

**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)

## 1 OVERTURE 9 – “A Call to Faithful Witness”

2  
3 Approved by the 39<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America  
4 June 10, 2011

5  
6 **Whereas:** the Church is called to take the gospel to all peoples, including those how have  
7 historically been resistant to the gospel;

8  
9 **Whereas:** contextualizing the language and forms of the gospel, while remaining faithful to  
10 the truths of Scripture, is good and necessary for the advancement of the gospel;

11  
12 **Whereas:** the Church must exercise wisdom in discerning appropriate expressions of  
13 contextualization, reserving its public corrections for genuine and substantive threats  
14 to the gospel;

15  
16 **Whereas:** in recent initiatives known as “Insider Movements”, some groups have produced  
17 Bible translations that have replaced references to Jesus as “Son” (*huios*) with terms  
18 such as “Messiah” in order to be more acceptable to Muslims;

19  
20 **Whereas:** some Bible translations of Insider Movements have replaced references to God as  
21 “Father” (*pater*) with terms such as “Guardian” and “Lord”;

22  
23 **Whereas:** these Bible translations are harmful to the doctrines of the authority of Scripture  
24 and the deity of Christ, bringing confusion to people in need of Christ – concerns  
25 that are held by many national leaders and Bible societies;

26  
27 **Whereas:** some PCA churches have knowingly or unknowingly financially supported these  
28 Bible translations;

29  
30 **Whereas:** Muslims should not be denied a full and faithful witness;

31  
32 **Therefore be it resolved** that the 39<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in  
33 America:

- 34
- 35 • Affirms that biblical motivations of all those who seek the good news of Jesus Christ
  - 36 with those who have never heard or responded to the gospel should be encouraged;
  - 37 • Repents of complacency or comfort that keeps us from a faithful witness;
  - 38 • Declares as unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider Movement or any other
  - 39 translations of the Bible that remove from the text references to God as “Father”

- 1           (*pater*) or Jesus as “Son” (*huios*), because such removals compromise doctrines of  
2 the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture;
- 3           • Encourages PCA congregations to assess whether the missionaries and agencies they  
4 support use or promote Bible translations that remove familial language in reference  
5 to persons of the Trinity, and if so, to pursue correction, and failing that, to withdraw  
6 their support;
- 7           • Encourages PCA congregations to support biblically sound and appropriately  
8 contextualized efforts to see Christ’s Church established among resistant peoples;
- 9           • Calls PCA churches and agencies to collaborate with each other and the broader  
10 Church to discern and implement biblical authority in gospel contextualization.
- 11          • Authorizes the Moderator, as an aid to greater gospel faithfulness throughout the  
12 PCA and the broader Church, to appoint a study committee to report to the 40<sup>th</sup>  
13 General Assembly concerning Insider Movements, including but not limited to:
- 14           ○ A summary and biblical assessment of Insider Movements’ histories,  
15 philosophies, and practices;
- 16           ○ A biblical response to interpretations of Scripture used in defense of Insider  
17 Movements;
- 18           ○ An examination of the theological impact of removing familial language for  
19 the Trinity from Bible translations;
- 20           ○ An assessment of PCA missions partners regarding the influence of Insider  
21 Movement within them, including assessment of their theology of religion,  
22 ecclesiology, Scripture, and relationship to the Emergent Church;
- 23           ○ An explanation of the relevance and importance of this issue for the PCA;
- 24           ○ Suggestions for identifying and assessing the influence of Insider Movements  
25 among mission agencies, missionaries and organizations;
- 26           ○ Recommended resources for faithfully training and equipping congregations  
27 to reach Muslims locally and internationally.
- 28 • Set the budget for the study committee at \$15,000/year and that funds be derived from gifts  
29 to the AC designated for that purpose.

## 1 **Abbreviations**

2		
3	BGG	Authors Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray, collectively
4	GA	General Assembly (PCA)
5	<i>IJFM</i>	<i>International Journal of Frontiers Missions</i> or <i>International Journal of Frontier</i>
6		<i>Missiology</i>
7	LXX	Septuagint
8	MIT(s)	Muslim Idiom Translation(s)
9	PCA	Presbyterian Church in America ( <a href="http://www.pcanet.org">www.pcanet.org</a> )
10	Q	<i>Qur'an</i> . The abbreviation “Q” is a standard format for referencing the <i>Qur'an</i> , in
11		which Q is followed by the sura (chapter) and aya (verse).
12	RE	Ruling Elder (PCA)
13	SCIM	Study Committee on Insider Movements, established according to Overture 9, “A
14		Call to Faithful Witness,” which was passed at the 39 <sup>th</sup> PCA General Assembly
15		in June 2011.
16	SIL	Formerly Summer Institute of Linguistics and now SIL International
17		( <a href="http://www.sil.org">www.sil.org</a> )
18	TE	Teaching Elder (PCA)
19	WEA	World Evangelical Alliance
20	WBT	Wycliffe Bible Translators ( <a href="http://www.wycliffe.org">www.wycliffe.org</a> )
21	<i>WCF</i>	<i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>
22	<i>WLC</i>	<i>Westminster Larger Catechism</i>
23	<i>WSC</i>	<i>Westminster Shorter Catechism</i>
24	W/SIL	Wycliffe/SIL International

## 1 Preface

### 3 The Study Committee's History

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

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

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

### 24 Study Committee Recommendations to the 2012 General Assembly

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

- 34 1. That “Part One – Like Father, Like Son: Divine Familial Language in Bible  
35 Translation” serve as a *Partial Report* (Part One of Two Parts).
- 36 2. That the 40th General Assembly *declare* that, since social familial terms fail to  
37 capture the biblical meaning of “Son” (*huios*) and “Son of God” (*huios tou theou*)

1 applied to Jesus and “Father” (*pater*) applied to God, Bibles should always translate  
2 divine familial terms using common biological terms.

- 3 3. That the 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly *make available and recommend* for study “Part One  
4 – Like Father, Like Son” to its presbyteries and sessions.
- 5 4. Pursuant to RAO 9-2, that the 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly *grant an extension* to the  
6 SCIM for one year to allow for completion of its mandate and to provide Part Two of  
7 its report on Insider Movements.
- 8 5. That the 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly *set the budget* for the study committee at  
9 \$15,000/for its second year, and that funds be derived from gifts to the AC  
10 designated for that purpose.



## 1 Executive Summary

### 3 Introduction

5 The start of the twenty-first century marks a period of extraordinary opportunity for  
6 the spread of the gospel, the planting of churches, and the translation of the Holy Scriptures.  
7 Though 350 million people<sup>1</sup> still await a Bible in their own tongue, with literally thousands  
8 of Bible translations currently underway around the world, that moment when all the  
9 world's people might have opportunity to hear and read Scripture in their own language is  
10 increasingly within reach. With the mighty redeeming work of the Holy Spirit occurring in  
11 many places around the world, it is imperative to pray that the Lord of the harvest would  
12 send even more workers into his harvest – for the works of evangelism, church planting, and  
13 faithful Bible translation. Many engage faithfully in these kingdom tasks, but not all Bible  
14 translations faithfully present the Triune God: *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*.

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

### 30 Section A: The Practice of Bible Translation

31  
32 Missionary translation work in the eighteenth through mid-twentieth centuries  
33 generally involved a Westerner who embedded in another culture, learned its language, and  
34 translated the Bible into that language, while rendering material aid and pastoral leadership.  
35 In contrast, desiring more rapid and natural-sounding results, modern translation efforts  
36 primarily use nationals of varying degrees of Christian experience and theological training.

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<sup>1</sup> According to WBT (<http://www.wycliffe.org>).

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

6  
 7 The *Qur'an* accords honor to Jesus as a man and a prophet but specifically denies  
 8 that Jesus is God or Son of God, or indeed that the Creator has any children at all.<sup>2</sup> The  
 9 concept of divine begotten-ness seems blasphemous to the Muslim, who understands the  
 10 unity and transcendence of the Creator to render divine sonship impossible. Some  
 11 missionaries report great resistance among Muslims even to hear or read the phrase “Son of  
 12 God,” a factor many claim inhibits gospel outreach. This challenge led to experimentation  
 13 with various methods of presenting the Christian message to Muslims, including systematic  
 14 substitution of Muslim idioms in the translations themselves. Bibles employing such  
 15 substitutions are known as “Muslim Idiom Translations” (MITs), a phrase used to describe a  
 16 wide variety of types of translations. While this report will provide recommendations for  
 17 translation method, it focuses in particular on those *familial language* MITs, which render  
 18 “Son” and “Father” with terms other than the most common biological terms in the target  
 19 language.

20  
 21 Concurrent with these MIT developments, some Western Bible translations began to  
 22 experiment with a greater degree of “functional” (so-called “meaning-for-meaning”)  
 23 translation as opposed to the traditional “formal” (“word-for-word”) translation strategy.  
 24 When applying the concept of functional equivalence to Bible translation in Muslim  
 25 contexts, some alleged that the meanings of divine familial terms (e.g., “Son of God”) were  
 26 best conveyed in some languages by non-familial terms (e.g., “Christ” or “Representative”).  
 27 Such terms were held to convey the essence of the divine relationships without the sexual  
 28 implications of the usual biological sonship terms. When objections arose that “Messiah”  
 29 fails to convey accurately the filial dimensions of “Son,” some MIT proponents retrenched,  
 30 proposing that instead of biological “Son” and “Father” equivalents in the national tongue,  
 31 social or functional roles of “Son” and “Father” would suffice, such as “Uniquely Beloved  
 32 One” and “Guardian.”

33  
 34 Examples of such familial language MITs include the “Stories of the Prophets”  
 35 series of Arabic audio dramas; the *True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ* (Arabic  
 36 Gospels/Acts); the *Noble Gospel of Matthew*, which features interlinear Greek/Turkish on

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

1 one page and a Turkish paraphrase on the facing page; and the *Injil Sharif* New Testament in  
2 the Bangla language. Each of these projects was undertaken in a language in which at least  
3 one Bible translation already existed. Organizations such as Wycliffe Bible Translators and  
4 SIL (jointly, W/SIL), Frontiers, and Global Partners for Development played major roles in  
5 shaping these translations. MITs are not simply the projects of field workers, but have been  
6 actively promoted by key leadership within these organizations.  
7

8 A series of articles in the Christian popular press publicized these activities, leading  
9 to a recent flurry of denominational activity. The 39th (2011) General Assembly of the  
10 Presbyterian Church in America condemned “translations of the Bible that remove from the  
11 text references to God as “Father” (*pater*) or Jesus as “Son” (*huios*), because such removals  
12 compromise doctrines of the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture”  
13 (Overture 9). The General Assembly also authorized the formation of the Study Committee  
14 on Insider Movements (SCIM), whose work includes this extensive partial report, “Part One  
15 – Like Father, Like Son: Divine Familial Language in Bible Translation.” Other  
16 organizations investigating or speaking against familial language MITs include the  
17 Assemblies of God, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church of  
18 Pakistan, the Pakistan Bible Society, and TEK, a coalition of Turkish churches.  
19

20 In response, W/SIL issued a series of statements, including the May 2012  
21 commentary on the August 2011 Istanbul statement: “Without reservation, SIL’s Scripture  
22 translation practice is to use wording which promotes accurate understanding of the  
23 relationship of Father by which God chose to describe Himself in relationship to His Son,  
24 Jesus Christ, in the original languages of Scripture.”<sup>3</sup> “Istanbul 3.0” affirmed the need for  
25 faithful translation of divine familial terms but left room for social familial terms, or the  
26 paratextual redefinition of biological familial terms, as described above. The WEA, at the  
27 invitation of W/SIL, is convening a panel<sup>4</sup> to evaluate W/SIL’s practice in these debated  
28 areas, with a report to W/SIL intended for the end of 2012. In summer 2011, proponents and  
29 opponents of familial language MITs also gathered at Houghton College for “Bridging the  
30 Divide,” an event designed to seek accord. A second gathering at Houghton continues this  
31 endeavor in June 2012.  
32

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

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<sup>3</sup> “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”.

<sup>4</sup> “WEA Announces Dr. Robert E. Cooley as Chairman of Wycliffe and SIL Review Panel,” May 9, 2012, <http://worldia.org/news/3978> (accessed May 11, 2012).

1 too narrow a term to convey accurately the dimensions of Jesus' Sonship, not least because  
2 Jesus' messianic mission began with his incarnation, whereas his Sonship is "before all  
3 worlds." Some translations that replaced *huios* (son) with a word meaning "Messiah" are  
4 being revised accordingly. Some related audio recordings have been withdrawn from public  
5 access, but not all; actual recall of distributed media is generally unfeasible, so that the  
6 problematic works are likely to continue circulating for the foreseeable future.

7  
8 Some proponents of familial language MITs assert the propriety of "social" or  
9 "functional" sonship terms, rather than biological terms. Despite claims that these  
10 substituted terms possess familial meaning and avoid allegedly unnecessary biological and  
11 sexual content, they remain inadequate for biblical translation. Only the common biological  
12 terms effectively deliver the critical theological concepts discussed in the full report;  
13 replacement with functional/social words creates critical theological problems.

## 14 **Section B: Theological Implications**

15  
16  
17 Muslim revulsion to divine biological/familial language does not lie primarily in  
18 linguistic limitations which cause offense through misunderstanding. Rather, Islamic  
19 teaching explicitly rejects any sort of divine begetting, whether sexual or otherwise, and  
20 indeed any sort of conceptual analogy between the Creator and elements of the created  
21 order. Yet when a translation avoids key terms in the inspired text, it does not engage merely  
22 in appropriate sympathy with a particular culture's allegedly neutral linguistic values, but  
23 risks misrepresenting the divine meaning of Scripture and faces the threat of syncretistic  
24 surrender to false belief.

25  
26 Non-biological solutions avoid the sexual implications of "Son" and "Father," but at  
27 great cost. The traditional biological terms convey not only social relationships such as  
28 protection and affection, but also concepts of shared nature and identity that actually  
29 facilitate filial function. *Contra* some MIT advocates' assertions, the original Greek terms  
30 *pater* and *huios* are strongly biological, as are "begetting" terms of the historic Christian  
31 creeds, such as *natum* and *gennēthenta*, in the Latin and Greek versions of the Nicene Creed,  
32 respectively.

33  
34 Even in Greek, Latin, and English, such terms require explanation as to their non-  
35 sexual meaning when applied to the Persons of the Godhead. Thus the potential for  
36 confusion, and the need for explicit Christian teaching to accompany the distribution of  
37 Bibles, should not prevent translations from following the example of the inspired Bible  
38 manuscripts in using thoroughly biological terms to translate Greek *pater* and *huios* and  
39 Hebrew *ab* and *ben*.

1           Despite the attempts of some recent theologians to limit the Bible’s testimony of  
2 Jesus as the “Son of God” to his messianic kingship, Scripture presents him as the Son of  
3 God, who not only leads his people as the ultimate Davidic king, but also reflects the nature  
4 of his eternal Father in his being, his calling, and his behavior. By analogy, Christians, as  
5 “children of God” by grace, image our Father’s nature by virtue of our vital and Spiritual  
6 union with the incarnate Son of God.

7  
8           Translations which use idiosyncratic terminology for key theological terms eclipse  
9 integral themes across Scripture, such as sonship in general. Even some MIT proponents  
10 acknowledge that their labors can result in professions of faith by individuals who remain  
11 unable to conceive of God as a Father, or themselves as his children. The familial language  
12 MIT reader is divorced both from the confessional commitments of his neighbors in the  
13 visible church who use a translation which retains historic and faithful terms for Father and  
14 Son, and also from the invisible church across time.

15  
16           Some MITs use biological “Son of God” language in the main text or the interlinear  
17 text but then sap the full meaning of such terms through footnotes, parenthetical disclaimers,  
18 parallel paraphrases, and other paratextual materials which limit the reader’s understanding  
19 of “Son of God” to social or functional sonship. As such, those solutions fail to answer  
20 critics adequately who find social sonship terms misleading when applied to divine familial  
21 relationships.

22  
23           Scripture is a covenant document (*WCF* 1). According to God’s gracious will to  
24 redeem his people and to reveal himself by the written Word, Scripture belongs to all of his  
25 people from all the nations – those who, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, now believe and who  
26 will believe. With a view to the international scope of God’s redemptive message, the Bible  
27 calls not only for its own translation (*WCF* 1.8), but also for the faithful ministry of the  
28 people of God to evangelize, to teach, and to preach the Scriptures to the nations. Bible  
29 translation projects may recognize that a particular people is yet unreached, and such a fact  
30 should compel faithful proclamation of the gospel accompanied by Bible translation, rather  
31 than efforts to produce a self-explanatory or self-expositing Bible which over-interprets texts  
32 in simplistic, culturally accommodating, yet theologically anemic ways. The church bears  
33 responsibility to accompany the spread of Bibles with a parallel spread of Bible teachers,  
34 reducing the temptation for over-interpretive translations, especially when such translations  
35 are likely to be the only Bible used by a particular people.

36  
37           More generally, some MITs cater too uncritically to postmodern reader-response  
38 theory which locates meaning in the reading community’s interaction with the text or to

1 receptor “acceptability,” rather than receiving meaning as a quality inherent in the text itself.  
2 Evangelicals hold that the Bible does not simply contain or generate the Word of God; it is  
3 the Word of God. The verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture entails the necessity of faithful  
4 translation of key theological terms not only in broad strokes of meaning, but in detailed  
5 adherence to the idioms from which Scripture weaves large-scale theological structures. For  
6 instance, the respective ways in which Adam, angels, the Davidic king of Israel, Jesus, and  
7 Christians are all “son(s) of God” mutually inform each other and inform the various other  
8 sorts of spiritual sonship (of Abraham, of Satan, etc.). These relationships, while not literal  
9 in a biological sense, are also not simplistically metaphorical.

