readily expose whether or not that resistance grows primarily from cognitive dissonance due to selected terms (or phrases), or from a spiritual distaste for the theological meaning of those terms. When even the respondent’s own explanation of his reaction may reflect a *post hoc* rationalization, the translator cannot easily or certainly separate comprehension difficulty from spiritual revulsion.

Moreover, in the former case, the best solution may be faithful teaching of Scripture rather than selecting more functionally understandable – but theologically inferior – terms. In the latter case, the solution requires faithful teaching of Scripture to expose the heart to its spiritual resistance to divine revelation. In both cases, the work of the Holy Spirit is needed to illumine the mind and to convict the heart (1 Cor. 1-2).

The greater problem with governing translations by subjective “acceptability” parameters lies in its primary orientation to the receptor rather than to the divine authority of the text. The methodological concerns here are thoroughly theological, raising issues of prolegomena (doctrine of God, doctrine of Scripture and epistemology), soteriology (with special attention to the noetic and heart effects of sin; cf. Rom. 1:18-32), and pneumatology (the role of the Holy Spirit in redemption and illumination). The debate itself commonly fails to give appropriate attention to the functional relationship of the Holy Spirit to Scripture, as its primary Author. The very One who has *out-breathed* Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; cf. 2 Pet. 1:19-21; *WCF* 1) is the One who illumines the minds of the regenerate to understand it (1 Cor. 2:6-16; *WCF* 1.5-6). Accordingly, the ministry of the Holy Spirit

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144 This term has been largely supplanted by “functional equivalence” in Bible translation circles. The terms overlap but are not strictly identical. See Kerr, “Dynamic Equivalence and Its Daughters,” pp. 5-6.
occurs in perfect solidarity with his own revealed parameters in the inscripturated Word
(WCF 1.10). “The testimony of the Holy Spirit is no separate revelation outside the Word,
like a voice from heaven. The Spirit does not add a separate message to the Word. This
would be in conflict with the perfection of Scripture, which has been inspired by the Spirit
himself.”

In step with reader-response trends in biblical hermeneutics, Eugene Nida paved
the way for recalibrated receptor-centered translation theory.

It is not surprising that some of the last writings of Nida on translation theory
would be called Meaning Across Cultures, and that From One Language to
Another would include so much emphasis on the sociosemiotic approach to
translation. Nearly all theories and writings over the last 20 plus years have
swung much more to social and cultural issues related to translation. This has
marked a major sea change in translation thinking, what is known as ‘the
cultural turn’ in translation studies, viewing translation as an act of cultural
communication rather than of scientific transfer. It is no longer thought that
translators should just be bilingual, but that they should be also bicultural as
much as possible.

Translation decisions governed by unfiltered or insufficiently filtered audience receptivity
manifest a subtle but significant theological supposition; in such cases, the audience
effectively serves as final translation arbiter. Resulting translation products unavoidably
compromise Biblical fidelity not only in the verbal content but also in their methodological
reversal of authority, in which translators effectively bow to the creature rather than the
Creator/Revealer (Rom. 1). Ironically, such methodological compromises can occur
unwittingly for evangelical motivations of gospel clarity! Contrastingly, terms selected for
translation must, by carefully reflecting the words of Scripture, faithfully express the
organically rich divinely revealed meaning of Scripture, even when the terms selected
confront cultural unbelief, elucidate spiritual ignorance, or challenge religious and social
customs. The theologically resplendent terms for God the Father and Jesus the Son simply
typify this principle.

146 J. VanGenderen and W. H. Velema, Concise Reformed Dogmatics. trans. Gerritt Bilkes and Ed M. van der
147 E.g., Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge,
148 See Nida, Toward a Science of Translating; Nida and Taber, The Theory and Practice of Translation;
analysis of dynamic equivalence theory, see Leland Ryken, Translation Differences: Criteria for Excellence in
Reading and Choosing a Bible Translation (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).
God’s Speech, God’s Family; Our Speech, Our family

God is history’s first Speaker. As the Triune God, he enjoys a rich communicative fellowship among Father, Son and Spirit, and in fact, “the persons of the Trinity function as members of a language community among themselves.” In his acts of creation, providence, and redemption God’s interaction with his creation often takes the form of speech. Through speech, God created the world (Gen. 1:1-5), sustains the world (Heb. 1:3; 2:10), directs the course of history (Lam. 3:37-38), raises the dead (Mark 5:41; John 11:43), and calms the storm (Mark 4:39-41). The eternal Son is the Word (John 1:1) made flesh (John 1:14) who called himself truth (John 14:6), so that the incarnation of Jesus becomes an act of divine translation which reveals the Father by speaking (Heb. 1:2) and simply by his existence (John 14:8-11). The Son speaks to the Father (John 17), and the Spirit listens to (John 16:13) and speaks to (Rom. 8:26) the Father. Even the nature of human language (speaker, speech, and recipient) finds analogy in the nature of God: the Father speaks, the Son is the Word, and the Spirit empowers Christians to hear fruitfully. Man, God’s creation and image bearer (Gen. 1:27), also speaks. Human speech was confused as a result of mankind’s sin (Gen. 11:1-9), but the ultimate re-gathering of God’s people will unite speakers of every language in a single chorus of praise to God (Rev. 7:9-12), a restored harmony of which the coming of the Holy Spirit gave a foretaste (Acts 2:1-11). Human speech thus finds both its origin and its destiny in God.

Just as our speech reflects the God who made us, so do our families. Human parent/child relationships derivatively and finitely reflect the original (underived) and eternal Father/Son relationship within the Trinity. As God the Father eternally begat his nature to his Son, we, by analogy, temporally pass on elements in our nature to our progeny.

[T]he Christian church has no tradition of understanding the phrase “Son of God” as metaphor. Rather, Jesus’ eternal sonship is seen as a metaphysical reality. Linguist/translators normally regard “Son of God” as a metaphorical description because it is not literal, i.e., physical; that is, if something is not literal/physical, it must be metaphorical.  

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152 Abernathy, “Translating ‘Son of God’ in Missionary Bible Translations,” p. 177 (emphasis original).
To put it more precisely, “Son of God” is not a simple metaphor, rendering human experience wholly equivocal to divine reality. Rather, the human concept of begotten-ness derives mutatis mutandis from the divine relationship of Father and Son. Human begotten-ness is simply one more way in which humans finitely reflect their Creator/Father, with the necessary conceptual modifications to account for the creaturely reality in contrast to infinite and eternal God. The persons of the Creator God have no beginning and no limit, and humans are bound by their creaturely limitations; but the Archetypal/ectypal\textsuperscript{153} analogue establishes human identity and relationality.

The vast range of meaning of biblical terms for “son” includes concepts biological and metaphorical. In the biblical world, paternity and filial terms include not only the important ontological-genetic identity, but also functional and vocational derivation. Engendering and social dynamics inextricably correlate and presuppose one another: “your father determined your identity, your training, your vocation. He generated you not only biologically, but, shall we say, functionally.”\textsuperscript{154} Even the metaphorical usages of “son” retain contours of identity, of organic (and frequently generative) relationship whether personal or conceptual, and of imitation: “The true sons of Abraham… are not those who carry Abraham’s genes, but those who act like him.”\textsuperscript{155} The metaphorical usage here relies upon the conceptual-genetic identity, presenting the faith of true believers to be of one in its substance with Abraham’s. Put otherwise, the biological dimensions of human sonship facilitate the genetic, imitative and functional integrity of even the metaphorical usages of the familial terms. A “social versus biological” sonship dichotomy misses the mark etymologically and culturally,\textsuperscript{156} as functional/social concepts actually depend upon the generative, identifying, and genetic contours of the filial terms employed to relay them.

We normally think of begetting in sexual terms, because, with the exception of legal adoption, our own children are be gotten through sexual means. Such sexual content is not absolute in the meaning of “begotten-ness” as applied to God, however, and the church has long used strongly biological begetting terms for Jesus’ Sonship (e.g., \textit{natum} and \textit{gennēthenta} in the Latin and Greek versions of the Nicene Creed, respectively). To be sure, albeit mysteriously, human sexuality exposes certain ontological \textit{analogies} between God and mankind. The archetypal function of divine ontological relations between eternal Father and


\textsuperscript{154} D. A. Carson, \textit{Jesus the Son of God:. A Christological Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed} (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, Forthcoming in late 2012), p. 13. The committee was kindly granted an unedited pre-publication version of this manuscript for its use.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., p. 18. See John 8:39; Rom. 9:1ff; Gal. 3:7, 9.

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Contra} BGG, “The Terms of Translation,” pp. 106-120.
Son ectypally manifest themselves in human biology and sexuality, particularly as the genetic identity and imitative connectedness of families derivatively reflect the Triune God. Summarily, human genetic solidarity (oneness, imitation, and derivation) finitely reflects divine unity and fellowship, and therefore, only the biological terms of human familial identity adequately carry the contours of meaning revealed from God about his Tri-unity. In short, the son reflects his father, because the Son reflects his Father.

Human familial themes evidence themselves not only in biological families, but surface even in metaphorical expressions: in English (e.g., “The Daughters of the American Revolution”), and Arabic (Q2:117 refers to a traveler as *ibn es-sabeel*, literally “son of the road”\(^{157}\), and many other languages. The Bible sees the same in both the Old Testament (“arrow” in Job 41:28 is literally *ben-kesheph*, “son of the bow”) and the New (e.g., the sons of Abraham and sons of the devil in John 8:38-44; the sons/offspring of Abraham in Rom. 4:11-12 and Gal. 4:29, etc.).\(^{158}\) Every culture which survives does so through parents and children. Thus one is hard pressed to find a language which does not draw on the power of familial metaphors for concepts of begetting and solidarity. Universality of begotten-ness begets universality of genetic, biological familial language.

**Translation of “Son of God” Overview**

In the world of biblical translation, the controversy has recently centered upon the question of Christ’s eternal Sonship in contrast to his messianic (redemptive-historical) Sonship, and translators’ decisions to replace “Son” or “Son of God” has depended, in part, on the aspect of Christ’s Sonship to which translators believe the text refers.\(^{159}\) Historically, New Testament hermeneutics have depended on the assertion that Scripture both implicitly and explicitly describes Jesus’ pre-existence as the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. The Nicene and Athanasian Creeds refer to Jesus as an eternal Son, “begotten of the Father before all worlds” (Latin: *ex Patre natum ante ómnia sæcula*; Greek: *ton ek tou patros gennêtanta pro pantōn tōn aiōnōn*). The Belgic Confession (1561), Article 10, states, “He is the Son of God not only from the time he assumed our nature but from all eternity (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).” The Westminster Shorter Catechism 21 asks the question: “Who is the Redeemer of God’s elect?” The answer points to Christ’s eternal pre-existence: “The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, *being the eternal Son of God*, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures,

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\(^{157}\) This illustration demonstrates explicitly how the Arabic common biological term for “son” extends beyond the sexual scope of meaning.

\(^{158}\) Carson, *Jesus the Son of God*, 16-20.

and one person, forever.” The historic confessions of the church with united voice uphold
the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ as a faithful summation of biblical teaching.

**The Messianic Son**

Scholars such as James D.G. Dunn have resisted Jesus’ pre-existence in the New
Testament, with the exception of a few isolated texts in the book of John. In other words, in
many scholars’ eyes, the Synoptic Gospels and the Epistles remain silent on pre-existence.
Dunn believes that later documents such as the Nicene Creed on the Son of God as an
eternally divine person deviate from the actual text of the Bible. Dunn and others claim that
the New Testament essentially presents a sonship strictly limited to a *functional* identity as
Messiah:

> When we compare our opening statements of the Nicene Creed with the
picture which has emerged from the NT it is clear that there has been a
considerable development over that period in early Christian belief in and
understanding of Jesus as the Son of God. There was no real evidence in the
earliest Jesus-tradition of what could fairly be called a consciousness of
divinity, a consciousness of a sonship rooted in pre-existent relationship with
God.\(^{161}\)

Given Dunn’s wide influence in the last half-century, it is hardly a surprise to find
similar-sounding sentiments in some Muslim-Idiom Translations (MITs). Of course, Bible
translators who promote an exclusively or primarily messianic Sonship may hold that Dunn
did not guide their steps. However, putting aside the question of actual influence,
examination of Dunn still holds value, because critiques of his approach hold equally true
for approaches which parallel his. Dunn admits pre-existence in Johannine theology yet
marginalizes it in view of his analysis of the early church’s theological development,
paralleling the emphasis on functional, royal, and social sonship prominent in certain
familial language MIT advocacy.

Criticism of Dunn’s denial of pre-existence has been overwhelming and decisive.
Not only do our confessional documents contradict it (*WCF* 8.2-3), but so also does the
preponderance of conservative biblical scholarship.\(^{162}\) Only a hermeneutically strained and

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\(^{160}\) Emphasis ours.


\(^{162}\) See, e.g., Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and
unbiblical agenda-driven view denies pre-existent divine Personhood/Sonship of Jesus to
passages such as Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-3 (cf. WCF 8.2).
“It is fanciful to suppose . . . that God sent into the world someone who became his Son after
he arrived.”163

Translation strategies that resort to replacements for “Son” such as “Wisdom” or
“Word” or even primarily social sonship terms have critical theological liabilities, since
those terms understate or even eclipse the Son’s pre-existent personhood.164 In consequence,
translations which present this inadequate view of Jesus, absent any explicit affirmation of a
pre-existent Son, will not only bear a greater similarity to the non-eternal, non-divine Jesus
of critical scholars, they also will find notable affinity with the quranic view of Jesus Christ
as a great man – but still only a man.

Furthermore, a theology of Christ’s pre-existence (for instance, as the eternal divine
Word of John 1) does not always yield a Bible translation which consistently delivers the
theology of eternal Sonship, especially if the context of passage in question does not
explicitly orient the reader to that sphere of reference. Yet a focus on the eternality of Jesus’
Sonship might be the very key to demonstrate its non-sexual nature; Jesus cannot very well
have a sexual origin if he has no origin at all.