10  
11 The meaning of Biblical “sons” is metaphysical and analogical, with the Trinitarian  
12 Father/Son relationship as the eternal reality which human beings image in a limited,  
13 creaturely fashion. Since Jesus the Son of God is the supreme Source and Meaning of the  
14 familial term *huios* (son), and the One into whose image we are conformed (Rom. 8:29),  
15 terms in Bible translations which possess a biological, genetic character are critical for  
16 expressing the biblical truths of divine, created, and redeemed sonship – in their rich array of  
17 theological meanings.

## 18 19 **Conclusion**

20  
21 Bible translations geared for Islamic contexts should not be driven by concerns that  
22 Muslims may recoil from biological terms applied to God or Jesus. That revulsion originates  
23 primarily out of religious conviction, not any communicative limitation of the terms  
24 themselves. The essentially biological terms (Hebrew, *ben* and *ab*; Greek, *huios* and *pater*)  
25 are divinely given and therefore should be translated into comparable biological terms.  
26 Footnotes, parentheticals and other paratextual comments may be used to explain the  
27 biblical and theological riches of Scripture, while never subverting the important truths  
28 embedded in the biological contours of Scripture’s words.

29  
30 Not all translation workers share these methodological commitments. Therefore,  
31 churches should carefully assess the philosophies and practices of translation workers whom  
32 they support. Churches should direct resources toward faithful translation and, if loving  
33 attempts at correction fail, away from projects and persons advocating problematic  
34 approaches to translation. For the honor of the God who has revealed himself in his Word,  
35 churches and agencies involved in translation should collaborate to improve the spread of  
36 the Christian message worldwide, ensuring that Bibles oriented towards those in Muslim  
37 contexts retain the fullest range of theological meanings resident in the original languages.

1 The responsibility for faithful translation and worldwide gospel proclamation rests finally in  
2 the church of Jesus Christ.

3

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

14

- 2 Corinthians 4:1-6<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise specified, English Bible quotations are from the *English Standard Version*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2001.

## 1 Preamble

2  
3 Overture 9, as adopted in 2011 by the 39th General Assembly (GA) of the  
4 Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), called for the formation of a Study Committee on  
5 Insider Movements (SCIM) to report to the 40th GA (2012) concerning the related issues of  
6 (1) Insider Movements (IM) and (2) Bible translations which remove familial language from  
7 references to the Trinity. The SCIM found those two issues sufficiently weighty so as to  
8 merit individual attention.<sup>6</sup> As a result, our report to the 40th GA deals only with the issue of  
9 divine familial language in Bible translation. Should the 40th GA allow a one-year extension  
10 for the SCIM, we intend to bring a report to the 41st GA (2013) concerning Insider  
11 Movements. As our work progressed in examining “the theological impact of removing  
12 familial language for the Trinity from Bible translations,” two realities emerged:

13  
14 *First*, some languages have familial terms of a social nature (e.g., adopted sons,  
15 household members, dear friends, etc.) as distinct from familial begetting terms. Therefore  
16 this report discusses not only familial terms in opposition to non-familial terms, but also the  
17 implications of different sorts of familial terms.

18  
19 *Second*, Scripture applies various familial terms to persons of the Trinity, such as  
20 “Father,” “Son,” “Brother,” and “Bridegroom.” The same and similar terms in Scripture  
21 refer to Christians, both individually and corporately: “children,” “sons,” “brothers,” and  
22 “bride.” For reasons of time and length, we have focused on the specific case of Jesus as the  
23 *Son of God*. While we recognize certain limitations of this focus, we trust that our presentation  
24 will show how similar reasoning applies to the other familial terms such as “Father.”

25  
26 Our concluding principles also impact broader translation philosophy, methodology,  
27 and accountability discussions.

28  
29 We live in extraordinary times of opportunity in the Muslim world, and as we lift our  
30 eyes beyond the arena of controversy, we cannot help but rejoice at what God is doing.  
31 Unprecedented numbers of Muslims are discovering Jesus Christ, as many formerly bound  
32 by fear are discovering the freedom of the gospel. In God’s providence, they are finding  
33 fresh courage to consider the truth as they give voice to physical and spiritual grievances and  
34 yearnings. In areas well beyond the Arab world, the Redeemer is drawing those in Muslim  
35 lands to himself. Yet we trust that he will do more. Daily news broadcasts remind us of

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<sup>6</sup> 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.



1 suffering or strife among the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims who have great need for the truth  
2 and grace which are found in Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

3  
4 In adopting Overture 9, the PCA repented “. . . of complacency or comfort that  
5 keeps us from a faithful witness,” and thus called for correction in ourselves, not simply in  
6 others. Accordingly, rather than pull back into a defensive posture, we must pray that the  
7 Lord of the harvest would send more workers into his harvest (Matt. 9:36-37; Luke 10:2);  
8 and we must pray for and pursue the PCA’s greater role in the advance of God’s kingdom  
9 among Muslims. As a means of maintaining a faithful gospel witness, we believe explicit  
10 corrections for certain errors are fully in order. At the same time, we dare not so focus on the  
11 errant trees as to be blind to the forest of opportunity before us.

12  
13 During the course of our work, the SCIM has read widely and interacted regularly  
14 with seasoned field translators and translation consultants, international Bible scholars,  
15 national church leaders affected by the biblical translations in question, translation  
16 organization leaders, and each other. As part of our due diligence, we submitted a late draft  
17 of this report to external reviewers from diverse backgrounds and with disparate views on  
18 the issues we have addressed. These reviewers included scholars, translation experts, and  
19 mission organization leaders – including selected leaders from some of the organizations  
20 named in this report. We genuinely appreciate their critiques and useful suggestions, as their  
21 input has proven very helpful in bringing this report to its final form. For the sake of the  
22 gospel and the church of Jesus Christ, we welcome continued serious analysis of the report  
23 and its conclusions, and for the sake of faithful translation of the Scriptures all around the  
24 world, urge others to give further rigorous scholarly and churchly examination to these  
25 themes.

26  
27 In the entire process, we have grown in our appreciation of both the complexity and  
28 the importance of faithful Bible translation. Lacking expertise in the various contested  
29 languages, we would be remiss to offer specific recommendations about how particular  
30 words or phrases should be translated in those languages. Still, aided by the counsel of  
31 national mother-tongue speakers, this report illustrates various translation problems and  
32 suggests avenues for correction. But we limit our recommendations to principles to be  
33 applied across all translation efforts, and proffer associated recommendations to the  
34 churches in the PCA as they involve themselves in the work of missions and Bible  
35 translation.

36  
37 We have also grown in our esteem for brothers and sisters who, in response to God’s  
38 call, have left family, career, and home to commit their lives to the rigorous work of faithful

1 Bible translation so that others may have access to the Scriptures. Bible translation is unlike  
2 any other kind of translation. Only the Scriptures lead us rightly into glorifying and enjoying  
3 their divine Author; only the Scriptures are self-attesting and self-interpreting; only the  
4 Scriptures possess ultimate authority. No other text possesses such distinction. Further, from  
5 Genesis to Revelation, the very words of the Bible reveal Jesus, the Son of God (John 5:39-  
6 47; Luke 24:13-49), by whom God has spoken in these last days (Heb. 1:1-2). This  
7 inscripturated revelation of Jesus Christ is critical, since “. . . there is salvation in no one  
8 else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”  
9 (Acts 4:12). In view of Scripture’s unique quality, the ministry of Bible translation is both a  
10 tremendous privilege and a great responsibility.

11

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

## 1 Section A: The Practice of Bible Translation

### 2 3 Bible Translation in the Twenty-First Century

4  
5 Many Western Christians today still think of Bible translation in its eighteenth  
6 through early twentieth century form: a Western missionary emigrates to a foreign land,  
7 learns the language and culture, and translates the Bible into that target language. In some  
8 cases, he must develop an alphabet and written grammar, as well as literacy training for the  
9 national audience. Often the missionary directly engages in other projects to help the people,  
10 including political advocacy, building public utilities such as schools and hospitals, aiding  
11 economic development, *et cetera*. In it all, the missionary accomplishes the translation  
12 efforts by personally investing in the target people, faithfully evangelizing, teaching, and  
13 ultimately church planting. Previous generations of Christians thrilled to hear of Marilyn  
14 Laszlo,<sup>7</sup> Jim Elliot,<sup>8</sup> and others, who devoted their lives to evangelism, living with small  
15 tribes in remote areas, and providing not only Bible translation but also Bible exposition and  
16 deeds of mercy which exemplified the truth and power of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

17  
18 Still, this history of Bible translation has birthed at least two criticisms. First, some  
19 have alleged that foreign missionaries cannot learn the subtleties of a new culture or  
20 language rapidly enough to translate terms like “sin,” “grace,” “repent” and even “God”  
21 with the correct nuances.<sup>9</sup> Second, some worry that the process reeks of Western cultural  
22 imperialism. Even unknowingly, a foreign missionary might impose his own cultural norms  
23 beyond what the Bible alone would mandate.

24  
25 Seeking to accelerate the process, to improve the understandability of the translation,  
26 and to avoid former errors and biases, current Western-aided Bible translation projects lean  
27 heavily on “mother-tongue” nationals who receive varying levels of proactive training and  
28 reactive critique from Western consultants, allegedly reducing the need for the consultants to  
29 have such a thorough understanding of the intricacies of the target culture and language:  
30 “Muslim language communities are much more receptive to a Bible translation if the major  
31 players in the translation team are themselves members of the community, participants in  
32

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<sup>7</sup> Marilyn Laszlo, *Mission Possible: The Wonderful Story of God and a Wycliffe Translator in the Jungles of Papua New Guinea* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> A treasure trove of examples resides in Eugene A. Nida, *God's Word in Man's Language* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952).

1 their culture, and speakers of their language.”<sup>10</sup> The translators may be college-educated or  
 2 not; theologically trained or not;<sup>11</sup> mature Christians, new Christians, or even non-  
 3 Christians.<sup>12</sup>

4  
 5 The process involves translation consultants whose responsibilities vary widely. In  
 6 some cases, they exercise veto power over final publication; in others they wield no  
 7 authority but function as advisors. The translation team presents the text to national test-  
 8 readers and then asks the readers comprehension questions about the text to determine  
 9 whether the text properly conveys the intended meaning. The translators and consultants  
 10 then must determine the source of any errors in the reader’s understanding: linguistic,  
 11 cultural, theological, or otherwise. Work in Muslim areas poses a particular challenge in  
 12 disentangling those factors.

### 14 **Muslim Belief: The Son of God in the *Qur'an***

15  
 16 The *Qur'an* accords Jesus honor as prophet and Messiah but vigorously denounces  
 17 all worship of him as God or the Son of God:

18  
 19 O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of God  
 20 aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an  
 21 apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit  
 22 proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles. Say not “Trinity”:  
 23 desist: it will be better for you: for God is one God: Glory be to Him: (far  
 24 exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens  
 25 and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs.<sup>13</sup>

26  
 27 This complaint against Jesus’ divine Sonship should not surprise the Christian  
 28 reader; Jesus faced the same objection personally from Jewish authorities during his earthly  
 29 ministry (John 10:22-39). Muslims find the notion that God has a Son reprehensible for at

---

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> SIL describes its own translation process at <http://sil.org/translation/stages.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Q4:171, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, trans. A. Yusuf Ali (11<sup>th</sup> edition; Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2004). Cf. Q5:19, 75; 6:101; 9:30-31; 19:35.

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

## 11 **Functional and Formal Equivalence**

12  
 13 In the mid-twentieth century, Eugene Nida described Bible translation up to that  
 14 point as work which aimed for "formal equivalence," translating the words while seeking to  
 15 maintain underlying grammatical structures.<sup>15</sup> Over and against a formal equivalence  
 16 approach, Nida first championed "dynamic equivalence" and later "functional equivalence,"  
 17 with the explicit goal of achieving "meaning for meaning" rather than "word for word"  
 18 translation. Although the secular academy has moved onto other terminologies and  
 19 paradigms for the encoding of meaning and the process of translation,<sup>16</sup> Nida still directly  
 20 informs discussion about Bible translations. His approach bore fruit in the *Good News Bible*  
 21 (1966) and the *Contemporary English Version* (CEV; 1987-1995), both published by his  
 22 long-term employer, the American Bible Society. The difference between functional and  
 23 formal translation, respectively, can be seen in a comparison of English translations of  
 24 Psalm 8:4 below:

25  
 26 Then I ask, "Why do you care                      What is man, that you are mindful of him,  
 27 about us humans?                                      And the son of man, that you care for him? (ESV)  
 28 Why are you concerned  
 29 for us weaklings?" (CEV)

30  
 31 Functional equivalence, with its "meaning for meaning" ethos, avoids translating  
 32 idioms directly. English does not use the "son of . . ." idiom as often as Hebrew. Therefore  
 33 the CEV renders "son of man" (Hebrew *ben-adam*) in Psalm 8:4 as "weakling." This injects  
 34

<sup>14</sup> See footnote #2 above.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Eugene A. Nida, *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, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974).

<sup>16</sup> Glenn J. Kerr, "Dynamic Equivalence and Its Daughters: Placing Bible Translation Theories in Their Historical Context," *Translation* 7:1 (2011): pp. 9-12.

1 a greater element of interpretation into the text than does “son of man.” In this case, the  
 2 functional equivalence translation isolates a single perceived implication of the sonship  
 3 metaphor in for this passage: God is great, whereas men are weak.  
 4

5 Functional equivalence translation may highlight one possible dimension of “son of  
 6 man” in Psalm 8, but in the process, the reader loses insight into the Hebrew sonship idiom  
 7 itself. The loss of this and other phrases pregnant with biblical cultural and/or biblico-  
 8 theological significance, such as “you anoint my head with oil” (the CEV renders Ps. 23:5  
 9 as, “you honor me as your guest”) or “first fruits” (the CEV simply omits the second half of  
 10 Ps. 78:51) exemplifies how functional equivalence impoverishes students of the Bible who  
 11 lack access to more formally equivalent versions. The passage seems clearer to the first-time  
 12 reader, who probably understands “weakling” better than “son of man,” but the text also  
 13 loses its organic and theologically critical connections to “son of man” elsewhere in  
 14 Scripture, and “son of . . .” metaphors in general. The individual verse seems clearer in one  
 15 respect, but such dynamic translation obscures the overarching meanings conveyed by  
 16 biblical typology and organic biblical themes.  
 17

18 Nida himself appreciated the dangers of a translation which errs on the side of  
 19 immediate clarity. Commenting on the interpretive challenges of John 3:13, he and Barclay  
 20 Newman note, “It seems best, however, simply to translate this verse, along with certain of  
 21 its exegetical obscurities and ambiguities, and to leave the interpretation to commentators.  
 22 Even though the solution might allow some slight confusion for the average reader, there is  
 23 at least no serious distortion of the truth through a more or less ‘close translation.’”<sup>17</sup> One  
 24 naturally wonders how “slight” an immediate confusion should be tolerated, in order to  
 25 avoid how “serious” a distortion of the broader truth.  
 26

27 Vern Poythress has emphasized this balance between literal translations which  
 28 neglect initial intelligibility, and translations which over-interpret in the name of immediate  
 29 clarity “at the expense of richer representation of original meaning,” leaving, “a kind of  
 30 ‘baby’ Bible that addresses primarily the most ignorant.”<sup>18</sup> This arguably poses fewer  
 31 problems in Western countries, blessed with a glut of competing Bible translations featuring  
 32 varying levels of formal and functional equivalence, not to mention paraphrased Bibles,  
 33 novelized Bible stories, children’s books, commentaries, and more.

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<sup>17</sup> Eugene Nida and Barclay Newman, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of John* (New York: United Bible Societies. 1980), p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> Vern S. Poythress, “Bible Translation and Contextualization: Theory And Practice in Bangladesh,” *The Works of John Frame and Vern Poythress*, October 10, 2005, [http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress\\_articles/2005Bible.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/2005Bible.htm) (accessed April 2012).

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

## 10 Recent History of Missions to Muslims

11  
 12 When one surveys the last one hundred years of Christian outreach to Muslims, a  
 13 pattern emerges. Faced with Muslim resistance to the concept of Jesus as “Son of God,”  
 14 each generation of missiologists has recapitulated a similar discussion: one group avers that  
 15 a formally equivalent “Son of God” translation invites misunderstanding due to the  
 16 idiosyncrasies of some receptor language. Another group responds that the problem lies  
 17 rather in religious resistance to *any* analogy between divine and human relationships,  
 18 especially the father/son language proscribed by the *Qur'an*.