But what of the prominence of Christ’s redemptive-historical, incarnate Sonship,
which the New Testament seems to emphasize? Careful study reveals a more complex
interplay between Jesus’ eternal identity and his redemptive historical Messiahship. For
example, in Paul’s multifaceted theology, Christ’s incarnate Sonship, grounded in his eternal
filial identity, takes on the deep and rich redemptive-historical structures of biblical
eschatology, covenant promise and fulfillment, and messianic, royal appointment. Romans
1:3-4 actually expresses an eschatological attainment of Jesus’ messianic Sonship, attained
at the moment of his resurrection. In other words, in his resurrection, Christ commences a
“new and unprecedented phase of divine sonship. The eternal Son of God, who was born,
lived, and died [kata sarka], has been raised [kata pneuma] and so, in his messianic identity
(of the seed of David), has become what he was not before: the Son of God in power.”165

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163 Carson, Jesus the Son of God, p. 30.
164 See Rick Brown, “Delicate Issues in Mission Part 1: Explaining the Biblical Term ‘Son(s) of God’ in
Muslim Contexts: What Christians Mean By It” IJFM 22.3 (Fall 2005): p. 95.
165 Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg,
to the spirit.” Cf. David B. Garner, “The First and Last Son: Christology and Sonship in Pauline Soteriology,”
Following the interpretive insights of Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, and John Murray, Gaffin insists that Christ’s unprecedented status as resurrected Son of God, while distinct from his eternal Sonship, cannot be severed from it. No features of the filial complex can be ripped from the other, as the biblical presentation of Christ is the composite of all the eternal, ontological, redemptive-historical, and eschatological features of the Jesus the Son of God.

Those who only equate “Son of God” with Jesus’ messianic kingship distort the more obvious connections concerning Jesus’ relations to the Father, creating an aberrational theology. The exclusive identification of “Son of God” with Davidic rule improperly relies upon texts such as Acts 13:32-33 to recapitulate or at least to sympathize with the ancient adoptionist heresy that Jesus did not become the Son until his enthronement, his temporal and royal “begetting.” Those who claim that Jesus did not become the Son until this enthronement (John 10:34-36; Acts 13:32-33; Rom. 1:4, commonly cited) must overlook the primary significance of texts such as Matthew 1:18-25; Mark 1:11; Luke 2:49; John 17:1-6; Romans 8:32; and Hebrews 13:8, all of which point to a hermeneutically-formulaic pre-existent, personal, relational Sonship, not one restricted to the coronation grid. Again Gaffin points out how such thinking confuses what Jesus has become (the begetting of “My Son” in Acts 13:33) with who Jesus eternally is (Son of God). Summarily, the complex reality of the conceptual and relational features of Jesus’ Sonship weaves together eternal ontology, revelation, creation, redemption, and consummation.

The Synoptic Gospels and the Son of God

As John Murray suggests, “Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi marks one of the most notable incidents in the public ministry of our Lord.” This confession and Christ’s own claims have been objects of resistance since their utterance. Truly, the offense of Christ as Son of God is nothing new, and contemporary denials or denigration of Christ’s Sonship are equally uncreative. Yet even the first century offense to Jesus’ claims about himself did not prevent him from expressing those filial claims with regularity and consistency, and his unrelenting expressions escalated the deep offense to his receptor audience. For Jesus, divine filial truth trumped receptor/reader hermeneutical would-be hegemony; divine
revelation of the Son of God (Matt. 3:17; 14:33; 17:5; 2 Pet. 3:17; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35; John 1:33, 34; 11:27; cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-17) confronted cultural and religious resistance. The New Testament speaks most regularly about the messianic, functional, and redemptive-historical Sonship of Christ, in a way that actually fortifies the eternal Sonship presupposed. “It is only in the perspective of the dignity that belongs to him as the intra-divine Son that we can properly assess the messianic subordination...” Notwithstanding that implicit and explicit affirmation of Christ’s eternal Sonship, and though the Dunn camp of scholars has errantly truncated Jesus’ identity into primarily non-eternal categories, certain of its insights regarding the New Testament emphasis on Christ’s redemptive-historical identity ought not be neglected.

Demonstration of the interplay between the ontological Son and the incarnate Son could be carried out throughout the New Testament, but we mention here two illustrations from the Synoptic Gospels, the primary Scriptures toward which scholars have rendered relentless denials of eternal ontology.

First, consider Matthew 11:25-30, in which reciprocal language and shared eschatological authority signal Jesus’ ontological identification with the eternal Father:

At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus ought not be seen simply as an agent of a great God, a mere emissary passing along someone else’s judgment and grace. It is here that we see Jesus as not just a Mediator of salvation, but its divine, Personal cause. At the same time, however, we see the Son’s submission to the Father. The entire passage becomes a stepping-stone toward Trinitarian understanding, rather than simply another affirmation to the Jews that the Messiah had come. Wellum puts his finger on the key point emerging from this text:

The only way to understand this reciprocal/mutual knowledge of the Son is in categories that are antecedent to Jesus becoming Messiah. Why? Because it is

168 Ibid., p. 75.
nigh impossible to think of Jesus’ knowledge as merely a consequence of his messianic mission; it has to be tied to pre-temporal, even eternal relations.\textsuperscript{169}

In short, God’s (and Christ’s\textsuperscript{170}) eschatological kingdom and the Lord’s royal, messianic mission find their fullest biblical meaning in the Sonship of Jesus Christ, in its rich eternal and redemptive-historical contours.

\textit{Second}, consider the Gospel of Mark, the one gospel perhaps most frequently argued to lack echoes of Christ’s ontological Sonship. This argument receives particular merit for many, because of the frequently held Marcan priority of the Synoptic Gospels. To begin, some manuscripts of Mark 1:1 omit its explicit reference to Christ as Son of God. While this introductory filial phrase is likely original, other features highlight Jesus’ ontological pre-existence in this terse yet poignant presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Thielman points out that, within a short time after announcing Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Mark cites questions regarding whether Jesus is the God of Israel. “Why does this man speak like that? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (2:7). As Mark and his readers well know, only God can forgive sins.\textsuperscript{171} Attempts to obviate Christ’s deity explicitly fail, as the Son of God here unequivocally expresses his divine identity.

At his baptism, the voice of God from heaven speaks in a way reminiscent of Psalm 2:7 and 42:1, but once again with a revealing twist. The term “beloved” evokes memories of Genesis 22:2, where God commanded Abraham concerning “your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.” By referencing this typological event in the life of Abraham, Mark discloses how Jesus is no mere servant. He is a beloved Son. This Abrahamic reference also extends Mark’s thought beyond Psalm 2:7, indicating that “Son of God,” whatever else it may mean, constitutes an “original and essential communion with God.” This reference therefore presupposes a connection to his pre-existent identity as God the Son.\textsuperscript{172}

Mark 14:61-65 provides a less controversial but no less poignant evidence of Jesus’ divine Sonship which focuses not on messianic expectations, but rather on a claim made by Jesus to the question, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” He replied that he would


\textsuperscript{170} Cf. Carson, \textit{Jesus the Son of God}, 28 n21.


\textsuperscript{172} See William L. Lane, \textit{The Gospel of Mark} NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 57. “In this context, ‘Son’ is not a messianic title, but is to be understood in the highest sense, transcending messiahship.” See also Edwards who cites early church sources, such as the Epistle of Barnabas, also drawing the connection between the baptism and the sacrifice of Isaac (James R. Edwards, \textit{The Gospel According to Mark} PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], p. 25).
be indeed “the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” The divine import of his answer is reflected clearly in the high priest’s emotional response and charge of blasphemy. No mere messianic claim would have necessitated this serious charge. As Edwards notes,

“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” (14:61) . . . The “you” is emphatic, and “the Blessed One,” a Jewish circumlocution for God’s name, means none other than “God’s Son.” The effect is to put a full christological confession into the mouth of the high priest! . . . According to Mark, Jesus openly affirms the high priest’s question, “I am!” (God’s Son). In v. 62 Jesus immediately interprets his affirmation with reference to the Son of Man in Dan 7:13 and Ps 110:1, . . . an affirmation that sets him unambiguously in God’s place.173

Does Son of God Mean Messiah, Representative, or Beloved Chosen One?

Arguing that the New Testament primarily presents Jesus Christ as the king who fulfills Old Testament anticipation, and in a Dunn-like fashion that his Sonship is effectively synonymous with functional and royal terms, some translators have adapted the filial language for Jesus Christ to something less biologically-construed, intending to more properly deliver the messianic meaning of “Son of God” to the hearers. In view of the strident response to Jesus’ Sonship by some and the fact that prominent messianic dimensions to Christ’s sonship appear in Scripture, at first glance, translation of “Son of God” with an exclusively messianic term might appear noble and missiologically compelling. But several questions emerge. On what basis is the linguistic, interpretive conclusion deduced? On what basis is a narrow or exclusively functional meaning of “Son of God” in a specific text of Scripture determined?

As previously noted, some scholarship denies the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ or, at the very least, finds this matter less than primary. If the translator, in sympathy toward Dunn’s view or one like it, denies Jesus’ pre-existence as articulated in the Westminster Standards or more likely determines that a particular text does not concern itself with eternal ontology, the idea of replacing “Son” with some other term becomes much more palatable. Such a tactic, however, neglects other questions. Does “Son of God” bear only a meaning determined by its immediate textual context? How can such a decision be made? What are the implications of such a decision in view of the organic integrity of ontological and redemptive-historical dimensions of Christ’s identity?

Other questions surface concerning the doctrine of Scripture itself. If Scripture is the divine Word of God, then how must the divine contours of Scripture affect such interpretive decisions? In view of the divine authorship of Scripture, does not the intra-canonical organism of Scripture require translation decisions to submit to the divinely-purposed selection of terms – especially those that expose central themes of the divine revelation? Put otherwise, on what basis could a translator properly determine that “Son of God” refers to Christ’s messianic status without any intended reference to his eternal Sonship? Whose supposed intent functionally determines the range of meaning in a given text? Is it the intent of a man quoted in Scripture (e.g., the Jewish high priest), the intent of the human author of a particular book of the Bible, or the intent of the divine Author of all Scripture?

As WCF 1.9 puts it, because Scripture is the ultimate authority, interpretation begins and ends with Scripture. Scripture is its own final arbiter in interpretation; it must also function in this role for translation, which is an inherently interpretive endeavor. Scripture presents Jesus as the Son of God in the full complex of ontological and functional meaning, and each reference to God the Son – to whatever degree it emphasizes a particular dimension of his filial identity – presents the Second Person of the Trinity. Bifurcation of ontology from filial function distorts the theological composite of divine Sonship embedded in the biblical term. Therefore Bible translations must always describe divine relationships in begetting terms, because God has revealed himself this way, and the organically woven contours of Sonship present an irreplaceable expression, without which the gospel of Jesus Christ becomes another gospel. So Poythress puts it, “Language that explicitly indicates a sonship relation between Jesus and God the Father needs to be present in translations, both for accuracy and for the spiritual health of the church. The same goes for translating the word ‘Father’ (Greek pater). The Father-Son relation is an important aspect of Trinitarian teaching, which needs to be communicated clearly in translation.”

The Stakes

Seeking to accommodate the receptor audiences, many in recent translation debates disregard what is lost by abandoning literal translation of the most explicit familial terms. We turn now to considering some ramifications for altering the biological language for Christ’s Sonship.

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174 Vern S. Poythress, “A Clarification on Translation of ‘Son’ and ‘Father.’”
175 Overture 9 states that the PCA “declares as unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider Movement or any other translations of the Bible that remove from the text references to God as “Father” (pater) or Jesus as “Son” (huios), because such removals compromise doctrines of the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture.” While most translators would affirm this language, and even the “Istanbul 3.0” document expressly affirms the need for retention of explicit familial language for God, the SCIM wishes to
Value of the begotten meaning of “son.” BGG recently introduced a novel taxonomy of Greek and Hebrew kinship, dividing lexical categories along the lines of social versus biological sonship, with the unusual conclusion that a term normally thought of as a single word with a contextually-determined range of meaning should instead be understood as two words with the same spelling, the same pronunciation, and similar meanings: “In Biblical Hebrew, the absolute noun yeled signifies a male child or youth, but the relational noun yeled (same spelling) signifies a kinship relation of biological son (e.g., 2 Kings 4:1).” 176

Bob Carter has challenged these claims of BGG, concluding, “based on actual data from the Hebrew text, this conclusion cannot stand.” 177 An SIL translator in Asia, responding to BGG’s idea that the New Testament uses ὦ&omicron [huios] to avoid biological implications, surveyed the New Testament usage of various sonship terms. He concluded that the authors, “were more likely choosing ὦ&omicron [huios], a term whose prototypical, default meaning did indeed include biological reproduction, over and against another term, τ&omicron[k]νον [teknon], which was more frequently employed than ὦ&omicron [huios] when the focus was on purely social, non-ontological/essential relationships.” 178

Notwithstanding such questions about the validity Brown’s taxonomy itself, the more critical and entirely overlooked question concerns the value of begotten solidarity for “Son of God.” Brown and others have recently moved away from “Messiah” and the like, and toward familial terms for divine relationships, while at the same time opposing biological terms, in favor of social sonship terms. Of course, it must be said that Jesus is not the biological son of his heavenly Father, who is “a most pure spirit, invisible, without body” (WCF 2.1). Arguing backwards from etype to Archetype, we note, however, that the begotten-ness relating the First and Second Persons of the Trinity to each other resembles biological sonship much more than social sonship. Jesus is not simply loved by God, or treated as a Son by God as a functioning son might be. Jesus reveals his Father’s character, will, and nature, because of who he is. Jesus does not merely function as Son or act in a filial underscore the need for retaining the common biological terms for Father and Son in Scripture, not just terms which fit within a broader definition of the familial range.