19  
 20 For instance, in 1953, D.A. Chowdhury proposed, “[W]e should no longer use the  
 21 terms ‘Khodar Beta’ (God’s Son) and ‘Hazrat 'Isa’ (Lord Jesus) in the literature meant for  
 22 Bengal Moslems; because the two terms, I venture to think, do not represent the truth.  
 23 ‘Khodar Beta’ and ‘Hazrat 'Isa’ have entirely different meanings when used by a Moslem.”<sup>20</sup>  
 24 In rebuttal, L. Bevan Jones cited a nineteenth century Afghan missionary who instead  
 25 recommended that when faced with Muslim definitions of Biblical terms, “We keep the  
 26 name we find in use but seek to change the Muslim’s idea as to its content.”<sup>21</sup>

27  
 28 Fifteen years later, Kenneth Cragg argued “The phrase [‘Son of God’] itself is not  
 29 important; another phrase would do if it communicated Jesus’ ready identity in action with  
 30 the perspectives and purposes of the Divine mind in his ministry and passion.”<sup>22</sup> Charles  
 31

---

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> D. A. Chowdhury, “Should We Use the Terms ‘Isa’ and ‘Beta?’” *Biblical Theology* (January 1953): pp. 26-27.

<sup>21</sup> L. Bevan Jones, “On the Use of the Name 'Isa’ (II),” *Biblical Theology* (April 1953): pp. 83-86.

<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Christianity in World Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 141-142.

1 Kraft cited Cragg approvingly and added, “the term ‘Son’ and its coordinate ‘Father’ should,  
2 in my opinion, at any rate, be avoided. . . . The concept of the Trinity can also in most cases  
3 be avoided.”<sup>23</sup>  
4

5 In 1977, Arie de Kuiper and Barclay Newman claimed that Jesus’ message “was the  
6 proclamation of God’s rule, not of himself as the Son of God,” and that, for example, the  
7 Malay language did not allow the concept of sonship to be presented in non-biological  
8 terms: “*anak* means child in the sense of a very immediate physical relation to the parents.  
9 Moreover this word cannot very well be used as a metaphor.”<sup>24</sup> As a result, they avoided the  
10 phrase “Son of God” by presenting Scripture passages to Muslims only selectively<sup>25</sup> rather  
11 than try to “impose on the Muslim reader from the beginning a complete gospel where the  
12 problem of Jesus’ Sonship immediately confronts him. The Muslim reader would then be  
13 free to use some other description of Jesus, and one just as real to him as is the term Son of  
14 God to other communities of believers.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus’ sonship, virgin birth, and bodily  
15 resurrection were suggested as true<sup>27</sup> but supposedly optional components of Christianity,  
16 which converts might later pick up, after reaching “a more mature level of belief.”<sup>28</sup>  
17

18 They proposed that “Son of God” might be rendered as *abdi Allah* or *Abdullah* (both  
19 meaning “servant of God”) in Arabic translations, whereas God’s declaration in Mark 1:11  
20 (“You are my beloved Son”) could be rendered, “You are like a son to me,” perhaps with a  
21 footnote limiting the sonship language to the sense applied to the Davidic king in Psalm 2.<sup>29</sup>  
22 Matt Finlay, a missionary in Southeast Asia whom de Kuiper and Newman quoted  
23 extensively in alleged support of their approach, responded in rebuttal:  
24

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

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Kraft, “Distinctive Religious Barriers to Outside Penetration,” in the *Report on Consultation on Islamic Communication*, held at Marseille in 1974, pp. 69-72.

<sup>24</sup> Arie de Kuiper and Barclay Newman, “Jesus, Son of God- A Translation Problem,” *The Bible Translator* 28:4 (October 1977): p. 435.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437.

<sup>29</sup> *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.”



1 Testament would lay us open to further charges of changing our Text because  
2 we know and now admit that the Bible is corrupt.<sup>30</sup>  
3

4 Finlay then offered numerous Malay idioms which used “son” in a non-biological manner,  
5 disproving de Kuiper and Newman’s claims to the contrary.  
6

7 The most recent iteration of this debate begins in a similar manner, with vigorous  
8 debate on all sides. “Experimentation” with avoidance of “Son of God” and other divine  
9 familial terms first began in the field, but also has been promoted from high levels within  
10 some missions agencies. In 2000, Rick Brown, influential translation consultant and former  
11 SIL Eurasia area director and board member, claimed that Muslim resistance to sonship  
12 language in Scripture stemmed from a misinterpreted sexual connotation:  
13

14 For Muslims [the phrase “son of God”] has a single well-entrenched meaning,  
15 namely physical offspring from God’s sexual union with a woman. . . .  
16 [M]ost of the common people in Muslim communities are so afraid of the  
17 term that they refuse to read or listen to anything that affirms it. Some will  
18 not even touch a book if they know that term is affirmed in it.<sup>31</sup>  
19

20 Brown proposed alternative means of describing the relationship of Christians to  
21 God, including “the righteous servants of God” and “those close to God.”<sup>32</sup> He endorsed  
22 translation solutions which in English would be rendered “Christ of God” or “Christ sent  
23 from God” as possible substitute descriptions for Jesus as the “Son of God.”<sup>33</sup> According to  
24 Brown, when the framers of the Nicene Creed identified Jesus’ Sonship with his divine  
25 origin and nature, “although they were theologically correct, they were exegetically wrong”  
26 because, he contended, Scripture does not defend Jesus’ divine nature through sonship  
27 language.<sup>34</sup> He described his approach to Muslim evangelism directly:  
28

29 I gently explain that ‘Son of God’ is merely a title for the Messiah, meaning  
30 God loves him and sent him as the Messiah with power from God, so that all  
31 people should honor and obey him. . . . If they say we worship Jesus as God,  
32 I ask if Jesus is God’s Word whom he cast into the virgin Mary to be born as  
33

---

<sup>30</sup> Matt Finlay, “Jesus, Son of God- A Translation Problem. Some Further Comments,” *The Bible Translator* 30:2 (April 1979): pp. 241-244.

<sup>31</sup> Rick Brown, “Delicate Issues in Mission Part 2: Translating the Biblical term ‘Son(s) of God’ in Muslim Contexts,” *IJFM* 22:4 (Winter 2005): p. 137.

<sup>32</sup> Rick Brown, “The Son of God: Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus,” *IJFM* 17:1 (Spring 2000): p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Rick Brown, “Delicate Issues in Mission Part 2,” pp. 139-140.

<sup>34</sup> Brown, “The Son of God,” p. 49.

1 a man called ‘the Messiah’ . . . . [M]any Muslims who have read the Gospel  
 2 and come to faith in Jesus cannot bring themselves to call him or themselves  
 3 ‘sons of God.’<sup>35</sup>  
 4

5 David Abernathy noted that such errant thinking resurfaces, among other concerns, the  
 6 ancient heresy of adoptionism:  
 7

8 An even larger problem looms for us theologically if “Son of God” and  
 9 “Christ” are essentially equivalent in meaning in the New Testament. If there  
 10 is little difference in semantic meaning between them, then it follows that  
 11 Jesus became the Son when he became the Christ. This would then mean that  
 12 he is not eternally the Son, an assertion that denies a basic tenet of Christian  
 13 faith held from the earliest times, even in the first century, long before the  
 14 deliberations of the ecumenical councils.<sup>36</sup>  
 15

16 As late as October 2010, SIL personnel published extended defenses of “Messiah” as  
 17 an appropriate substitute for “Son of God.”<sup>37</sup> More recently, Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and  
 18 Andrea Gray (hereafter, BGG) acknowledged a distinction: “terms like ‘Christ/Messiah’  
 19 should be used only to translate *Christos/Meshiach* and should not be used to translate  
 20 *huios/ben* [i.e., ‘son’].”<sup>38</sup> The revised version of the 2010 SIL paper mentioned above stated,  
 21 “We do not recommend translating ‘Son of God’ simply as ‘Christ’, making no distinction  
 22 between the terms.” For situations in which “Son of God” is either “completely  
 23 misunderstood” or simply “not natural and not clear,” that paper suggested “spiritual Son of  
 24 God,” “God’s Beloved,” “God’s only-one,” and “God’s beloved Christ.”<sup>39</sup>  
 25

26 BGG still posit the inability of some languages to avoid sexual connotations for their  
 27 common familial terms: “Such wordings are inaccurate because they add a procreative  
 28 meaning that was absent from the original, and this obscures the important interpersonal  
 29

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<sup>35</sup> 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.

<sup>36</sup> David Abernathy, “Translating ‘Son of God’ in Missionary Bible Translations: A Critique of ‘Muslim-Idiom Translations: Claims and Facts’ by Rick Brown, John Penny, and Leith Gray,” *St. Francis Magazine* 6:1 (February 2010), p. 178.

<sup>37</sup> SIL Consultative Group for Muslim Idiom Translation paper, titled, “Technical Paper Number 5: Rationale for non-literal translation of ‘Son of God’, Version 1,” October 2010, n.p.

<sup>38</sup> BGG, “A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms,” *IJFM* 28:3 (Fall 2011): p. 116. Poythress concurs, noting that “Messiah” and “Son of God” have similar but not identical meanings (“Bible Translation and Contextualization,” [accessed April 2012]).

<sup>39</sup> SIL Consultative Group for Muslim Idiom Translation paper, titled, “Technical Paper Number 5: Rationale for non-literal translation of ‘Son of God’, Version 2,” January 2011, n.p.

1 relationships that were expressed in the original text.”<sup>40</sup> Although some cite specific  
 2 languages as unable to use biological familial terms in non-physical ways, others have  
 3 provided counterexamples of these procreative terms being used metaphorically, as Finlay  
 4 showed in his day with respect to the Malay language. Missionaries reported to our  
 5 committee that Muslims in some areas of the world simply do not react in the emphatic,  
 6 negative manner described in such universal terms by Brown, and other Muslims take  
 7 offense for reasons unrelated to a perceived sexual slant in sonship language.

8  
 9 To date, few national speakers have engaged in this debate in Western periodicals,  
 10 making scholarly citations of their perspectives elusive. Furthermore, facing fund-raising  
 11 challenges and citing potential risks to their security and harmony, translation agencies have  
 12 at times discouraged their workers from openly challenging colleagues and superiors on  
 13 these matters. We are aware of three missionaries who were told by their organization’s  
 14 leadership that if they were concerned with the organization’s direction, they should simply  
 15 quit rather than question. Some have done so.<sup>41</sup>

16  
 17 These accounts present a crucial question. When a Muslim says, “I must not even  
 18 read this book because it calls Jesus the Son of God,” have we just witnessed a linguistic  
 19 failure or a religious clash? Anecdotes prove notoriously unhelpful in settling this debate, or  
 20 any debate for that matter.<sup>42</sup> For every story about a Muslim who rejected the Bible until  
 21 sonship language was expunged, a counter story surfaces about a former Muslim who  
 22 cherishes the familial treasures of the gospel, claiming that God’s Fatherhood of Jesus and  
 23 of believers actually convinced him to become a Christian. In addition, as Poythress has  
 24 noted, a perpetual battle of the experts produces a very unsatisfactory situation for Christians  
 25 interested in the international progress of the gospel.<sup>43</sup>

26  
 27 Complicating matters further, some authors publish about these issues under one or  
 28 more pseudonyms, obscuring personal identity and institutional affiliations, and perhaps  
 29

---

<sup>40</sup> BGG, “A New Look at Translating,” p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> 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.

<sup>42</sup> “[S]ome kinds of information that the scientist regards as highly pertinent and logically compelling are habitually ignored by people. Other kinds of information, logically much weaker, trigger strong inferences and action tendencies” (R.E. Nesbitt, Eugene Borgida, Rick Crandall, and Harvey Reed, “Popular Induction: Information Is Not Necessarily Informative,” in *Cognition and Social Behavior*, ed. John Carroll and John Payne [Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1977], p. 133).

<sup>43</sup> Vern S. Poythress, “A Clarification on the Translation of ‘Son’ and ‘Father,’” *The Works of John Frame and Vern Poythress*, March 1, 2012, [http://www.framepoythress.org/poythress\\_articles/2012Clarification.htm](http://www.framepoythress.org/poythress_articles/2012Clarification.htm) (accessed April 2012).

1 unintentionally giving their views an apparently wider base of support, as several different  
 2 names promote similar ideas. As a result, publications from the last decade have tilted  
 3 lopsidedly in favor of those who would avoid begetting terms of sonship. That tide is  
 4 turning, but in the meantime, solid and actionable primary data from the field proves both  
 5 difficult to obtain and conflicting in its findings.

## 7 **Bibles for Muslims**

9 Bible translations used in Muslim-dominated societies can be categorized in a variety  
 10 of ways, including a “church-oriented” to “Muslim-oriented” spectrum as well as  
 11 breakdowns related to who is doing the translation, and for what audience, and for what  
 12 purpose.<sup>44</sup> Translations contextualized for Muslim people groups are sometimes called  
 13 “Muslim Idiom Translations” (MIT). This loose descriptor covers a wide variety of  
 14 translation types, ranging from simple substitutions of *Allah* for God and *Isa* for Jesus<sup>45</sup> to  
 15 the use of a much broader range of Muslim terminology and phraseology that risks inviting  
 16 the Muslim background reader to read the Bible through an Islamic worldview.<sup>46</sup>

17  
 18 Some translations avoid terms found in the *Qur'an* (e.g., “Allah” and “Isa”) while  
 19 others embrace and redefine the same terms. Some specifically avoid language associated  
 20 with the indigenous church, hoping to avoid stereotypes and reminders of local  
 21 Muslim/Christian tensions. For example, in some parts of Pakistan, “Masih” (a  
 22 transliteration of “Messiah” used in the traditional Urdu Bible) has become a surname  
 23 adopted by Christians of low-caste Hindu origin, so that the application of that word to Jesus  
 24 carries unintended associations. Another word meaning “anointed” or a transliteration of  
 25 “Christ” might skirt that problem while retaining Biblical linkage. One Turkish Bible uses  
 26 quranic diction, a practice that our Turkish pastoral respondents judged acceptable so long  
 27 as the similarity to the *Qur'an* remained a matter of style rather than content. However, the  
 28 style-versus-content distinction operates better in theory than in practice, and accommodative  
 29

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<sup>44</sup> 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.

<sup>45</sup> 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.

<sup>46</sup> 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.

1 translations might facilitate the reading of scripture through the Muslim lens or worldview  
 2 with which the reader may be more familiar, potentially opening the door to even an  
 3 unwitting syncretism.<sup>47</sup>

## 4 5 **Current Events 2011-2012**

6  
7 Debate over the “Son of God” language in Scripture entered the public evangelical  
 8 consciousness in the last eighteen months through articles in lay presses such as *World*  
 9 *Magazine*,<sup>48</sup> *Christianity Today*,<sup>49</sup> and *World News Daily*.<sup>50</sup> When Overture 9 (“Toward a  
 10 Faithful Witness”)<sup>51</sup> from Potomac Presbytery to the 39<sup>th</sup> PCA GA (2011) requested the  
 11 appointment of a Study Committee to review Insider Movements and current trends in the  
 12 translation of familial language in the Bible,<sup>52</sup> Larry Chico authored a response,  
 13 “Considering Overture 9,” on behalf of Wycliffe/SIL.<sup>53</sup> That response was not received  
 14 formally by the General Assembly<sup>54</sup> but became itself a subject of analysis.<sup>55</sup> The 39<sup>th</sup> PCA  
 15 GA (2011) adopted Overture 9, declaring “as unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider  
 16 Movement or any other translations of the Bible that remove from the text references to God  
 17 as ‘Father’ (*pater*) or Jesus as ‘Son’ (*huios*), because such removals compromise doctrines  
 18 of the Trinity, the person, and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture.”<sup>56</sup>

19  
20 A consultation at Houghton College on June 20-23, 2011, entitled, “Bridging the  
 21 Divide,” agreed that Bible translations must practice “fidelity in Scripture translation using  
 22 terms that accurately express the familial relationship by which God has chosen to describe

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<sup>47</sup> Whether syncretism actually occurs remains a question the SCIM intends to address in Part Two of its report.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Emily Belz, “Inside Out,” *World Magazine*, May 7, 2011, <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/17944> (accessed April 2012) and idem, “The Battle for Accurate Bible Translation,” *World Magazine*, February 25, 2012, <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/19184> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>49</sup> Collin Hansen, “The Son and the Crescent,” *Christianity Today*, February 4, 2011, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/february/soncrescent.html> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>50</sup> 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 Carl, “Wycliffe Defends Changing Titles for God,” *World News Daily*, February 2, 2012, <http://www.wnd.com/2012/02/wycliffe-defends-changing-titles-for-god> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>51</sup> See p. 4 of this report.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the 39th PCA General Assembly, 2011, pp. 61-63.

<sup>53</sup> “Considering Overture 9” has not been published formally, but its text is included in the Seaton response cited below.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes of the 39th PCA General Assembly, 2011, pp. 16-17.

<sup>55</sup> Scott Seaton, “In Pursuit of a Faithful Witness,” *Reformation21*, November 2011, <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/in-pursuit-of-a-faithful-witness.php> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Minutes of the 39th PCA General Assembly, 2011, pp. 16-17.

1 Himself as Father in relationship to the Son in the original languages.”<sup>57</sup> The Houghton  
 2 delegates formed three committees to study related issues further, and another consultation  
 3 will occur in June 2012.