176 BGG, “The Terms of Translation,” p. 102. BGG define “biological terms” as “kinship relations based on procreation.” Such identification of “biological kinship” solely with “procreation” (i.e. the sexual origin of the relationship), rather than with the ongoing implications of begotten-ness, is inadequate and problematic.


178 “What Greek Filial Terms Did the New Testament Authors Have in their Toolboxes? A Response to Brown, Gray, and Gray.” In May 2012, SCIM received a draft version of this paper and was granted permission to quote from it, provided the author remain anonymous. BWGRKL, BWGRKN, and BWGRKI [Greek] Postscript® Type 1 and TrueTypeT fonts Copyright © 1994-2011 BibleWorks, LLC. All rights reserved. These Biblical Greek fonts are used with permission and are from BibleWorks (www.bibleworks.com).
fashion. He eternally is the Son of God, and as the incarnate, Messianic One becomes the Son of God in power at his resurrection (Rom. 1:3-4). The ontological is the *sine qua non* of the redemptive-historical.

A “social son” term necessarily misses the integral themes which arise from the generative, begetting nature of biological sonship language (as distinguished from the sexual aspect of biological sonship). A similar set of errors arises from a “social Father” who is protector, guardian, or head of household, but not necessary begetter. Intensifying the problem, whereas begotten sonship terms would normally possess a high level of consistency in meaning across languages, social sonship terms would likely vary more considerably, since social practices differ from culture to culture. **Therefore, familial terms used in Bible translations should preserve the concept of begotten-ness, which certainly resides in a biological sonship/fatherhood term rather than a social sonship/fatherhood term.** Because human biological sonship is normally sexual as well, this approach will necessitate explanation that Jesus was begotten in a non-sexual way. Despite this need for clarification, a biological sonship term delivers divine meaning in a way a social sonship term cannot.

The genetic connection is also seen with other appearances of “son” in Scripture. Psalm 45:6-7 speaks of the Davidic king (begotten of God according to Ps. 2:7, and a son of God, his father, according to 2 Sam. 7:14) as “God” (*Elohim*) specifically because “you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness” as God does. To be sure, the royal function of Sonship is prominent in these texts, but the Son’s righteous imitation of the Father who has begotten him divulges more than temporally cast social/functional concepts.

By way of another example, Jesus told the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Note that the

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179 Even in countries with non-coital *in vitro* fertilization, distinctive familial terms capturing that reality have little popular currency.

180 Some see “Exalted Son from God” as a potential alternative to “Son of God.” Certainly, Jesus is a Son, and Jesus is from God. But what does “Son from God” accomplish, apart from avoiding the historic rendering? The term “Son” irreducibly implies relationship with a father; and who is that Father, if not God? The reader offended by “Son of God” may not understand “Son from God” correctly without taking offense at it as well, so “Son from God” solutions would require field testing to determine whether readers understand them as genuine begetting terms, not just terms of close association or place of origin. See SIL Consultative Group, “Technical Paper Number 5,” p. 4.

181 Carson (in *Jesus the Son of God*) discusses the begetting dimensions of sonship at length, noting that Hebrews 1 applies Psalms 2 and 45, as well as 2 Samuel 7, to show that Jesus as the Son of God is greater than angels, in accord with the lofty language applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1:2-4.
Pharisees perceive a sexual inference in Jesus’ language (v. 41, where they protest, “We are not born of sexual immorality.”), exposing the evident biological nature of the language Jesus chose.

The revelation of Christ’s Sonship in Scripture necessarily includes concepts of solidarity and engendering. That is, the Father does not beget the Son in a mere social (or economic) action; this begetting language speaks analogously of the eternal oneness of Father and Son. The economic activity of the Father sending the eternal Son as incarnate Son, as well as the interweaving of the *imago Dei* with familial identity through Scripture of both the first and Last Adams, underscore the importance of the genetic, familial freight borne in the language of Son – eternally, creatively and redemptive-historically. Thus the language of the *WCF* affirms eternal and Messianic Sonship, with the former the basis for the latter:

> It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of His Church; the Heir of all things; and Judge of the world; unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. (8.1)

> The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of time was come, take upon Him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. (8.2)

**Intimacy.** A word that helps frame our appropriate New Testament understanding of “Son” is “intimacy.” Careful analysis of the use of “Father” in the Old Testament tells us a great deal concerning the meaning of “Son” in the New Testament. For example, while the Old Testament uses YHWH as God’s name 7,000 times, God only calls himself “Father” 20 times. By contrast, in the New Testament, Paul uses *pater* 40 times and John 122 times, highlighting the close and multifaceted relationship of Father to Son. Likewise, “Son” or

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“my Son” occurs 124 times in the New Testament. While “Son of God” carries many meanings from commissioning, obedience, and service to sacrifice, it also bears the unmistakable and unique connotation of intimacy, a familiarity and closeness not adequately summed up by the term “Messiah” or some other non-familial, non-begotten, or more distantly familial term. Moreover, the interplay between “Messiah” and “Son of God” occurs at critical junctures in Scripture. The prominence of the familial language in the New Testament actually points to the culmination of divine redemptive pursuit in which the Creator/Redeemer/Father receives, by the work of the Messiah, sons and daughters of all the nations of the earth, whom he loves in his own Son irrevocably and intimately.

The character of biblical soteriology as familial. Familial language lies at the heart of the gospel. Christians are sons of Abraham, saved by a faith like his (Rom. 4:11-17; Gal. 3:7). Christians are, as John marvels, the children of God (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1-3). Even Pauline adoption (huiosthesia) entails not only legal contours but also deep structures of theological solidarity and eschatologically transformative significance: “adoption is by parentage a forensic concept; yet it fulfills itself in the bodily transforming change of the resurrection.” This rich familial identity with Christ as our Brother, and with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, defines the distinctly rich contours of resurrected gospel identity – both now and in the not yet.

In related fashion, we should note how various interpenetrating strands of rich theology spring from select biblical terms. For example, throughout Scripture imago Dei, created and adoptive sonship, the ministry of the Holy Spirit (as the breath of original life and the breath of new resurrection life), the Fatherhood of God and Sonship of Jesus Christ, all possess interlocking and enriching features which, for proper understanding, depend upon their explicit and consistent translation. We become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4); we must be peacemakers because our Father is a peacemaker (Matt. 5:9); we must be perfect because our Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). The whole of creation cries out for the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:16-23), who as Jesus’ brothers will be glorified and conformed to the image of the One True Son (Rom. 8:28-30), who in turn is not ashamed to call us brothers (Heb. 2:10-13; Matt. 28:10). Faithful translation of such terms allows readers to grasp divine revelation: the singular authorship of Scripture, its intracanonical unity, the deep structures and realities of redemptive grace, the splendor of covenant theology, and the eschatological age ushered in by the eternal Son made incarnate.

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(Heb. 1:1-4). For these themes to deliver their divine filial freight in the Second Person of the Trinity, no mere Messiah-king, representative, social son, or even Uniquely Beloved One, will do.

**Universality of the church—shared expressions, shared Christ.** The universality of the gospel and the catholicity of the church cannot be detached from the familial language for God as Father, Jesus as Son, and believers as the *family* of God. When we share theological terms across languages, we uphold the solidarity of the family of God (Ephesians 4). Just as baptism marks the entry in the community of faith, so baptism explicitly in the *name* of the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” (Matt. 28:18-20) not only honors God’s divinely revealed identity, but also sustains the church’s vital and precious solidarity. Sons of God speak the language of redeemed family members, because believers from all the nations make up one family in the Son of God.

**Summary of Principles**

1. Scripture is the Word of God. Scripture’s inherent divine authority demands a particular measure of reverence, theological self-consciousness, and methodological caution in biblical translation.

2. Scripture is a gift of God for his elect people. Recognizing its covenantal character — that it is God’s Word for those whom he has and will redeem — precludes accommodation of Scripture for the receptor’s religious palatability.

3. Scripture translation must be combined with evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and leadership training, all in dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit through his Word.

4. Scripture reveals Jesus Christ as the Son of God: eternal, messianic, and resurrected. References to Christ’s sonship entail a complex of meaning, which cannot properly be atomized. Scripture presents Christ’s Sonship as a rich complex of ontological, redemptive-historical, and eschatological themes. While certain texts may possess stronger emphasis on one *aspect* of his Sonship, faithful translation recognizes that the theologically rich term of “Son” necessitates the strongest genetic filial term available in the receptor language.

5. Consistent language for the Son of God is critical to biblical integrity, and with an eye to the archetypal character of eternal Fatherhood/Sonship for familial identity in creation and redemption (Eph. 3:14), the most common generic sonship term in a given language will almost always best convey a son’s engendered relationship to his father and deliver biblical meaning faithfully. Any confusion about this terminology will need correction by teachers and preachers, but no such changes to the text of Scripture in any language are tolerable.
6. Translation methods must honor Scripture’s verbal and plenary authority, the Holy Spirit’s Authorship, and the divinely selected terms for the manifestation of the character of God and the work of his redemption. Cultural, religious, or linguistic resistance are not sufficient reasons to change terms when those terms carry critical theological weight within particular books of Scripture or in any intra-canonical way.

A Return to Istanbul

In closing this section on theological implications, we return to the four Bible translations discussed in Section A. Each of these translations was completed prior to the Istanbul consultation (August 2011), so it may be helpful to compare these translations with the documents from Istanbul to see how the new SIL guidelines interact with actual translation products which limited or avoided biological sonship terms.

1. Bangla: *Injil Sharif*

The 2005 edition translated “Son of God” as “Messiah,” and thereby violates the Istanbul commitment to filial language. The 2008 edition solution of “God’s Uniquely-Intimate Beloved Chosen One” may convey the special affection God the Father has for his unique Son, but such social terms, while allowable as “filial language” under Istanbul 3.0’s guidelines, omit crucial information about Jesus’ relationship with the Father. The glossary entry describing this term only as a title of Israel’s kings would require substantial revision to adequately capture the eternally generative aspects of Jesus’ pre-temporal and incarnate Sonship.

2. Arabic: “Stories of the Prophets”

These “Stories” clearly violate the Istanbul standards since they strategically avoid Bible verses which refer to Jesus as “Son of God,” translate “Son” as “Messiah,” and translate “Father” as “Lord” or “God.”

3. Arabic: *True Meaning*

The 2008 edition initially used “guardian” or “Lord” for *pater*. The “Lord” solution would not pass muster under Istanbul 3.0, but “guardian” and “only-beloved” might be justified as “social filial terms.” The 2008 edition most commonly rendered “Son of God” literally as *ibn Allah*, which conforms to Istanbul 3.0. However, if *ibn Allah* is followed by a parenthetical “God’s Loved One,” it seems likely that in the mind of the reader, *ibn* will be
limited to a social term of affection. Istanbul 3.0 emphasizes the need to test such paratext for “effectiveness” in the targeted community, but might deem a strictly social understanding of Jesus’ sonship as “effective” for conveying the proper filial meaning, when in fact social or royal sonship without begotten-ness should be declared inadequate. The accompanying essays which limit Jesus’ Sonship to his messianic status clearly violate Istanbul 3.0. Finally, the Istanbul documents do not indicate whether false interpretations which stem from the reader’s false religious convictions are grounds to alter key Biblical terms; greater clarity on this issue would enhance Istanbul’s specificity.

4. Turkish: Noble Gospel

Our Turkish respondents reported that *vekil* and *mevla* are not specifically familial terms, so their use in the paraphrase text for *huios* and *pater* violates Istanbul. Some might attempt to argue, since the woodenly literal translation on the interlinear pages does contain traditional “father” and “son” terminology, that therefore the work as a whole complies with Istanbul 3.0. The Istanbul Statement does not address parallel Bibles explicitly, but presumably the “test for effectiveness” rules intended for paratext would apply here as well. One would expect that readers defer to the natural-sounding paraphrase to inform the meaning of the interlinear. If that proved true, then the non-familial terms *vekil* and *mevla* would fail the Istanbul test.

While Istanbul shows an admirable philosophical commitment to the idea of accuracy in Bible translations and fidelity to Trinitarian doctrine, taking the four translations together, only one (“Stories of the Prophets”) is clearly excluded under the new SIL guidelines, along with some of the essays in *True Meaning*. If SIL intends to prevent translations like these, the guidelines require revision to specify that familial terms must be not only social but biological, and that parallel paraphrases should be tested by the same methods as paratext. Furthermore, while the SCIM would encourage further improvements to the Istanbul guidelines, the greatest challenge for all translation agencies lies in implementation, oversight, and accountability. It is here that the role of the church becomes paramount for encouraging faithfulness not only in translation guidelines, but more so in translation practice.

Conclusion

Christ’s divine Sonship suffuses the New Testament. It binds up the Gospels, with a divine Son revealed in the cross (e.g., Mark) and gloriously worshipped as divine Son (e.g., John). A divine Son caps the entire Judaic *cultus*, as revealed in Hebrews. Divine Sonship pre-exists Jesus’ incarnation (Luke 1), and its revelation climaxes with the adoration of the
Lamb of God in the Revelation which John received on the Isle of Patmos. It exists in the earliest Christian communities, as Acts briefly alludes and Paul more clearly trumpets.\footnote{This paragraph is essentially a quotation (slightly adapted) from Bill Nikides, “Special Translation of the Bible for Muslims?: Contemporary Trends in Evangelical Missions,” \textit{St. Francis Magazine} 4 (April 2006), p. 7.} “The highest possible Christology, the inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity, was central to the faith of the early church before any New Testament writings were written, since it occurs in all of them.”\footnote{Richard Bauckham, \textit{God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament} (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998), p. 27.}