4  
 5 PCA Pastor Scott Seaton served as lead author for an online petition, sponsored by  
 6 the Biblical Missiology coalition, which has to date gathered over 13,000 signatories from  
 7 around the world requesting that Wycliffe, SIL, Frontiers, and others “not support any  
 8 translation that replaces or removes ‘Father,’ ‘Son,’ or ‘Son of God’ from the text.”<sup>58</sup> The  
 9 Presbyterian Church in Pakistan voted to “sever its nexus with SIL,”<sup>59</sup> and the Pakistan  
 10 Bible Society ended twenty years of cooperation with SIL as well.<sup>60</sup> SIL denied any  
 11 intention to remove familial language in the first place<sup>61</sup> and suspended approval of the  
 12 debated translations, pending further discussion with interested parties.<sup>62</sup> The Assemblies of  
 13 God denomination presented Wycliffe with a May 15, 2012, deadline for redressing its  
 14 previous policies and actions related to familial language translation.<sup>63</sup> The Evangelical  
 15 Presbyterian Church is also investigating these issues, with plans to make a preliminary  
 16 statement upholding traditional divine familial terminology at its June 2012 General  
 17 Assembly.<sup>64</sup>

18  
 19 In August 2011, members of W/SIL along with selected scholars gathered in  
 20 Istanbul, and produced a statement of “Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine  
 21 Familial Terms,” hereafter referred to as “Istanbul.” The initial version of Istanbul posted on

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<sup>57</sup> 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).

<sup>58</sup> “Lost in Translation: Keep Father and Son in the Bible,” *Change.org*, January 2012, <http://www.change.org/petitions/lost-in-translation-keep-father-son-in-the-bible> (accessed May 4, 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.

<sup>59</sup> 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-content/uploads/2012/02/ChurchofPakistanRegardingBibleTranslation.pdf> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Belz, “Battle for Accurate Bible Translation,” (accessed April 2012).

<sup>61</sup> “SIL Responds to False Accusations,” *SIL International*, January 2012, <http://www.sil.org/sil/news/2012/SIL-Son-of-God-translation.htm> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>62</sup> “SIL announces additional dialogue with partners on translation practice,” *SIL International*, February 6, 2012, <http://www.sil.org/sil/news/2012/SIL-dialogue-translation-practice.htm> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>63</sup> 63. Ben Aker, Jim Bennett, Mark Hausfeld, Jim Hernando, Tommy Hodum, Wave Nunnally, and Adam Simnowitz, “The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology in Scripture Translations for Muslims,” April 2012, <http://www.fatherson.ag.org/download/paper.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2012), and idem, Executive Summary of “The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology in Scripture Translations for Muslims,” April 2012, <http://www.fatherson.ag.org/download/summary.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2012); cf. Randy Hurst, “Essential Scriptural Integrity,” *Pentecostal Evangel* (March 4, 2012): p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Personal correspondence with George Carey, EPC World Outreach director.

1 the SIL website in 2011 stated that translators must avoid “*any possible implication of*  
 2 *sexual activity by God.*”<sup>65</sup> A revision published in January 2012 omitted that overly broad  
 3 verbiage but left room for the previous policy’s allowance for alternative translations of  
 4 divine familial terms in Bibles for languages in which “a word-for-word translation of these  
 5 familial terms would communicate an incorrect meaning (i.e. that God had physical, sexual  
 6 relations with Mary, mother of Jesus. . . .).”<sup>66</sup> No examples were given, and the only  
 7 problem cited in the statement was that controversy had arisen, without admitting the  
 8 possibility that translation misjudgments had occurred.

9  
 10 In February 2012, W/SIL committed to discontinue or correct all translation work  
 11 prior to August 2011 which did not meet their current policy “for the literal translation of  
 12 divine familial terms to be given preference” (their emphasis), allowing for “the few cases  
 13 when a literal translation would create an inaccurate meaning.”<sup>67</sup> No examples were given.  
 14 In March 2012, W/SIL announced that a panel from the WEA would evaluate W/SIL’s  
 15 practices related to divine familial language translation by the end of 2012.<sup>68</sup> W/SIL and  
 16 WEA did not mention whether the resulting report would be made public.<sup>69</sup> Throughout all  
 17 these discussions runs the thread not only of mere scholarly disagreement, but also of  
 18 heartfelt passion and concern on the part of all concerned for those who do not know and  
 19 believe the gospel of Christ.

20  
 21 SIL released another longer version commentary on Istanbul shortly before our  
 22 SCIM report Part One became public. The pre-publication version of “Istanbul 3.0”<sup>70</sup> the  
 23 SCIM received affirms Trinitarian orthodoxy and expresses a welcome dedication to “filial”  
 24 language to describe Jesus, presumably as opposed to “messiah” substitutions for *huios*.  
 25 Throughout Istanbul 3.0 runs a laudably worded commitment to accurate Bible translation

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<sup>65</sup> This excerpt from “SIL International Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms,” *SIL International*,” [http://www.sil.org/translation/divine\\_familial\\_terms.htm](http://www.sil.org/translation/divine_familial_terms.htm) (accessed August 2011; emphasis ours). This excerpt is no longer available online in its original wording.

<sup>66</sup> “SIL International Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms,” *SIL International*,” [http://www.sil.org/translation/divine\\_familial\\_terms.htm](http://www.sil.org/translation/divine_familial_terms.htm) (accessed January 2012).

<sup>67</sup> “Divine Familial Terms: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions,” *Wycliff.org*, February 15, 2012, <http://www.wycliffe.org/SonofGod/QA.aspx> (accessed April 2012; emphasis in original).

<sup>68</sup> Tom Breen, “Bible Translator Criticized over Word Substitution,” Associated Press, April 26, 2012, [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gRm1Ss9Eb\\_hzzoyxW7clb3OdCDyw](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gRm1Ss9Eb_hzzoyxW7clb3OdCDyw)

<sup>69</sup> “WEA to Form Independent Review Panel on Wycliffe and SIL Bible Translation,” March 2012, <http://www.worldea.com/news/3934> (accessed April 2012). A parallel press release appeared, titled, “World Evangelical Alliance Agrees to Lead Review of Wycliffe and SIL Translation Practices,” *Wycliffe Bible Translators USA*, March 2012, <http://wycliffeusa.wordpress.com/2012/03/27/> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>70</sup> 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.

1 and to the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ: “Without reservation, SIL’s Scripture  
 2 translation practice is to use wording which promotes accurate understanding of the  
 3 relationship of Father by which God chose to describe Himself in relationship to His Son,  
 4 Jesus Christ, in the original languages of Scripture.”<sup>71</sup>

5  
 6 Many will surely seek to honor by motive and method the heart and substance of  
 7 these improved policies, translating divine familial terms faithfully. As documented above,  
 8 however, the members of the translation community hold a diversity of viewpoints as to  
 9 what constitutes such faithful translation and faithful application of such policies, and only  
 10 the future will disclose how the translators will apply such guidelines to the thirty to forty  
 11 disputed current translation projects<sup>72</sup> as well as to any future ones.

### 12 13 **Pastoral Concerns**

14  
 15 Organizations such as W/SIL<sup>73</sup> and Frontiers have served for decades as a vanguard,  
 16 taking the gospel and the written Word into formerly inaccessible and neglected regions.  
 17 This trailblazing effort goes underappreciated in some cases, and sadly, like many good  
 18 works, is more often noticed in the occasional breach of duty than in the usual fulfillment of  
 19 duty. Such work requires a pioneering mindset which brings with it the occupational hazard  
 20 of potentially inadequate interface with the broader church in at least three ways.

21  
 22 *First*, the notable advances through Christian evangelism worldwide render new  
 23 translation efforts successively less likely to plow totally untilled ground, introducing a new  
 24 array of factors that must inform the translation work. Suppose, for example, that over  
 25 generations, a church grows in a region’s major language group. Minor language groups in  
 26 that same area remain unreached, sometimes due to a state of mutual animosity with the  
 27 culturally dominant group which can impede evangelization. Moreover, although the smaller  
 28 group may know the language of the dominant culture, the group may resist reading a Bible  
 29 not written in its own language. If that new Bible translation *leads* its readers to believe  
 30 doctrines incompatible with those of the historic church (and the larger group in the region),  
 31

---

<sup>71</sup> “Istanbul 3.0”.

<sup>72</sup> 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*.

<sup>73</sup> 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>.



1 it not only induces them to embrace theological error, it also runs afoul of the Bible’s  
 2 insistence that faith in Christ requires all Christians dwell as members of a single body  
 3 (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  
 4 confession in a common Lord (Eph. 4:1-16). Furthermore, significant theological differences  
 5 between the two translations may lead bilingual readers of both to wonder what the Bible  
 6 really says.

7  
 8         Such a scenario illustrates how evangelizing relatively unreached subgroups requires  
 9 pastoral sensitivity, intentional and humble proactivity toward the already-established  
 10 church in that region, as well as biblical foresight for building relationships between the new  
 11 church and the global church. These factors must also influence the way in which  
 12 organizations develop and deliver new translations of Scripture. In the 1970s, the Lebanese  
 13 Christian scholar and translator Georges Housney took these dynamics seriously when he  
 14 embarked on a new Arabic Bible translation only after receiving support from 300 affected  
 15 Christian leaders and organizations. The subsequent acceptance of his finished work shows  
 16 the importance of a strategy of such pastoral engagement,<sup>74</sup> whereas, as Poythress has noted,  
 17 “to introduce a second translation with considerable differences from the first, must be done  
 18 with thoughtfulness, lest it cause division among Christians and confusion among non-  
 19 Christians as to what the Christian Bible really says.”<sup>75</sup>

20  
 21         The schisms between the Western and Eastern churches, and between the Roman and  
 22 Protestant churches, revolved largely around debates about authority. On a smaller scale but  
 23 with similar destructive power, when a new Bible translation discusses core concepts in  
 24 terms alien to the broader international church and the already-existing indigenous church,  
 25 the seeds of schism are either sown or fertilized. It may require many prayerful years to  
 26 break down unwholesome cultural separations, “that they may be one even as we are one”  
 27 (John 17:22).

28  
 29         *Second*, the vanguard function of Bible translators in global evangelism can generate  
 30 undue pressure for the translation itself to perform the work of exposition which more  
 31 properly belong to teachers and preachers of the church. The self-interpreting authority of  
 32 the perspicuous Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16; *WCF* 1:7, 9) does not relieve the church of its  
 33 privilege and duty to accompany the distribution of the Word with faithful preaching  
 34

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<sup>74</sup> The finished Bible was published in 1988 as *Ketab El Hayat* (“The Book of Life”) and as “The New Arabic Version” since 1992.

<sup>75</sup> Poythress, “Bible Translation and Contextualization,” (accessed April 2012).

1 (Luke 24:27, 32). It is, in fact, the very Word of God that mandates not only evangelism, but  
 2 also disciple-making and preaching (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 4:1-5).<sup>76</sup> Thus, **Bible**  
 3 **translators must produce non-expository translations, recognizing the role of pastors**  
 4 **and church leaders, and thereby serving the long-term needs of the nascent local**  
 5 **church.**

6  
 7 But given that expectation, if there is to be an initial church to grow long-term in the  
 8 first place, **churches such as the PCA must serve the work of translation by sending and**  
 9 **supporting theologically trained long-term field workers** who are equipped to respond to  
 10 those who ask, “How can I [understand the Bible], unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30-  
 11 31). Surely translation agencies would benefit greatly from persons and groups who, out of  
 12 concern for proclaiming the gospel and for the preservation of Biblical teaching overseas,  
 13 commit to sending two or four or ten field workers to each of the 2,000 peoples currently the  
 14 subject of translation work. Absent that commitment, armchair criticism justifiably breeds ill  
 15 will. A translated Bible, unaccompanied by faithful gospel witnesses to preach and explain  
 16 that Bible, also hamstring faithful gospel expansion and compels new Christians around the  
 17 world to limp along by unnecessary and improper self-reliance.

18  
 19 *Third*, one wonders whether an evangelistic process maintains a proper  
 20 eschatological vision when it aims for short term gains in the form of professions of faith,  
 21 while cementing long-term problems in the form of schismatic believing communities,  
 22 divorced from the global and historic church due to their immoderate local autonomy,  
 23 immaturity, and sectarian theology. Those who neglect long-term planning by misapplying  
 24 the doctrine of Christ’s imminent return (Rev. 22:20) may dismiss such a significant  
 25 downside. Others, whether consciously or unconsciously, may carry out shallow but broad  
 26 evangelism to “every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev. 14:6; similarly in 5:9  
 27 and 7:9) out of a desire to hasten the return of Christ, citing Matthew 24:14: “And this  
 28 gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all  
 29 nations, and then the end will come.”<sup>77</sup> But belief in an imminent Second Coming should not  
 30 preempt concern for the long-term consequences of church planting or Bible translation  
 31 methodology.

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<sup>76</sup> See Section B: Theological Implications.

<sup>77</sup> 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]).

## 1 **Caveats**

2  
3 Naïveté may tempt the amateur critic to assess a Bible translation's acceptability  
4 based on some particular translation of its words back into English. Poythress warns against  
5 jumping to conclusions based on such back-translations: "[S]trictly speaking, they [readers  
6 in some national language] are not misunderstanding [the English phrase] 'Son of God,' but  
7 rather an expression in their native language. That expression does not have exactly the  
8 same meaning that 'Son of God' has in English, or the analogue in Greek. And that is the  
9 problem, not the English phrase 'Son of God.'"<sup>78</sup>

10  
11 Few non-national speakers possess the linguistic and cultural experience to assess  
12 adequately assess the fruit of a translation in a distant language, particularly when doing so  
13 relies upon a back-translation which itself may display the bias of the back-translator.  
14 Barring some way to verify the adequacy of the back-translation itself, such an analysis of a  
15 translation essentially asks the back-translator for his opinion of the original translation  
16 while giving the reviewer a false sense of certainty about what the translation really  
17 communicates to its recipients. Therefore, although this report provides examples of back-  
18 translation in Arabic Bibles, it does so cautiously and only with the input of several native  
19 speakers. Due to the inherent limitations of back translations, we do not recommend that  
20 churches attempt to police the work of translators by scrutinizing back translations. Rather,  
21 churches should investigate the translation philosophy of translators whose work they  
22 support, employing the types of questions listed at the end of this report.

23  
24 Also, such a lengthy and resource-intensive project as Bible translation necessarily  
25 involves a wide variety of scholars, experts, field workers, and native speakers whose views  
26 may conflict on any particular questions. For this reason, the church should hold translation  
27 agencies accountable for the specific advice its staff renders to outside organizations, but not  
28 for all final products which involved the organizations. The church should not assume that a  
29 particular person's views are shared by every organization with whom he interacts, nor that  
30 such views will affect every product of those organizations. The collaborative nature of  
31 translation projects, combined with the perceived or real need for secrecy in areas hostile to  
32 Christianity, makes it difficult for observers to discern where responsibility lies. One group  
33 completes a translation after receiving translation training from a second group, only later to  
34 invite critique from a third group before finally distributing the finished product through a  
35 fourth. At the same time, for good or ill, such collaboration between organizations also

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<sup>78</sup> Vern S. Poythress, "Bible Translations for Muslim Readers," *Mission Frontiers*, February 7, 2011,  
<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/blog/post/bible-translations-for-muslim-readers> (accessed April 2012).

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

6  
 7 This committee also wishes to acknowledge the limitations of its investigations.  
 8 Because of the aforementioned security concerns or perceived fears of organizational  
 9 backlash, numerous relevant witnesses did not feel free to share their experiences and  
 10 perspectives with us. Some who chose to write or speak explicitly asked for their  
 11 communications to remain confidential. These factors create an opportunity for bias in our  
 12 investigation and conclusions. We have attempted to mitigate such tendencies through  
 13 charitable readings, secondhand sources, and corroborative evidence. Still, the rapid  
 14 developments in the last two years alone make it possible that new information will shed a  
 15 different light on elements of our analysis.

## 17 Contemporary Examples

18  
 19 Of the two hundred translation projects currently underway in Muslim contexts,  
 20 thirty to forty translate divine familial terms in non-biological ways.<sup>79</sup> Of these few dozen,  
 21 four examples from the present and recent past will suffice. Note that each of these four  
 22 projects targeted languages (Arabic, Turkish, and Bangla) in regions where another Bible  
 23 translation already existed. In each case, the new functionally equivalent translation intends  
 24 to reach people who do not read the existing translation. If a new, functionally equivalent  
 25 translation intends to supplement an existing translation, particularly if the existing  
 26 translation is of formal equivalence, this fact *may* mitigate concerns that the recipients of the  
 27 functionally equivalent translation lack access to the Bible's original thematic language.  
 28 However, to the extent that a new functionally equivalent translation supplants rather than  
 29 supplements the earlier allegedly inferior translation, it remains potentially subject to the  
 30 "baby Bible"<sup>80</sup> criticism raised above. In any case, nothing warrants illegitimate translation  
 31 practice.

### 33 1. Bangla: *Injil Sharif*

34  
 35 In 2005, Milton Coke's organization Global Partners for Development published  
 36 10,000 copies (described by some as a "trial version" despite the large print run) of the *Injil*

<sup>79</sup> Belz, "Holding Translators Accountable."

<sup>80</sup> Poythress, "Bible Translation and Contextualization: Theory And Practice in Bangladesh."

1 *Sharif* New Testament in the Bangla language of Bangladesh. The Bangla New Testament  
 2 translated Scriptural references to Jesus as “Son of God” using a Bangla word approximating  
 3 “Messiah.” A 2008 revision substituted the wordy “Ekanto Prio Mononito Jon,” meaning  
 4 “God’s Uniquely-Intimate Beloved Chosen One.” The accompanying glossary explained the  
 5 phrase only as a title of favor for Israel’s kings, without any mention of Christ’s divine  
 6 nature.<sup>81</sup>

7  
 8 W/SIL initially reported, “Neither Wycliffe USA nor SIL had any involvement in the  
 9 *Injil Sharif* project.”<sup>82</sup> However, in 2002, Milton Coke reported to one of his supporters:

10  
 11 Recently, the Wycliffe senior VP for Eurasia (Muslim Languages), Rick  
 12 Brown, presented two full sessions at our workshop in Bangkok last month  
 13 on the subject of how to translate Son of God and other delicate Biblical  
 14 expressions for Muslims. I agree with his proposals . . . [I]t boils down to fact  
 15 that the Arabic language demands that a son can only mean a biological  
 16 offspring . . . I think Messiah is a good New Testament translation for Son of  
 17 God, and Rick Brown argues this forcefully in the article I will send you. But  
 18 his argument briefly is this, looking for example at Mark 1:1, we see an  
 19 equation Christ = Son of God (=Messiah).<sup>83</sup>

20  
 21 And indeed, *Injil Sharif*’s original “Messiah” solution for translating “Son of God”  
 22 lines up with Brown’s writings circa 2002, and the newer “wordy” solution lines up with the  
 23 sort of non-biological yet allegedly filial terms which Brown’s more recent writings  
 24 promote. More recently, W/SIL admitted indirect involvement in *Injil Sharif*.

25  
 26 Neither Wycliffe USA nor SIL had official involvement in the translation.  
 27 The translation team for *Injil Sharif* decided to use the equivalent of  
 28 “Messiah” in place of “Son of God” in their first edition based upon their  
 29 understanding of published articles written by an SIL consultant. In 2005, the  
 30 team sought advice from the SIL consultant who had published the articles.  
 31 The SIL consultant recommended that they stop using “Messiah,” and instead  
 32 find a word or phrase that conveyed the divine familial relationship. After  
 33 more than two years of discussion and testing in the local community, the  
 34

---

<sup>81</sup> “Fact Check: Biblical Missiology’s Response To Wycliffe’s Comments On ‘Lost In Translation,’” *Biblical Missiology*, January 2012, p. 10, <http://biblicalmissiology.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/LostInTranslation-FactCheck.pdf> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>82</sup> “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.

<sup>83</sup> In an e-mail received by one of his supporters on June 17, 2002.

1 team settled upon a phrase that when translated back into English, reads,  
2 “God’s Intimately-Unique Loved One.”<sup>84</sup>

3  
4 This explanation not only omits Brown’s workshops in Bangkok; it also leaves the  
5 impression that the problem arose due to “[the translation team’s] understanding of  
6 published articles,” rather than admitting that at the time, Brown actually (and even  
7 “forcefully,” in Coke’s opinion) advocated an approach which Brown himself later  
8 disavowed.

9  
10 Talk of “trial versions” of translations can confuse or deflect readers. To some  
11 degree, every published Bible translation is a “trial version” subject to revision as wisdom  
12 and experience dictate. Crossway Bibles published the original *English Standard Version* in  
13 2001 and then a revised version in 2011. The *New International Version* of 1984 revised the  
14 New Testament of 1973 and the whole Bible of 1978. However, once a work enters the  
15 public realm through sales or free distribution and is used by churches and individuals, it  
16 loses its “trial” status. Electronic distribution makes recall of such “trials” even less feasible  
17 than for printed copies.

18  
19 Furthermore, the *Qur’an* conditions Muslims to see changes in Bibles as vindication  
20 of the *Qur’an*’s claims about the corrupt, unstable nature of the Bible, compared with the  
21 allegedly divinely dictated *Qur’an*. Such concerns should not completely squelch a healthy  
22 desire to improve previously published translations in Muslim-dominated societies. One  
23 must not allow unbelievers to dictate the terms of Bible translation, the very thing to which  
24 we object concerning divine familial language. Even so, translators must show proactive  
25 sensitivity to all manner of culturally conditioned perceptions, including the concept of  
26 revising a holy text.

## 28 **2. Arabic: “Stories of the Prophets”**

29  
30 In the 1990s, W/SIL participated in the production of the “Stories of the Prophets”  
31 Arabic New Testament audio dramas<sup>85</sup> translating the Greek *pater* as “rabb” (used with the  
32 non-familial meaning “Lord” throughout the *Qur’an*) instead of a word closer to English  
33 “father.” Examples of word replacement solutions in particular verses include<sup>86</sup>:

<sup>84</sup> “Divine Familial Terms: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions,” *Wycliff.org*, March 30, 2012,  
<http://www.wycliffe.org/SonofGod/QA.aspx> (accessed April 27, 2012).

<sup>85</sup> “Divine Familial Terms: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions,” *Wycliff.org*, updated February 15, 2012,  
at <http://www.wycliffe.org/SonofGod/QA.aspx> (accessed April 2012).

<sup>86</sup> Adam Simnowitz, “How Insider Movements Affect Ministry: Personal Reflections,” in *Chrislam: How Missionaries Are Promoting an Islamized Gospel*, ed. Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton, and Bill Nikides (Garden Grove, CA: i2 Ministries, 2011), pp. 206-207.

- 1 (a) Luke 1:32, 35 - “Son of the Most High” and “Son of God” become “the awaited Christ.”  
 2 (b) Luke 4:3 - “If you are truly the Son of God” becomes “If you are truly the Messiah  
 3 of the most high God.”  
 4 (c) Luke 4:9 - “the Son of God” becomes “the Messiah of God.”  
 5 (d) Luke 6:36 - “your Father is merciful” becomes “God is merciful.”  
 6 (e) Luke 11:2 - “Father” in the Lord’s Prayer becomes “Our loving heavenly Lord.”  
 7 (f) Luke 11:13 - “the heavenly Father” becomes “the Lord of the world.” (Cf. Q1:1-3).  
 8 (g) Luke 24:49 - “I will send the promise of my Father upon you” omits “of my Father.”  
 9 (h) Mt 28:19 - “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” becomes “in the  
 10 name of God and his Messiah and the Holy Spirit.”  
 11

12 The “Stories of the Prophets” recording of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans also omitted  
 13 Romans 1:2-4, which refers to Jesus as Son of David and Son of God,<sup>87</sup> as well as the  
 14 explanation of Jesus’ propitiating sacrifice in Romans 3:25-31, and more.<sup>88</sup> It is not  
 15 uncommon practice to remove sections of a text when adapting it for in a dramatic or audio  
 16 presentation, but the omissions cited above unavoidably reflect intentional word avoidance  
 17 of familial language for the Godhead due to a faulty translation paradigm and strategy.  
 18

19 In response to complaints, expansion of this audio series has ended, and some of the  
 20 debated recordings have been withdrawn from SIL-affiliated web sites. However, some  
 21 problematic recordings remain available.<sup>89</sup> W/SIL staff members have also issued conflicting  
 22 statements about whether the dramas should be considered a sort of Bible or not.<sup>90</sup>  
 23

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

---

<sup>87</sup> 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.

<sup>88</sup> 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).

<sup>89</sup> See [alanbiya.net](http://alanbiya.net) and [sabeelmedia.com](http://sabeelmedia.com) (accessed April 2012).

<sup>90</sup> “Fact Check: Biblical Missiology’s Response,” p. 6 (accessed April 2012).

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

### 9 **3. Arabic: *True Meaning***

10  
 11 The Syrian Arabic novelist Mazhar Mallouhi, who describes himself as “a Muslim  
 12 follower of Christ,”<sup>91</sup> spearheaded *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*.<sup>92</sup> This Arabic  
 13 language version of the four Gospels and Acts formally translates “Son of God” as *ibn Allah*  
 14 (using the most common Arabic word for “son”) but routinely follows it with a parenthetical  
 15 expression meaning “God’s Loved One.” The translation also avoids calling God “Father”  
 16 (the most common Arabic word for “father” is *ab*) in favor of words connoting “Lord” or  
 17 “Guardian,”<sup>93</sup> as shown in the following examples:

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

25  
 26 David Harriman, who formerly served for 18 years as the director of  
 27 development/director of advancement with Frontiers, shared with our committee that  
 28 Mallouhi was a Frontiers staff member. Harriman also reported, “During my tenure at  
 29 Frontiers, some 600 Frontiers donors contributed more than \$214,000 to publish this volume  
 30 [*True Meaning*].”<sup>95</sup> Frontiers support for this work continues. In January 2012, Frontiers’  
 31 United States Director responded to a concerned U.S. pastor by describing the Biblical

<sup>91</sup> Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path Between Two Faiths* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p. 104.

<sup>92</sup> Hereafter referred to as *True Meaning*.

<sup>93</sup> “Fact Check: Biblical Missiology’s Response,” p. 7 (accessed April 2012).

<sup>94</sup> This verse provides only a substitution, and no parenthetical.

<sup>95</sup> By personal correspondence with David Harriman.



1 Missiology online petition<sup>96</sup> as a “serious false witness to the truth.”<sup>97</sup> He also forwarded to  
 2 the pastor an extended e-mail by SIL staff member Larry Chico, defending *True Meaning*  
 3 and the other translations which this report critiques.<sup>98</sup>  
 4

5 An online report of Mallouhi’s publishing company, Al Kalima, announced the  
 6 publication of *True Meaning* in March 2008 and featured a testimonial about the beauty of a  
 7 bound copy.<sup>99</sup> Interviews with Mallouhi and Rick Brown described its linguistic excellence  
 8 and successful sales.<sup>100</sup> When objections arose, W/SIL described the current as merely a  
 9 “draft text” that was “unfinished and is still being revised,”<sup>101</sup> and that, “[b]ased on user  
 10 feedback and discussion, the local translation committee made the decision to revise the first  
 11 edition and include the traditional divine familial terms at the recommendation of the SIL  
 12 consultant.”<sup>102</sup> However, as seen in the current edition, even “the traditional divine familial  
 13 terms” can be subverted when redefined by parentheticals which govern their interpretation.  
 14

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

---

<sup>96</sup> See Section A, “Current Events 2011-2012.”

<sup>97</sup> 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 (*WLC* 143-145; *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.

<sup>98</sup> By personal correspondence with pastor Jim Baugh.

<sup>99</sup> See [http://www.al-kalima.com/translation\\_project.html](http://www.al-kalima.com/translation_project.html) (accessed April 2012).

<sup>100</sup> “Muslim and Christian scholars collaborate on ground-breaking gospel translation and commentary,” *albahaba* (on the Middle East news website), June 4, 2008, <http://www.albahaba.com/news/muslim-and-christian-scholars-collaborate-ground-breaking-gospel-translation-and-commentary> (accessed April 2012). The article emphasizes the role of Muslims in producing this Bible translation.

<sup>101</sup> The original, unpublished Wycliffe document is quoted in “Fact Check: Biblical Missiology’s Response,” p. 6 (accessed April 2012).

<sup>102</sup> “Divine Familial Terms: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions,” (accessed April 2012).

<sup>103</sup> “Kinship and the Question of ‘God’s People’” (essay #18) in the *True Meaning* Preface.

<sup>104</sup> “The Ideas of Inspiration and Revelation in the Injeel, the Tawrat, and the Writings of the Prophets,” (essay #3) in the *True Meaning* Preface.

<sup>105</sup> “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 *True Meaning*.

<sup>106</sup> “What is the Meaning of the Expression Son of God?” (essay #12) in the *True Meaning* Preface.

1 called “the eternal Word of God,”<sup>107</sup> but his eternal Sonship receives no discussion. Primed  
 2 with this understanding, the reader who encounters repeated references in the Bible text to  
 3 “the Son of God (God’s beloved one)” seems likely to interpret Jesus’ Sonship in purely  
 4 messianic and social ways.<sup>108</sup>

5  
 6 Responding to objections publicized by the Arabic-fluent Assemblies of God  
 7 minister Adam Simnowitz, Al Kalima circulated a letter<sup>109</sup> explaining its position: *ibn Allah*  
 8 required the parenthetical “God’s Loved One” disclaimer because (1) “it means ‘biological  
 9 son,’ whereas the original Hebrew and Greek words [i.e. *ben* and *huios*] meant ‘social son,’”  
 10 and (2) the target audience perceived a sexual connotation in the phrase.

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

23  
 24 Uniform translation of *pater* as *wali* thus has the same contorting effect as if “Son of  
 25 Man” were translated “weakling” throughout the whole Bible, or if “Messiah” were  
 26 substituted for “Son of God” globally. To support its claim that the original Biblical familial  
 27 terms are primarily social rather than biological, Al Kalima cited two articles in which  
 28 BGG<sup>112</sup> state, “to express divine familial relationships, the Bible uses Greek and Hebrew

<sup>107</sup> “The Ideas of Inspiration and Revelation in the Injeel, the Tawrat, and the Writings of the Prophets” (essay #3) in the *True Meaning* Preface.

<sup>108</sup> Section B: Theological Implications addresses “social” sonship terms.

<sup>109</sup> Received from Simnowitz by the SCIM.

<sup>110</sup> Hans Wehr, “*wali*,” *A Dictionary Of Modern Written Arabic (Arabic - English)*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, 1993), p. 1289.

<sup>111</sup> Ludwig W. Adamec, “WALI,” *Historical Dictionary of Islam* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), p. 324.

<sup>112</sup> BGG, “Translating Familial Biblical Terms: An Overview of the Issue,” *IJFM* 28:3 (April-June, 2011), <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/blog/post/translating-familial-biblical-terms> (accessed April 2012); and idem, “The Terms of Translation: A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms,” *IJFM* 28:3 (April-June, 2011), [http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/28\\_3\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_28\\_3-BrownGrayGray-NewLook.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/28_3_PDFs/IJFM_28_3-BrownGrayGray-NewLook.pdf) (accessed April 2012). Al-Kalima mistakenly refers to this as *IJFM* 23:3 at one point in its response, but presumably 28:3 was intended.

1 social familial terms that do not necessarily demand biological meanings.”<sup>113</sup> For a response  
 2 to the idea that *ben*, *huios*, *ab*, and *pater* are primarily social familial terms, see “Section B:  
 3 Theological Implications” below.

4  
 5 W/SIL downplayed their consultant’s role as simply “a single voice among many”  
 6 who offered opinions on the process, with the implication that W/SIL should not be held  
 7 responsible for deficiencies in the product. However the SIL consultant in question, who  
 8 uses various pseudonyms in published articles, defended the usage of *wali* as “closer to the  
 9 Biblical meaning” of *pater* precisely because *wali* is social rather than biological.<sup>114</sup> This  
 10 suggests (1) that the SIL consultant supported the conclusions of BGG, and (2) that the  
 11 translation of *pater* followed the “single voice” of the SIL consultant on this matter, rather  
 12 than acting against it. Indeed, the solution for which the SIL consultant originally lobbied  
 13 (i.e., omitting *ibn Allah* in the main text) was arguably worse than the compromise solution  
 14 eventually adopted (i.e., including *ibn Allah* along with the vitiating parenthetical limiting  
 15 the term to mean, “God’s Loved One”).<sup>115</sup> But, as we will see more fully in Section B:  
 16 Theological Implications, this parenthetical fails to deliver the critical essence of the biblical  
 17 concept of *huios theou*, Son of God.

#### 18 19 **4. Turkish: Noble Gospel**

20  
 21 Sabeel Media, an American company staffed by SIL members, distributes *The*  
 22 *Exalted Meaning of the Noble Gospel Written By the Disciple Matthew*,<sup>116</sup> a Turkish version  
 23 of Matthew’s gospel translated with assistance from Frontiers staff. Turkish-language Bible  
 24 paraphrase appears on right page adjacent to the Greek-Turkish interlinear<sup>117</sup> on the facing  
 25 page. This left-side interlinear page, surrounded by a decorative border intended to emphasize  
 26 the Greek text’s status as the original Biblical text, provides the usual Turkish words for  
 27 “son” and “father” with respect to Jesus and God, but the same verses on the paraphrastic

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<sup>113</sup> BGG, “A New Look at Translating Familial Language,” p. 107. Al Kalima specifically cites similar ideas in a sister article by the same authors, titled, “A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible” *IJFM* 28:3 (Fall 2011): pp. 121-25, [www.ijfm.org/...3.../IJFM\\_28\\_3-BrownGrayGray-BriefAnalysis.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/...3.../IJFM_28_3-BrownGrayGray-BriefAnalysis.pdf) (accessed April 2012).

<sup>114</sup> According to a January 10, 2012 online post on the “Bridging the Divide” forum, received by our committee. See a similar argument for translating “God” with a word meaning “guardian/protector” in Leith Gray, “The Missing Father: Living and Explaining a Trinitarian Concept of God to Muslims,” *Mission Frontiers* (November 2008): p. 21. Our committee also interacted with this consultant directly, confirming his approach to divine familial language translation.

<sup>115</sup> By personal e-mail correspondence.

<sup>116</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Noble Gospel*.

<sup>117</sup> 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.

1 page sometimes uses the Turkish words *vekil* and *mevla*, meaning “representative” and  
 2 “protector,” respectively.<sup>118</sup> Western translators who worked on this project explained their  
 3 rationale: “The messenger should do whatever he can to remove unnecessary obstacles that  
 4 hinder the recipient from fully engaging with the message.”<sup>119</sup> Since Muslims are less likely  
 5 to willingly receive divine *familial* language, and would likely require explanation of what it  
 6 did and did not mean, formal translation of such language was seen as an “unnecessary  
 7 obstacle.”

8  
 9 Accordingly, *Noble Gospel* renders the Trinitarian baptismal formula in Matthew  
 10 28:19 as, “. . . the name of the Protector, his Representative (deputy, agent) and the Holy  
 11 Spirit.”<sup>120</sup> In discussing this text, Brown invoked Justin Martyr’s description of baptism in  
 12 his “First Apology,” concluding that in the early church, “[W]hen the Trinity was invoked at  
 13 baptism, there was flexibility with regard to the way the persons of the Trinity were  
 14 named.”<sup>121</sup> Brown believed this information should influence the translation of the Bible  
 15 itself.