The glue that binds the biblical text together is not only the kingly Messiah; it is the condescended, loving presence of God the Son, fully God and fully man who is both Agent of salvation and Object of worship. Though some have observed the ways in which the worship of Jesus works its way through believing communities, there is a more profound dimension to his revelation as divine. A strictly monotheistic people learned to embrace Jesus in worship, not slowly but with breathtaking speed following the crucifixion and resurrection. This was not a grudging process of socialization to a new faith, but a revolution reverberating from the empty tomb as people became convinced that the Son of God was no mere Messiah, but one who embodied every aspect of his name.\footnote{This paragraph continues an adapted quotation from Nikides, “Special Translation,” p. 7. As Berkouwer warns, viewing the New Testament as a complete text leads to the inescapable conclusion that “Son of God” ultimately and most significantly points to his worship as God. The only way to avoid this faulty conclusion is to atomize the text, a method which inevitably leads to an adoptionist Christology (G. C. Berkouwer, \textit{The Person of Christ}, Studies in Dogmatics [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954], p. 176).}

Scripture’s presentation of Christ’s Sonship is complex formulation, in the sense that while certain contingent, redemptive features of his Sonship identity may appear prominently in a text, the eternal and ontological always remain implicitly, permeatingly, and essentially present. In other words, we cannot think properly of Christ properly apart from his eternal Sonship. This would be like speaking of a human while denying or ignoring his essential personhood.

Although some may ask, “Which aspect of sonship (incarnate, messianic, resurrected, etc.) is prominent in this particular text?” the very question misses the unifying point of sonship language concerning Christ, and manifests a misguided hermeneutic. Since Scripture is divine Word about the divine Messiah, and Scripture describes this Messiah as “Son” in all of its rich dimensions, we are in no position to transform the explicit filial forms of the original text to something less than filial, or less than begetting. Scripture’s organically rich filial language uniquely expresses the fatherly nature of the

\footnote{186 This paragraph is essentially a quotation (slightly adapted) from Bill Nikides, “Special Translation of the Bible for Muslims?: Contemporary Trends in Evangelical Missions,” \textit{St. Francis Magazine} 4 (April 2006), p. 7.}


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Creator/Redeemer God, and properly expresses the ectypal, familial character of the image-bearers whom God has made and then graciously redeemed in adoption in his Son (cf. Eph. 3:14-21). Substitution of sonship language for Christ and his disciples distorts the way things are in creation (according to revelation), the way things are in salvation (according to revelation), and the way things will be in the Parousia (according to revelation).

Bible translators subscribe to the rule that translations should “make every effort to ensure that no political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agenda is allowed to distort the translation.” When Bible translators operate under the belief that Jesus’ Sonship is primarily messianic or can be accurately captured by non-biological terms of social relationship, this rule is violated, as such a translation injects a controversial theological agenda into the translation process.

Indeed, to change or substitute non-familial or social familial terms with the common biological terms in Scripture is to move in a direction contrary to Scriptural intent. Therefore, if a translator seeks to find a more “culturally responsible” or “culturally sensitive” form because the word in the target language arguably contains primary or secondary nuances that differ from the original language (Greek), this aim does not warrant the translator’s selecting a less than explicit term for the Son of God. The biological sonship term may need to be explained, but it cannot be substituted without compromising the revelation of Christ’s person. Translation decisions that violate these parameters functionally eclipse the perspicuous verbal authority of Scripture regarding the Son of God. By truncating the identity of Christ in the minds of the reader, replacement terms can even distort the gospel.

No matter our motivation, there is no pure Gospel apart from the ontological and incarnational sonship of Jesus Christ. Some will protest: sonship and messiah-ship are functionally interchangeable. To be sure, the redemptive-historical theme of Scripture interweaves Christ’s kingly and messianic functions with his sonship status. But the Christological fabric becomes unraveled when we rip the messianic warp from the filial woof. We cannot speak of Christ as Messiah apart from understanding that regal and redemptive functioning in light of him being the Son of God. We also cannot speak of his exalted Sonship apart from his reign as King. Sonship and regal redemptive reign are mutually informative and indivisible; but though the ideas share referentiality, their meanings are not identical. So when the

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190 E.g., “The title ‘Son of God’ was a widely used expression used to portray the Messiah, who was a king chosen by God.” From the preface to the Noble Gospel translation of Matthew’s Gospel (Turkish).
biblical authors employ language laden with such distinct qualities, we have no interpretive right to regard that language as negotiable.

And it is because Jesus is Son of God that we must speak of Christians as adopted sons and daughters of God. We must express Gospel truth in a way that honors the true familial expressions of Scripture, and avoids compromise by unintentional truncation or even well intended yet obstructive contextualization. We cannot speak of the true Gospel apart from the filial character of our union with Christ, for we are united to the Son of God and no one else. The filial and familial language of the Gospel then is not contextually optional; it is transcendentally central.

Paul’s warnings in Galatians 1 ought give us terrifying pause. Removing familial language eclipses the Christ of the Gospel and it distorts the Gospel of Christ. Ultimately an incognito Christ is a misrepresented Christ. A misrepresented Christ is a false gospel. A false gospel is the turf of the sons of darkness. . . . Some may be mercifully rescued; others will die in their sins.191

The stakes are that high.

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Recommendations to Organizations Doing Translation

No institution, including the PCA, operates above reproach in all its members and methods. Our concern is not that the average translator is failing his charge, or that translation failures necessarily evince heterodox beliefs among translators. Rather, the response to the representative problematic translations identified in this report and others like them reveals institutional weaknesses which raise questions as to whether translation agencies are prepared to redress the situation quickly, or in some cases at all. Current evidence from agencies points at best to a lack of unanimity, and in some cases to frank resistance, concerning a strong commitment to biological divine sonship terminology. Given the inadequate attention they have given heretofore to the theological implications of Jesus’ begotten-ness, we lack confidence at the present time to accept blanket statements made by translation agencies or their representatives that there exist languages in which the use of non-biological kinship terms constitutes best practices.

The church bears the privilege and responsibility to engage fully in translation matters (WCF 1.8), and this report seeks to assist translators and organizations doing translation in correcting any of the failures named in this report. To that end and for the good of the global church and for the honor of the Lord God who has exalted above all things his name and his word (Ps. 138:2), we present the following recommendations to organizations doing translation:

1) Bible translations should always use biological terms for divine familial relationships.
   a) “Messiah” and “Beloved One” fall far short of the needed breadth of meaning.
   b) Social sonship terms fail to capture the generative and genetic dimensions of identity inherent in the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father, and thus inadequately substitute for terms with the begetting connotations of the original Greek and Hebrew terms.
   c) If two biological terms equally convey the generative and social dimensions of family, then the one with lesser sexual connotation could be more appropriate, ceteris paribus.

2) Organizations should not use translation workers or consultants who advocate the avoidance of biological familial terms applied to persons of the Godhead.

3) Organizations should not aid or approve translations which avoid biological familial terms applied to the persons of the Godhead.

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192 “Translation” includes translators, consultants, reviewers, and others whose input materially affects the content of Bible translations. “Organizations” include Wycliffe, SIL, Frontiers, and Partners for Global Development.
4) Parentheticals, footnotes, and other ancillary paratextual materials should not explicitly or implicitly subvert the begetting dimensions of biological familial terms which appear in the main text. Rather, when used, they should articulate specifically the biblical meaning of the terms, as understood in historic, confessional orthodoxy.

5) One text of a parallel Bible (e.g., a paraphrase) should not subvert the begetting dimensions of biological familial terms in the other text (e.g., an interlinear).

6) Organizations should institute and strengthen policies which ensure that orthodox theological training and orthodox theological review integrally inform the translation process from start to finish.

7) Non-Christians may help assess the intelligibility of translations in their native tongue but they should not govern, make, or unduly influence translation decisions, as these tasks are inherently and irreducibly theological.

8) Adequate accountability information should be pushed to donors and other interested parties. Within a given language, if the most common biological term for a familial relationship (e.g., father, son, child, etc.) is not used, translators should prepare numerous examples substantiating the reason.

9) More generally, translators should seek in all ways to cooperate with the visible church and its ordained leaders in the shared work of gospel ministry. Translators should resist the temptation to exposit in their translations, thereby wittingly or unwittingly usurping the teaching and preaching offices of the church.

10) Due to limited resources, most languages in the world will only get a single Bible translation in the foreseeable future. Therefore, that single translation must not saddle its reading church with a “baby Bible” which emphasizes immediate payoff over long-term value, and which divorces that church from the larger Body of Christ through idiosyncratic language.

11) Translators should consider the long-term uses of Scripture, including how the translation can be used for in-depth study by God’s covenant people.

12) A deep commitment to faithful rendering of the Biblical text should take decisive precedence over concerns that the clear teaching of Scripture will be found unacceptable by an unbelieving or an untaught audience.

13) Distinctions between Bible paraphrases and Bibles should be made clear in all references. Just as translations are field-tested to ensure that their meaning is understood, paraphrases and paratextual apparatus must be tested to assess whether their intended audiences actually use them and understand their relationship to the Bible proper.

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193 Poythress, “Bible Translation and Contextualization: Theory And Practice in Bangladesh.”
14) Because the church bears responsibility to preserve the integrity of Scripture, faithful local churches should be involved in the production and approval of Bible translations in their areas.\textsuperscript{194} 

a) In the absence of a faithful local church or denomination, the next closest ecclesial body should have input.

b) Translation projects which go forward over the objections of the local church (e.g., if the local church is not in fact faithful), should thoroughly document the necessity of such action, for the sake of concerned parties.

15) Published articles should clearly identify relevant institutional affiliations of the author(s), with pseudonymity minimized to avoid confusion.

16) Disagreements about the meanings and implications of published works should lead to open discussion. Authors should avoid hasty charges of “bearing false witness,” and organizations and individual authors should promote cordial public discourse rather than stifling academic debate.

17) The review of Wycliffe’s Bible Translator’s practices and policies by WEA should be made public after its completion.

18) Existing translations which do not consistently and comprehensively use the common biological terms for divine Son and divine Father should be corrected.

Recommendations to Churches

Implications of our findings bear directly not only upon organizations doing translation, but upon our own church. With that awareness in mind and in keeping with the explicit mandate of Overture 9, we provide the following recommendations to PCA churches and presbyteries:

1) Churches should support the work of faithful Bible translation around the world.
2) Churches should lovingly correct translation workers engaged in Bible projects that lack faithfulness in some respect.
3) Should such attempts at correction fail, PCA churches and committees should redirect missions resources away from projects which deviate from the translation principles articulated in this report.
4) Churches should regularly evaluate their contributions to Bible translation efforts to ensure that the work incorporates adequate attention to the theological dimensions of Bible translation. To discern the faithfulness of translation projects, ask translators and others involved in the translation projects questions such as these:
   a) How do you ensure that the training and competence of translation workers is not only linguistic but also properly theological?
   b) What is your approach to the translation of divine familial terms such as “Son of God”? Do you use a begetting term, a social term, a term of affection, a royal term, or something else? Do you use such terms consistently or are there exceptions? If so, what are those exceptions and why do you make them?
   c) Does your translation work describe Jesus’ divine Sonship with the most common filial term in the target language, allowing Scripture itself to inform the meaning of that term?
   d) How do the established churches within your field of service perceive your translation project(s)?
      i) In what ways are they involved?
      ii) If they are not involved, why not?
      iii) If they are opposed, why are you proceeding?
      iv) If there are no established churches within your field of service, what other ecclesial bodies are involved in your translation work?
   e) How does the national Bible society within your field of perceive your project? If they are opposed, why are you proceeding?
5) Churches should exercise extreme caution when using back-translations to evaluate the results of translation products, as the potential for misunderstanding is high.

195 Including funds for translators, consultants, and other expenses.
6) Churches should support the training and labors of competent preachers and teachers who are committed to evangelizing, preaching, and explaining the Scriptures and serving in communities around the world. Such a commitment should include:
   a) Supporting trained missionaries and national pastors and teachers willing to commit to long-term placement in those communities.
   b) Supporting church leaders willing to pursue advanced theological training.
   c) Supporting the theological training of translation workers.
   d) Targeting areas for support where such church and theological leaders are clearly needed.

7) Churches should pray for the truth of the gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the concerted efforts of believers and churches to break down the racial and cultural barriers which retard the progress of Christian word and deed ministry in the West and around the world.

8) Denominations should offer highly qualified persons for regular engagement with translation agencies to improve institutional implementation of the aforementioned priorities, including theological oversight.

9) Missiological and theological scholars of the PCA should engage these issues in peer-reviewed journals, books, lectures, and other formats in order to frame the debate within the bounds of a robust Christian orthodoxy.

10) The PCA should request that a representative be invited to major meetings of translation agencies at which familial language translation policy will be discussed. PCA leadership or its delegate(s) should accept such invitations when offered.

11) Churches and denominations should pray and strive for a unity reflecting the purity and peace of Christ’s church.
Epilogue

The success of Bible translation, especially since the Reformation, remains thoroughly stunning. From only a brief survey of completed translations and the thousands of projects that continue to this day, we are left to marvel at the ways in which the Scriptures have become accessible to millions of people in their own tongues. In combination with the works of evangelism, discipleship, and church planting, Bible translation has, by the illumining work of the Spirit of God, enabled these millions to know, love, and worship the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God.

In view of the palpable fruit throughout the world, the SCIM celebrates the work of thousands who have invested their lives in faithful Bible translation. In this same spirit of celebration in gospel integrity, we also now urge those who currently undertake this privilege and responsibility to do so with the humility, theological responsibility, and filial joy incumbent upon them as sons and daughters of the living God.

Deo Patri sit gloria,
eiusque soli Filio,
cum Spiritu Paraclito,
et nunc, et in perpetuum.
-Ambrose of Milan

All praise be to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who by his redeeming grace has united us by the Holy Spirit to his Son. All praise be to this Triune God who has exalted above all things his name and his Word (Ps. 138:2).

Respectfully Submitted,
THE PCA AD INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON INSIDER MOVEMENTS (SCIM)
May 14, 2012

“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”
-1 John 4:13-15
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