16  
 17 Sometimes *Noble Gospel*’s footnotes use a traditional familial term such as “son” but  
 18 restrict its meaning. For instance, in the English version of Matthew 3:17, God declares of  
 19 Jesus, “This is my beloved Son.” *Noble Gospel* translates “son” with *vekil* and includes a  
 20 footnote which explains how the translators wish their readers to understand “Son of God”:

21  
 22 God Almighty speaks from heaven and calls Jesus Christ ‘my beloved son’,  
 23 which has the meaning of ‘my one and only Representative who is my  
 24 Beloved’ . . . The title “Son of God” was a widely used expression used to  
 25 portray the Messiah, who was a king chosen by God . . . According to the  
 26 Jews, “God’s Son” means “God’s beloved ruler” and is equivalent with the  
 27 title ‘Messiah’. . . Because this king makes authorized announcements as

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<sup>118</sup> 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.

<sup>119</sup> 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.

<sup>120</sup> Back-translated from *Noble Gospel* by bilingual Turkish pastor Rev. Fikret Bocek (Matthew 28:18-19 in Turkish: “İimdi bütün milletlere gidin ve bana mürit yetiştirin ve Mevla, Vekili ve Mukkades Ruh adýna onlara tövbe abdesti aldýrýn. Size emrettiðim þeylerin hepsini yapmaya onlara öðretin ve iþte dünyanın sonuna kadar ben daima sizinle birlikteyim.”). Communicated to SCIM on January 14, 2012.

<sup>121</sup> Brown, Rick. “Delicate Issues in Mission Part 2: Translating the Biblical term ‘Son(s) of God’ in Muslim Contexts,” *IJFM* 22:4 (Winter 2005): p. 141.

1 God’s representative, it has been deemed appropriate to use the expression  
2 Representative of God.<sup>122</sup>  
3

4 The interlinear pages were included “to facilitate research done by those who are  
5 researching monotheistic religions.”<sup>123</sup> The *Noble Gospel*’s preface describes the regular  
6 Turkish-language translation within as a paraphrase, saying, “Such a translation does not use  
7 a ‘word for word’ translation but instead focuses on the meaning that was intended in each  
8 sentence. The question asked here is; ‘If someone tried to communicate this thought in our  
9 language, Turkish, how would they express it?’”<sup>124</sup> This directive leads the reader to *rely*  
10 upon the paraphrastic interpretation as the most basic source of understanding and  
11 underscores the primacy of the allegedly clearer paraphrase against the wooden literalism of  
12 the interlinear. Whether or not the paraphrase succeeds in that aim, the preface makes clear  
13 which page controls the meaning of the other. As with the in-text parentheticals in the *True*  
14 *Meaning* translation in Arabic, readers who see “Son” (interlinear page) but then understand  
15 it to mean only “representative” (paraphrase page) will gain little from the interlinear. Again  
16 one must wonder whether the interlinear tool effectively serves the target audience most  
17 likely to need an explanation of biblical sonship language.  
18

19 A coalition of thirty Turkish churches protested against the distribution of this  
20 Turkish translation starting in 2007, to no avail.<sup>125</sup> In February 2012, Bob Blincoe of  
21 Frontiers defended the *Noble Gospel*, arguing that the combination of paraphrase, interlinear  
22 translation, and explanatory footnotes “help a conservative Sunni Muslim audience know  
23 what the Bible really says.”<sup>126</sup> In contrast, a translator with three decades of field experience  
24 reported, “As I understand Turkish, Islamics, and the Bible, I can say the [*Noble Gospel*]  
25 Turkish Matthew is worse than the New World Translation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.”<sup>127</sup>  
26

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

28  
29 BGG have suggested that “priority should be given to wordings that express the  
30 familial components of meaning in the text, while supplying the other components in the

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<sup>122</sup> English translation of the *Noble Gospel* preface, n.p.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> “The Alliance of Protestant Churches: An Announcement to Church Leaders and Congregations in Turkey,” undated but received in English translation by SCIM in early 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Bob Blincoe, “Why a New Translation of the Gospel of Matthew in Turkish?” (unpublished article dated February 8, 2012); also cited in Belz, “The Battle for Accurate Bible Translation in Asia” (accessed April 2012).

<sup>127</sup> Personal communication from this translation worker who requested to remain anonymous.

1 paratext.”<sup>128</sup> Footnotes and other paratextual apparatus may indeed be necessary and helpful.  
 2 But the main text should feature a **formally equivalent translation for key theological**  
 3 **terms, leaving accurate functional interpretations for paratext or footnotes, rather**  
 4 **than the other way around, especially when the reader is likely to have access to only**  
 5 **one translation.** This is so for at least two reasons:

6  
 7 *First*, as the *Injil Sharif* and *Noble Gospel* examples show, a brief footnote on the  
 8 topic “son of God” oversimplifies, and depending on the interpretive commitments of the  
 9 translator, can even mislead. Such an overarching biblical theme, while it can be accurately  
 10 summarized, cannot be effectively unpacked for any reader in a few words or even a few  
 11 sentences. More detailed approaches (e.g., prefatory or appendiceal essays on various  
 12 theological topics) conceptually could work, provided that the theology articulated in those  
 13 essays expressed accurately the Scripture’s teaching as represented in historic, confessional  
 14 orthodoxy. The narrow theological perspectives of the essays accompanying the *True*  
 15 *Meaning* exemplify the practical pitfalls facing translation projects which engage in  
 16 extended exegesis without input from the constituencies that underwrite the entire  
 17 translation project. Yet satisfying all the various constituencies supporting the translation  
 18 effort proves essentially impracticable. Would an article on baptism or tongues or church  
 19 structure meet with the simultaneous approval of Presbyterians, Assemblies of God, and  
 20 Anglicans? Translators might well breathe a sigh of relief to hear that churches do not  
 21 expect Bible translators to navigate those waters. Given the respective liabilities of both  
 22 short and long footnotes on such key topics as “Son of God,” a formally equivalent  
 23 translation of key theological terms, without a controlling footnote which overly restricts the  
 24 main text’s meaning, best achieves Nida’s ideal to avoid “serious distortion of the truth.”

25  
 26 *Second*, the mediatory effect of the paratext upon the main text remains a subject of  
 27 ongoing debate,<sup>129</sup> and over-reliance on footnotes may engender lack of confidence in the  
 28 main text.<sup>130</sup> As with paraphrases and more formal translations, one cannot assume that  
 29 worldwide readers will properly apprehend the authority relationship between footnote and  
 30 main text. Some readers may treat footnotes as effectively inerrant; others may ignore them

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<sup>128</sup> BGG, “The Terms of Translation,” p. 109 (accessed April 2012).

<sup>129</sup> 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).

<sup>130</sup> 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.”

1 entirely. This confusion simply underscores the serious stakes raised by translation methods:  
2 matters of Scripture, the Persons of the Trinity, and salvation.

3

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

## 1 Section B: Theological Implications

### 3 Introduction

5 Scripture's origin as a divinely out-breathed revelation (2 Tim. 3:16-17; *WCF* 1.4,  
6 1.8, 1.10) sets it apart from any other writing. Originating from God himself (2 Pet. 1:19-  
7 21), Scripture deserves unique treatment in its translation with a methodological stewardship  
8 warranted by its divine substance and inherent divine gravitas (*WCF* 1.9-10). *WCF* 1.4  
9 underscores the sweeping implications of the Bible's divine authorship: "The authority of  
10 the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the  
11 testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author  
12 thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God."<sup>131</sup>

14 Accordingly, belief in and obedience to this *received* Word of God must  
15 comprehensively shape our handling of Scripture, including the task of its translation. Put  
16 otherwise, Bible translation work must operate under the perpetual scrutiny of Scripture's  
17 unique authority and self-interpreting contours (*WCF* 1.9), with a self-conscious and  
18 methodological submission to the divinely given words of the text. Only such a posture  
19 respects God's given revelation to us, as we receive his authoritative and clear speech,  
20 delivered in human words (by divine condescension and gracious accommodation).<sup>132</sup> Such  
21 humanly accommodated speech cannot be severed from its divinely orchestrated,  
22 intentioned, and revealed essence; the divine context governs and comprehensively shapes  
23 the condescended (human) one. In short, any handling of Scripture must never extract the  
24 human from the divine, in a way that treats the historically accommodated form of a text  
25 *apart from* its divine character. Thus, both translator and translation methodology must  
26 submit methodologically to Scripture's authority, as faithful translation starts and ends with  
27 Scripture as divine Word.

### 29 Contemporary Translation Methods and the Authority of Scripture

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

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<sup>131</sup> See Scott K. Oliphint, "Because It is the Word of God," in *Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. David B. Garner (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), pp. 1-22.

<sup>132</sup> See, e.g., John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM, 1960), 1.13.1.



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

10  
 11 The mission agencies that participated in the currently disputed Bible translations  
 12 require their staff to affirm the ultimate authority of the Bible in faith and practice.<sup>135</sup> To our  
 13 knowledge, no translation worker has openly denied or criticized this policy; to the contrary,  
 14 concerns about the accuracy of these translations immediately are met with clear  
 15 declarations of intent to translate the inerrant Scriptures faithfully. However, because no  
 16 bright white line separates reasonable cultural accommodation from syncretism, when an  
 17 audience finds elements of Christian teaching incomprehensible or reprehensible, each element  
 18 must be assessed with Christian wisdom and a multitude of counselors (Prov. 11:14). All  
 19 parties in the recent controversy surely recognize at least potential danger for a translation to  
 20 yield turf to offended readers, neglecting the theological and ecclesial<sup>136</sup> consequences  
 21 which ensue when critical biblical terms are abandoned.

22  
 23 Naturally, one asks which terms are critical, lest religious and cultural outcry  
 24 functionally silence the authority of Scripture as the divine Word of God. A translation  
 25 which avoided cultural offense at theological expense would effectively eclipse Scripture’s  
 26 intra-canonical interpretive authority (*WCF* 1:9).<sup>137</sup> Again, no translation worker sees  
 27 himself in that position or intends to denigrate Scripture’s authority. But self-evaluation never  
 28 replaces internal and external oversight. As Blincoe notes, churches and denominations  
 29 should monitor parachurch organizations “in the same way that county governments or state

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<sup>133</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), p. 135.

<sup>134</sup> 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.

<sup>135</sup> 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, [http://www.frontiersusa.org/site/PageNavigator/about/about\\_statement\\_of\\_faith](http://www.frontiersusa.org/site/PageNavigator/about/about_statement_of_faith) (accessed May 8, 2012).

<sup>136</sup> 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’ body is, in part, upheld by the biblical terms which sustain our shared confession.

<sup>137</sup> See David B. Garner, “Did God Really Say?” in *Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. David B. Garner (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2012), pp. 129-137.

1 governments monitor private industry.”<sup>138</sup> Missions agencies which accept such oversight  
 2 recognize that those industriously working on board the boat do not always notice when it  
 3 drifts off course.

## 4 **To Whom Is the Bible Written?**

6  
 7 The *WCF* begins not only with a chapter on Scripture, but more specifically with the  
 8 Scripture’s *necessity to the church*. Scripture’s necessity is wed to its intended audience. So,  
 9 *WCF* 1.1, having established the inexcusability and helplessness of mankind, declares,

10  
 11 It pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manner, to reveal Himself,  
 12 and to declare that will *unto His Church*; and afterwards for the better  
 13 preserving and propagating of that the truth, and for the more sure  
 14 establishment and comfort *of the Church* against the corruption of the flesh,  
 15 and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto  
 16 writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary . . . (emphasis  
 17 added)

18  
 19 Scripture is necessary “*for the church’s salvation*,” and thus “*the Bible was given by God to*  
 20 *his church*.”<sup>139</sup> To borrow again from the *WCF*, it is *the worldwide people of God* “who  
 21 have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures.”<sup>140</sup>

22  
 23 Since it is revelation, or more particularly *redemptive* revelation, Scripture purposes  
 24 to disclose the divine will of God, to expose the meaning of the salvific works of God, to  
 25 preserve his people in holiness, and in it all comprehensively to point to the person and work  
 26 of Jesus Christ on behalf of his church. A covenantal document, Scripture intends particular  
 27 content – it conveys authoritatively, sufficiently, and clearly the redemptive message  
 28 necessary for the people of God. Divine purpose includes Scripture’s recipients – that is, its  
 29 audience is those to whom God intends to communicate his redemptive revelation. This  
 30 latter conclusion derives clearly from the necessary work of God in saving his elect people,  
 31 and also from the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination (*WCF* 1.6), enabling hearers/readers to  
 32 receive *understandingly* and to understand *receptively* the Word of God.

33  
 34 With the divinely revealed expansion of the covenant from Old Testament to New  
 35 Testament, wherein God purposes to redeem people from all tribes, tongues, and nations

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<sup>138</sup> Robert A. Blincoe, “The Strange Structure of Missions Agencies Part 1: Two Structures After All These Years?” *IJFM* 19:1 (Spring 2002): p. 5.

<sup>139</sup> Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), p. 124 (emphasis original).

<sup>140</sup> *WCF* 1:8.

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

6  
 7 *First*, the worldwide people of God also need the Word from their covenant God,  
 8 and hence, by good and necessary consequence, the task of Bible translation becomes an  
 9 essential component of the expansion of the church around the globe. “Scripture came . . . in  
 10 concretely human and localized languages, limited with respect to their intelligibility. This  
 11 fact gave rise to the immediate necessity of translating God’s Word into other languages as  
 12 it goes out into the world to testify of ‘the mighty acts of God’ (Acts 2:11).”<sup>141</sup> Divinely  
 13 revealed covenant expansion compels the church to translate Scripture for those who do not  
 14 yet have God’s Word in their tongues. Accordingly, the Westminster divines called  
 15 explicitly for Bible translation (*WCF* 1.8), recognizing the expanded character of the  
 16 covenant community – one whose Word comes to all true sons of Abraham regardless of  
 17 their tongue (cf. Acts 1-2). Because of God’s gracious will to redeem his people and to  
 18 reveal himself by the written Word, Scripture belongs to all of his people from all the  
 19 nations – those who, by the work of the Holy Spirit, *now* believe and who *will* believe.

20  
 21 *Second*, the fact of Scripture’s intended readership ought shape the character and  
 22 method of translation. In other words, unnecessarily archaic, so-called “ghetto,” or  
 23 incomprehensible language ought be meticulously avoided. Precisely because Scripture  
 24 possesses divine meaning embedded in the divine words to his people, meaningful  
 25 translation must always concern itself with understandability. The divine purpose in  
 26 communication should comprehensively govern Bible translation. The proper frame of  
 27 reference for translation method is Scripture’s divine purpose to his appointed hearers, and  
 28 to preserve the integrity of this thoroughly divine and theological revelation, formally  
 29 equivalent translation of key biblical terms like “Son of God” and “Father” should prevail.

30  
 31 *Third*, translation decisions governed by conceptual adaptation to unbelieving  
 32 audiences threaten the integrity of Bible translation. While a vast variety of books, booklets,  
 33 and tracks should combine with oral proclamation to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to  
 34 unbelievers, *methods* of Scripture translation ought not be driven or shaped primarily by  
 35 evangelistic zeal. This qualification ought not dampen missiological fervor nor compromise  
 36 the goal of understandability of biblical translation. On the contrary, motivation for

---

<sup>141</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 213.

1 evangelism and disciple making springs directly from the clear Scriptures. Yet because  
 2 unbelievers naturally and willfully suppress the revelation of God (cf. Rom. 1:18-32), it is  
 3 only the Spirit freely given by God who redeemingly illumines their understanding (1 Cor.  
 4 2). Saving comprehension of Scripture comes by the Spirit changing the unbeliever, not by  
 5 the translator inappropriately modifying the Spirit-authored Scriptures – even out of well-  
 6 intended motivations. Thus, while understandability is a vital component to faithful  
 7 translation, redemptive understanding of the divine Word is a divine gift, delivered  
 8 successfully not by theologically weakened translation but by the Spirit’s power in applying  
 9 divine redeeming grace. Applying to Bible translation what Nabeel Jabbour assesses as the  
 10 *frame of reference* for gospel proclamation, we affirm that “we should not tailor our  
 11 message to fit the Islamic theology or their system of reasoning and thus possibly  
 12 compromising the doctrine of the Triune God.”<sup>142</sup>

13  
 14 When Bible translators honor the divinely intended audience of Scripture and submit  
 15 to Scripture’s own teaching about the essential role of oral messengers, they can avoid the  
 16 unnecessary burden of ill-advised, unbelieving or untaught receptor-governed adaptations of  
 17 Scripture. Faithful witness to the nations involves the preaching and explanation of the  
 18 written revelation of the Father about his Son, as the Spirit takes the written Word and opens  
 19 the eyes of his people to its saving truth (1 Cor. 1-2). Thus, proper understanding of the  
 20 shared duty of gospel messengers with translators protects (and restores!) translators from  
 21 yielding to the temptation of ungodly over-reliance upon anthropological, cultural, and  
 22 linguistic analysis. Instead, the written Scriptures commend persevering oral witness (Matt.  
 23 28:18-20) and patient oral exposition (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 4:1-5).

24  
 25 In summary, while the Spirit of God surely has drawn many converts to the Lord  
 26 Jesus Christ through Bible reading alone,<sup>143</sup> Scripture itself presents speech (preaching,  
 27 teaching, and evangelism) as the ordinary means of gospel proclamation (cf. Rom. 10:10-15;  
 28 2 Tim. 4:1-5). Faith ordinarily comes by *hearing*, not by reading. Scripture translation then  
 29 ought not seek to bear the weight of exhaustive explanation on its own, as oral proclamation  
 30 must complement Scripture’s written form. Not foremost a book of evangelism, Scripture  
 31 comes to God’s covenant people to disclose his gracious work in *their* redemption. As God’s  
 32 book *for his people* – both current and future sons and daughters of God – Scripture  
 33 possesses its own theologically infused language which frequently co-opts existing terms  
 34 that, in their inspired use, require explanation of their divinely revealed content (e.g.,  
 35 redemption, adoption, glory, etc.). Building upon the foundation of apostles and prophets

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<sup>142</sup> Nabeel Jabbour, “Position Paper,” April 2012.

<sup>143</sup> 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).

1 (Eph. 2:19-22), God raises evangelists, pastors and teachers in the local expressions of his  
 2 church (Eph. 4:11-13) to carry out the necessary tasks of preaching, teaching, evangelism,  
 3 and apologetic defense (1 Pet. 3:15). The Word proclaimed draws people to the Word  
 4 written; the Word written compels the Word translated to the nations – for those who  
 5 already believe and for those who will.

## 7 Translation Method and “Acceptability” Parameters

9 As discussed in Section A, while certain components in “dynamic equivalence”<sup>144</sup>  
 10 translation theory possess plausible value, typically the theory establishes reader-centric  
 11 “acceptability” parameters as determinative for proper translation, creating significant and  
 12 inevitable abuses when cultural hegemony confronts Biblical authority.<sup>145</sup> A receptor  
 13 group’s resistance to a particular biblical translation does not readily expose whether or not  
 14 that resistance grows primarily from cognitive dissonance due to selected terms (or phrases),  
 15 or from a spiritual distaste for the theological meaning of those terms. When even the  
 16 respondent’s own explanation of his reaction may reflect a *post hoc* rationalization, the  
 17 translator cannot easily or certainly separate comprehension difficulty from spiritual revulsion.

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

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

<sup>144</sup> 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.

<sup>145</sup> See de Kuiper and Newman, “Jesus, Son of God - A Translation Problem,” p. 432. Cf. Michael Marlowe, “Against the Theory of ‘Dynamic Equivalence,’” *Bible Research*, January 2012, <http://www.bible-researcher.com/dynamic-equivalence.html> (accessed March 18, 2012).

1 occurs in perfect solidarity with his own revealed parameters in the inscripturated Word  
 2 (*WCF* 1.10). “The testimony of the Holy Spirit is no separate revelation outside the Word,  
 3 like a voice from heaven. The Spirit does not add a separate message to the Word. This  
 4 would be in conflict with the perfection of Scripture, which has been inspired by the Spirit  
 5 himself.”<sup>146</sup>

6  
 7 In step with reader-response trends<sup>147</sup> in biblical hermeneutics, Eugene Nida paved  
 8 the way for recalibrated receptor-centered translation theory.<sup>148</sup>

9  
 10 It is not surprising that some of the last writings of Nida on translation theory  
 11 would be called *Meaning Across Cultures*, and that *From One Language to*  
 12 *Another* would include so much emphasis on the sociosemiotic approach to  
 13 translation. Nearly all theories and writings over the last 20 plus years have  
 14 swung much more to social and cultural issues related to translation. This has  
 15 marked a major sea change in translation thinking, what is known as ‘the  
 16 cultural turn’ in translation studies, viewing translation as an act of cultural  
 17 communication rather than of scientific transfer. It is no longer thought that  
 18 translators should just be bilingual, but that they should be also bicultural as  
 19 much as possible.<sup>149</sup>

20  
 21 Translation decisions governed by unfiltered or insufficiently filtered audience receptivity  
 22 manifest a subtle but significant theological supposition; in such cases, the audience  
 23 effectively serves as final translation arbiter. Resulting translation products unavoidably  
 24 compromise Biblical fidelity not only in the verbal content but also in their methodological  
 25 reversal of authority, in which translators effectively bow to the creature rather than the  
 26 Creator/Revealer (Rom. 1). Ironically, such methodological compromises can occur  
 27 unwittingly for evangelical motivations of gospel clarity! Contrastingly, terms selected for  
 28 translation must, by carefully reflecting the words of Scripture, faithfully express the  
 29 organically rich *divinely revealed* meaning of Scripture, even when the terms selected  
 30 confront cultural unbelief, elucidate spiritual ignorance, or challenge religious and social  
 31 customs. The theologically resplendent terms for God the Father and Jesus the Son simply  
 32 typify this principle.

33  


---

<sup>146</sup> J. VanGenderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*. trans. Gerritt Bilkes and Ed M. van der Maas (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), p. 110.

<sup>147</sup> E.g., Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1980).

<sup>148</sup> See Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*; Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*; Eugene A. Nida and William D. Reyburn, *Meaning Across Cultures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981). For analysis of dynamic equivalence theory, see Leland Ryken, *Translation Differences: Criteria for Excellence in Reading and Choosing a Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

<sup>149</sup> See Kerr, “Dynamic Equivalence and Its Daughters,” p. 17.

## 1 God's Speech, God's Family; Our Speech, Our family

2  
3 God is history's first Speaker. As the Triune God, he enjoys a rich communicative  
4 fellowship among Father, Son and Spirit, and in fact, "the persons of the Trinity function as  
5 members of a language community among themselves."<sup>150</sup> In his acts of creation,  
6 providence, and redemption God's interaction with his creation often takes the form of  
7 speech. Through speech, God created the world (Gen. 1:1-5), sustains the world (Heb. 1:3;  
8 2:10), directs the course of history (Lam. 3:37-38), raises the dead (Mark 5:41; John 11:43),  
9 and calms the storm (Mark 4:39-41). The eternal Son is the Word (John 1:1) made flesh  
10 (John 1:14) who called himself truth (John 14:6), so that the incarnation of Jesus becomes an  
11 act of divine translation which reveals the Father by speaking (Heb. 1:2) and simply by his  
12 existence (John 14:8-11). The Son speaks to the Father (John 17), and the Spirit listens to  
13 (John 16:13) and speaks to (Rom. 8:26) the Father. Even the nature of human language  
14 (speaker, speech, and recipient) finds analogy in the nature of God: the Father speaks, the  
15 Son is the Word, and the Spirit empowers Christians to hear fruitfully.<sup>151</sup> Man, God's  
16 creation and image bearer (Gen. 1:27), also speaks. Human speech was confused as a result  
17 of mankind's sin (Gen. 11:1-9), but the ultimate re-gathering of God's people will unite  
18 speakers of every language in a single chorus of praise to God (Rev. 7:9-12), a restored  
19 harmony of which the coming of the Holy Spirit gave a foretaste (Acts 2:1-11). Human  
20 speech thus finds both its origin and its destiny in God.

21  
22 Just as our speech reflects the God who made us, so do our families. Human  
23 parent/child relationships derivatively and finitely reflect the original (underived) and  
24 eternal Father/Son relationship within the Trinity. As God the Father eternally begat his  
25 nature to his Son, we, by analogy, temporally pass on elements in our nature to our progeny.

26  
27 [T]he Christian church has no tradition of understanding the phrase "Son of  
28 God" as metaphor. Rather, Jesus' eternal sonship is seen as a *metaphysical*  
29 *reality*. Linguist/translators normally regard "Son of God" as a *metaphorical*  
30 description because it is not *literal*, i.e., *physical*; that is, if something is not  
31 literal/physical, it must be metaphorical.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *In The Beginning Was the Word: Language: A God Centered Approach* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2009), p. 28.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33. Karl Barth proposes a different language-oriented formulation of the Trinity as Revealer, Revealed, and Revelation. Cf. Karl Barth, *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. T. F Torrance and Geoffrey Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-75), I/1:8.

<sup>152</sup> Abernathy, "Translating 'Son of God' in Missionary Bible Translations," p. 177 (emphasis original).

1 To put it more precisely, “Son of God” is not a simple metaphor, rendering human  
 2 experience wholly equivocal to divine reality. Rather, the human concept of begotten-ness  
 3 derives *mutatis mutandis* from the divine relationship of Father and Son. Human begotten-  
 4 ness is simply one more way in which humans finitely reflect their Creator/Father, with the  
 5 necessary conceptual modifications to account for the creaturely reality in contrast to infinite  
 6 and eternal God. The persons of the Creator God have no beginning and no limit, and  
 7 humans are bound by their creaturely limitations; but the Archetypal/ectypal<sup>153</sup> analogue  
 8 establishes human identity and relationality.

9  
 10 The vast range of meaning of biblical terms for “son” includes concepts biological  
 11 and metaphorical. In the biblical world, paternity and filial terms include not only the  
 12 important ontological-genetic identity, but also functional and vocational derivation.  
 13 Engendering and social dynamics inextricably correlate and presuppose one another: “your  
 14 father determined your identity, your training, your vocation. He generated you not only  
 15 biologically, but, shall we say, functionally.”<sup>154</sup> Even the metaphorical usages of “son”  
 16 retain contours of identity, of organic (and frequently *generative*) relationship whether  
 17 personal or conceptual, and of imitation: “The true sons of Abraham... are not those who  
 18 carry Abraham’s genes, but those who act like him.”<sup>155</sup> The metaphorical usage here relies  
 19 upon the conceptual-genetic identity, presenting the faith of true believers to be of one in its  
 20 substance with Abraham’s. Put otherwise, the biological dimensions of human sonship  
 21 facilitate the genetic, imitative and functional integrity of even the metaphorical usages of  
 22 the familial terms. A “social versus biological” sonship dichotomy misses the mark  
 23 etymologically and culturally,<sup>156</sup> as functional/social concepts actually depend upon the  
 24 generative, identifying, and genetic contours of the filial terms employed to relay them.

25  
 26 We normally think of begetting in sexual terms, because, with the exception of legal  
 27 adoption, our own children are begotten through sexual means. Such sexual content is not  
 28 absolute in the meaning of “begotten-ness” as applied to God, however, and the church has  
 29 long used strongly biological begetting terms for Jesus’ Sonship (e.g., *natum* and *gennēthenta*  
 30 in the Latin and Greek versions of the Nicene Creed, respectively). To be sure, albeit  
 31 mysteriously, human sexuality exposes certain ontological *analogies* between God and  
 32 mankind. The archetypal function of divine ontological relations between eternal Father and

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<sup>153</sup> The “archetype” is the divine original, of which the “ectype” is a creaturely copy. See, e.g., Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 2. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 48; Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976), p. 203.

<sup>154</sup> D. A. Carson, *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.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. See John 8:39; Rom. 9:1ff; Gal. 3:7, 9.

<sup>156</sup> *Contra* BGG, “The Terms of Translation,” pp. 106-120.



1 Son ectypally manifest themselves in human biology and sexuality, particularly as the  
 2 genetic identity and imitative connectedness of families derivatively reflect the Triune God.  
 3 Summarily, human genetic solidarity (oneness, imitation, and derivation) finitely reflects  
 4 divine unity and fellowship, and therefore, only the biological terms of human familial  
 5 identity adequately carry the contours of meaning revealed from God about his Tri-unity. In  
 6 short, the son reflects his father, because the Son reflects his Father.

7  
 8 Human familial themes evidence themselves not only in biological families, but  
 9 surface even in metaphorical expressions: in English (e.g., “The Daughters of the American  
 10 Revolution”), and Arabic (Q2:117 refers to a traveler as *ibn es-sabeel*, literally “son of the  
 11 road”<sup>157</sup>), and many other languages. The Bible sees the same in both the Old Testament  
 12 (“arrow” in Job 41:28 is literally *ben-kesheph*, “son of the bow”) and the New (e.g., the sons  
 13 of Abraham and sons of the devil in John 8:38-44; the sons/offspring of Abraham in Rom.  
 14 4:11-12 and Gal. 4:29, etc.).<sup>158</sup> Every culture which survives does so through parents and  
 15 children. Thus one is hard pressed to find a language which does not draw on the power of  
 16 familial metaphors for concepts of begetting and solidarity. Universality of begotten-ness  
 17 begets universality of genetic, biological familial language.

## 19 Translation of “Son of God” Overview

20  
 21 In the world of biblical translation, the controversy has recently centered upon the  
 22 question of Christ’s eternal Sonship in contrast to his messianic (redemptive-historical)  
 23 Sonship, and translators’ decisions to replace “Son” or “Son of God” has depended, in part,  
 24 on the aspect of Christ’s Sonship to which translators believe the text refers.<sup>159</sup> Historically,  
 25 New Testament hermeneutics have depended on the assertion that Scripture both implicitly  
 26 and explicitly describes Jesus’ pre-existence as the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of  
 27 the Trinity. The Nicene and Athanasian Creeds refer to Jesus as an eternal Son, “begotten of  
 28 the Father before all worlds” (Latin: *ex Patre natum ante ómnia sæcula*; Greek: *ton ek tou*  
 29 *patros gennēthenta pro pantōn tōn aiōnōn*). The Belgic Confession (1561), Article 10,  
 30 states, “He is the Son of God not only from the time he assumed our nature but from all  
 31 eternity (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3).” The Westminster Shorter Catechism 21 asks the question:  
 32 “Who is the Redeemer of God’s elect?” The answer points to Christ’s eternal pre-existence:  
 33 “The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, *being the eternal Son of*  
 34 *God*, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures,

<sup>157</sup> This illustration demonstrates explicitly how the Arabic common biological term for “son” extends beyond the sexual scope of meaning.

<sup>158</sup> Carson, *Jesus the Son of God*, 16-20.

<sup>159</sup> See, e.g., Rick Brown, “Presenting the Deity of Christ From the Bible,” *IJFM* 19.1 (2001): p. 23.

1 and one person, forever.”<sup>160</sup> The historic confessions of the church with united voice uphold  
 2 the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ as a faithful summation of biblical teaching.

### 4 **The Messianic Son**

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

14 When we compare our opening statements of the Nicene Creed with the  
 15 picture which has emerged from the NT it is clear that there has been *a*  
 16 *considerable development over that period in early Christian belief in and*  
 17 *understanding of Jesus as the Son of God.* There was no real evidence in the  
 18 earliest Jesus-tradition of what could fairly be called a consciousness of  
 19 divinity, a consciousness of a sonship rooted in pre-existent relationship with  
 20 God.<sup>161</sup>

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

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

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<sup>160</sup> Emphasis ours.

<sup>161</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: SCM, 1989), p. 60 (emphasis in original).

<sup>162</sup> See, e.g., Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Geoffrey Grogan, “New Testament Christology -- or New Testament Christologies?,” *Themelios* 25.1 (November 1999), pp. 60-73; J. F. Balchin, “Paul, Wisdom, and Christ,” in

1 unbiblical agenda-driven view denies pre-existent divine Personhood/Sonship of Jesus to  
 2 passages such as Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-3 (cf. *WCF* 8.2).  
 3 “It is fanciful to suppose . . . that God sent into the world someone who became his Son after  
 4 he arrived.”<sup>163</sup>

5  
 6 Translation strategies that resort to replacements for “Son” such as “Wisdom” or  
 7 “Word” or even primarily social sonship terms have critical theological liabilities, since  
 8 those terms understate or even eclipse the Son’s pre-existent personhood.<sup>164</sup> In consequence,  
 9 translations which present this inadequate view of Jesus, absent any explicit affirmation of a  
 10 pre-existent Son, will not only bear a greater similarity to the non-eternal, non-divine Jesus  
 11 of critical scholars, they also will find notable affinity with the quranic view of Jesus Christ  
 12 as a great man – but still only a man.

13  
 14 Furthermore, a theology of Christ’s pre-existence (for instance, as the eternal divine  
 15 Word of John 1) does not always yield a Bible translation which consistently delivers the  
 16 theology of eternal Sonship, especially if the context of passage in question does not  
 17 explicitly orient the reader to that sphere of reference. Yet a focus on the eternity of Jesus’  
 18 Sonship might be the very key to demonstrate its non-sexual nature; Jesus cannot very well  
 19 have a sexual origin if he has no origin at all.

20  
 21 But what of the prominence of Christ’s redemptive-historical, incarnate Sonship,  
 22 which the New Testament seems to emphasize? Careful study reveals a more complex  
 23 interplay between Jesus’ eternal identity and his redemptive historical Messiahship. For  
 24 example, in Paul’s multifaceted theology, Christ’s incarnate Sonship, grounded in his eternal  
 25 filial identity, takes on the deep and rich redemptive-historical structures of biblical  
 26 eschatology, covenant promise and fulfillment, and messianic, royal appointment. Romans  
 27 1:3-4 actually expresses an eschatological attainment of Jesus’ messianic Sonship, attained  
 28 at the moment of his resurrection. In other words, in his resurrection, Christ commences a  
 29 “new and unprecedented phase of divine sonship. The eternal Son of God, who was born,  
 30 lived, and died [*kata sarka*], has been raised [*kata pneuma*] and so, in his messianic identity  
 31 (of the seed of David), has become what he was not before: the Son of God in power.”<sup>165</sup>

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*Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. H. H. Rowdon (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1982), pp. 204-219.

<sup>163</sup> Carson, *Jesus the Son of God*, p. 30.

<sup>164</sup> 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.

<sup>165</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), p. 118. The phrase *kata sarka* means “according to the flesh,” and *kata pneuma*, “according to the spirit.” Cf. David B. Garner, “The First and Last Son: Christology and Sonship in Pauline Soteriology,”

1 Following the interpretive insights of Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, and John  
 2 Murray, Gaffin insists that Christ's unprecedented status as resurrected Son of God, while  
 3 distinct from his eternal Sonship, cannot be severed from it. No features of the filial complex  
 4 can be ripped from the other, as the biblical presentation of Christ is the composite of all the  
 5 eternal, ontological, redemptive-historical, and eschatological features of the Jesus the Son  
 6 of God.

7  
 8 Those who only equate "Son of God" with Jesus' messianic kingship distort the  
 9 more obvious connections concerning Jesus' relations to the Father, creating an aberrational  
 10 theology. The exclusive identification of "Son of God" with Davidic rule improperly relies  
 11 upon texts such as Acts 13:32-33 to recapitulate or at least to sympathize with the ancient  
 12 adoptionist heresy that Jesus did not become the Son until his enthronement, his temporal  
 13 and royal "begetting." Those who claim that Jesus did not become the Son until this  
 14 enthronement (John 10:34-36; Acts 13:32-33; Rom. 1:4, commonly cited) must overlook the  
 15 primary significance of texts such as Matthew 1:18-25; Mark 1:11; Luke 2:49; John 17:1-6;  
 16 Romans 8:32; and Hebrews 13:8, all of which point to a hermeneutically-formulaic pre-  
 17 existent, personal, relational Sonship, not one restricted to the coronation grid. Again Gaffin  
 18 points out how such thinking confuses what Jesus has *become* (the begetting of "My Son" in  
 19 Acts 13:33) with who Jesus eternally *is* (Son of God).<sup>166</sup> Summarily, the complex reality of  
 20 the conceptual and relational features of Jesus' Sonship weaves together eternal ontology,  
 21 revelation, creation, redemption, and consummation.

## 23 The Synoptic Gospels and the Son of God

24  
 25 As John Murray suggests, "Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi marks one of the  
 26 most notable incidents in the public ministry of our Lord."<sup>167</sup> This confession and Christ's  
 27 own claims have been objects of resistance since their utterance. Truly, the offense of Christ  
 28 as Son of God is nothing new, and contemporary denials or denigration of Christ's Sonship  
 29 are equally uncreative. Yet even the first century offense to Jesus' claims about himself did  
 30 not prevent him from expressing those filial claims with regularity and consistency, and his  
 31 unrelenting expressions escalated the deep offense to his receptor audience. For Jesus,  
 32 divine filial truth trumped receptor/reader hermeneutical would-be hegemony; divine

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in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), pp. 255-59.

<sup>166</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "Redemption and Resurrection: An Exercise in Biblical-Systematic Theology," *beginning with moses*, <http://www.beginningwithmoses.org/bt-articles/214/redemption-and-resurrection-an-exercise-in-biblical-systematic-theology-> (accessed April 2012); originally published in *Themelios* 27.2 (Spring 2002): pp. 16-31. See also Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, p. 275.

<sup>167</sup> John Murray, "Jesus the Son of God," in *Collected Writings*, Vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), p. 58.

1 revelation of the Son of God (Matt. 3:17; 14:33; 17:5; 2 Pet. 3:17; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke  
 2 3:22; 9:35; John 1:33, 34; 11:27; cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-17) confronted cultural and religious  
 3 resistance. The New Testament speaks most regularly about the messianic, functional, and  
 4 redemptive-historical Sonship of Christ, in a way that actually fortifies the eternal Sonship  
 5 presupposed. “It is only in the perspective of the dignity that belongs to him as the intra-  
 6 divine Son that we can properly assess the messianic subordination.”<sup>168</sup> Notwithstanding  
 7 that implicit and explicit affirmation of Christ’s eternal Sonship, and though the Dunn camp  
 8 of scholars has errantly truncated Jesus’ identity into primarily non-eternal categories,  
 9 certain of its insights regarding the New Testament emphasis on Christ’s redemptive-  
 10 historical identity ought not be neglected.

11

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

16

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

19

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

29

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

36

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

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

1 nigh impossible to think of Jesus' knowledge as merely a consequence of his  
2 messianic mission; it has to be tied to pre-temporal, even eternal relations.<sup>169</sup>  
3

4 In short, God's (and Christ's<sup>170</sup>) eschatological kingdom and the Lord's royal, messianic  
5 mission find their fullest biblical meaning in the Sonship of Jesus Christ, in its rich eternal  
6 and redemptive-historical contours.  
7

8 *Second*, consider the Gospel of Mark, the one gospel perhaps most frequently argued  
9 to lack echoes of Christ's ontological Sonship. This argument receives particular merit for  
10 many, because of the frequently held Marcan priority of the Synoptic Gospels. To begin,  
11 some manuscripts of Mark 1:1 omit its explicit reference to Christ as Son of God. While this  
12 introductory filial phrase is likely original, other features highlight Jesus' ontological pre-  
13 existence in this terse yet poignant presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.  
14 Thielman points out that, within a short time after announcing Jesus Christ, the Son of God,  
15 Mark cites questions regarding whether Jesus is the God of Israel. "Why does this man  
16 speak like that? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (2:7). As Mark and his readers well  
17 know, only God can forgive sins.<sup>171</sup> Attempts to obviate Christ's deity explicitly fail, as the  
18 Son of God here unequivocally expresses his divine identity.  
19

20 At his baptism, the voice of God from heaven speaks in a way reminiscent of Psalm  
21 2:7 and 42:1, but once again with a revealing twist. The term "beloved" evokes memories of  
22 Genesis 22:2, where God commanded Abraham concerning "your son, your only son Isaac,  
23 whom you love." By referencing this typological event in the life of Abraham, Mark  
24 discloses how Jesus is no mere servant. He is a beloved Son. This Abrahamic reference also  
25 extends Mark's thought beyond Psalm 2:7, indicating that "Son of God," whatever else it  
26 may mean, constitutes an "original and essential communion with God." This reference  
27 therefore presupposes a connection to his pre-existent identity as God the Son.<sup>172</sup>  
28

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

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<sup>169</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, "The Deity of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels," in *Deity of Christ*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), p. 82.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God*, 28 n21.

<sup>171</sup> Frank Thielman, "The Road to Nicea: The New Testament," in *Evangelicals and Nicene Faith: Reclaiming the Apostolic Witness*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 34-44.

<sup>172</sup> See William L. Lane, *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, *The Gospel According to Mark* PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], p. 25).

1 be indeed “the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of  
2 heaven.” The divine import of his answer is reflected clearly in the high priest’s emotional  
3 response and charge of blasphemy. No mere messianic claim would have necessitated this  
4 serious charge. As Edwards notes,

5  
6 “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” (14:61) . . . The “you” is  
7 emphatic, and “the Blessed One,” a Jewish circumlocution for God’s name,  
8 means none other than “God’s Son.” The effect is to put a full christological  
9 confession into the mouth of the high priest! . . . According to Mark, Jesus  
10 openly affirms the high priest’s question, “I am!” (God’s Son). In v. 62 Jesus  
11 immediately interprets his affirmation with reference to the Son of Man in  
12 Dan 7:13 and Ps 110:1, . . . an affirmation that sets him unambiguously in  
13 God’s place.<sup>173</sup>  
14

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

16  
17 Arguing that the New Testament primarily presents Jesus Christ as the king who  
18 fulfills Old Testament anticipation, and in a Dunn-like fashion that his Sonship is effectively  
19 synonymous with functional and royal terms, some translators have adapted the filial  
20 language for Jesus Christ to something less biologically-construed, intending to more  
21 properly deliver the messianic *meaning* of “Son of God” to the hearers. In view of the  
22 strident response to Jesus’ Sonship by some and the fact that prominent messianic  
23 dimensions to Christ’s sonship appear in Scripture, at first glance, translation of “Son of  
24 God” with an exclusively messianic term might appear noble and missiologically  
25 compelling. But several questions emerge. On what basis is the linguistic, interpretive  
26 conclusion deduced? On what basis is a narrow or exclusively functional *meaning* of “Son  
27 of God” in a specific text of Scripture determined?  
28

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

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<sup>173</sup> Edwards, *Mark*, pp. 446-447. See also C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, CNTC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 443; Lane, *Mark*, p. 537.

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

11  
 12           As *WCF* 1.9 puts it, because Scripture is the ultimate authority, interpretation begins  
 13 and ends with Scripture. Scripture is its own final arbiter in interpretation; it must also  
 14 function in this role for translation, which is an inherently interpretive endeavor. Scripture  
 15 presents Jesus as the Son of God in the full complex of ontological *and* functional meaning,  
 16 and each reference to God the Son – to whatever degree it emphasizes a particular  
 17 dimension of his filial identity – presents the Second Person of the Trinity. Bifurcation of  
 18 ontology from filial function distorts the theological composite of divine Sonship embedded  
 19 in the biblical term. Therefore Bible translations must always describe divine relationships  
 20 in begetting terms, because God has revealed himself this way, and the organically woven  
 21 contours of Sonship present an irreplaceable expression, without which the gospel of Jesus  
 22 Christ becomes another gospel. So Poythress puts it, “Language that explicitly indicates a  
 23 sonship relation between Jesus and God the Father needs to be present in translations, both  
 24 for accuracy and for the spiritual health of the church. The same goes for translating the  
 25 word ‘Father’ (Greek *pater*). The Father-Son relation is an important aspect of Trinitarian  
 26 teaching, which needs to be communicated clearly in translation.”<sup>174</sup>

## 27 28 **The Stakes**

29  
 30           Seeking to accommodate the receptor audiences, many in recent translation debates  
 31 disregard what is *lost* by abandoning literal translation of the most explicit familial terms.  
 32 We turn now to considering some ramifications for altering the biological language for  
 33 Christ’s Sonship.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Vern S. Poythress, “A Clarification on Translation of ‘Son’ and ‘Father.’”

<sup>175</sup> 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*



1 **Value of the *begotten* meaning of “son.”** BGG recently introduced a novel taxonomy of  
 2 Greek and Hebrew kinship, dividing lexical categories along the lines of social versus  
 3 biological sonship, with the unusual conclusion that a term normally thought of as a single  
 4 word with a contextually-determined range of meaning should instead be understood as two  
 5 words with the same spelling, the same pronunciation, and similar meanings: “In Biblical  
 6 Hebrew, the absolute noun *yeled* signifies a male child or youth, but the relational noun  
 7 *yeled* (same spelling) signifies a kinship relation of biological son (e.g., 2 Kings 4:1).”<sup>176</sup>  
 8

9 Bob Carter has challenged these claims of BGG, concluding, “based on actual data  
 10 from the Hebrew text, this conclusion cannot stand.”<sup>177</sup> An SIL translator in Asia,  
 11 responding to BGG’s idea that the New Testament uses *υἱός* [*huios*] to avoid biological  
 12 implications, surveyed the New Testament usage of various sonship terms. He concluded  
 13 that the authors, “were more likely choosing *υἱός* [*huios*], a term whose prototypical, default  
 14 meaning did indeed include biological reproduction, over and against another term, *τέκνον*  
 15 [*teknon*], which was more frequently employed than *υἱός* [*huios*] when the focus was on  
 16 purely social, non-ontological/essential relationships.”<sup>178</sup>  
 17

18 Notwithstanding such questions about the validity Brown’s taxonomy itself, the  
 19 more critical and entirely overlooked question concerns the *value* of begotten solidarity for  
 20 “Son of God.” Brown and others have recently moved away from “Messiah” and the like,  
 21 and toward familial terms for divine relationships, while at the same time opposing  
 22 biological terms, in favor of social sonship terms. Of course, it must be said that Jesus is not  
 23 the biological son of his heavenly Father, who is “a most pure spirit, invisible, without  
 24 body” (*WCF* 2.1). Arguing backwards from ectype to Archetype, we note, however, that the  
 25 begotten-ness relating the First and Second Persons of the Trinity to each other resembles  
 26 biological sonship much more than social sonship. Jesus is not simply loved by God, or  
 27 treated as a Son by God as a functioning son might be. Jesus reveals his Father’s character,  
 28 will, and nature, *because of who he is*. Jesus does not merely function as Son or act in a filial  
 29

---

*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.*

<sup>176</sup> 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.

<sup>177</sup> Bob Carter, “A Response to ‘Brown, Gray, and Gray, the Terms of Translation: A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal terms in the Bible,’” unpublished but available upon request, received April 25, 2012.

<sup>178</sup> “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).

1 fashion. He eternally is the Son of God, and as the incarnate, Messianic One becomes the  
 2 Son of God in power at his resurrection (Rom. 1:3-4). The ontological is the *sine qua non* of  
 3 the redemptive-historical.  
 4

5 A “social son” term necessarily misses the integral themes which arise from the  
 6 generative, begetting nature of biological sonship language (as distinguished from the sexual  
 7 aspect of biological sonship). A similar set of errors arises from a “social Father” who is  
 8 protector, guardian, or head of household, but not necessary begetter. Intensifying the  
 9 problem, whereas begotten sonship terms would normally possess a high level of  
 10 consistency in meaning across languages, social sonship terms would likely vary more  
 11 considerably, since social practices differ from culture to culture. **Therefore, familial terms**  
 12 **used in Bible translations should preserve the concept of begotten-ness, which certainly**  
 13 **resides in a biological sonship/fatherhood term rather than a social sonship/fatherhood**  
 14 **term.** Because human biological sonship is normally sexual as well,<sup>179</sup> this approach will  
 15 necessitate explanation that Jesus was begotten in a non-sexual way. Despite this need for  
 16 clarification, a biological sonship term delivers divine meaning in a way a social sonship  
 17 term cannot.<sup>180</sup>  
 18

19 The genetic connection is also seen with other appearances of “son” in Scripture.  
 20 Psalm 45:6-7 speaks of the Davidic king (begotten of God according to Ps. 2:7, and a son of  
 21 God, his father, according to 2 Sam. 7:14<sup>181</sup>) as “God” (*Elohim*) specifically because “you  
 22 have loved righteousness and hated wickedness” as God does. To be sure, the royal function  
 23 of Sonship is prominent in these texts, but the Son’s righteous imitation of the Father who  
 24 has begotten him divulges more than temporally cast social/functional concepts.  
 25

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

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

<sup>180</sup> 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.

<sup>181</sup> 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.

1 Pharisees perceive a sexual inference in Jesus' language (v. 41, where they protest, "We are  
2 not born of sexual immorality."), exposing the evident biological nature of the language  
3 Jesus chose.

4  
5 The revelation of Christ's Sonship in Scripture necessarily includes concepts of  
6 solidarity and engendering. That is, the Father does not beget the Son in a mere social (or  
7 economic) action; this begetting language speaks analogously of the eternal oneness of  
8 Father and Son. The economic activity of the Father sending the eternal Son as incarnate  
9 Son, as well as the interweaving of the *imago Dei* with familial identity through Scripture of  
10 both the first and Last Adams, underscore the importance of the genetic, familial freight  
11 borne in the language of Son – eternally, creatively and redemptive-historically. Thus the  
12 language of the *WCF* affirms eternal and Messianic Sonship, with the former the basis for  
13 the latter:

14  
15 It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus,  
16 His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the  
17 Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of His Church; the Heir of  
18 all things; and Judge of the world; unto whom He did from all eternity give a  
19 people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified,  
20 sanctified, and glorified. (8.1)

21  
22 The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal  
23 God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fulness of  
24 time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties  
25 and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the  
26 power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance.  
27 So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the  
28 manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without  
29 conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very  
30 man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. (8.2)

31  
32 **Intimacy.** A word that helps frame our appropriate New Testament understanding of  
33 "Son" is "intimacy." Careful analysis of the use of "Father" in the Old Testament tells us a  
34 great deal concerning the meaning of "Son" in the New Testament.<sup>182</sup> For example, while  
35 the Old Testament uses YHWH as God's name 7,000 times, God only calls himself "Father"  
36 20 times. By contrast, in the New Testament, Paul uses *pater* 40 times and John 122 times,  
37 highlighting the close and multifaceted relationship of Father to Son.<sup>183</sup> Likewise, "Son" or  
38

<sup>182</sup> See John Murray, "Jesus the Son of God," pp. 63-66.

<sup>183</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), pp. 35-51.

1 “my Son” occurs 124 times in the New Testament. While “Son of God” carries many  
 2 meanings from commissioning, obedience, and service to sacrifice, it also bears the  
 3 unmistakable and unique connotation of intimacy, a familiarity and closeness not adequately  
 4 summed up by the term “Messiah” or some other non-familial, non-begotten, or more  
 5 distantly familial term. Moreover, the interplay between “Messiah” and “Son of God”  
 6 occurs at critical junctures in Scripture.<sup>184</sup> The prominence of the familial language in the  
 7 New Testament actually points to the culmination of divine redemptive pursuit in which the  
 8 Creator/Redeemer/Father receives, by the work of the Messiah, sons and daughters of all the  
 9 nations of the earth, whom he loves in his own Son irrevocably and intimately.

10  
 11 **The character of biblical soteriology as familial.** Familial language lies at the heart  
 12 of the gospel. Christians are sons of Abraham, saved by a faith like his (Rom. 4:11-17; Gal.  
 13 3:7). Christians are, as John marvels, the children of God (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1-3). Even  
 14 Pauline adoption (*huiiothesia*) entails not only legal contours but also deep structures of  
 15 theological solidarity and eschatologically transformative significance: “adoption is by  
 16 parentage a forensic concept; yet it fulfills itself in the bodily transforming change of the  
 17 resurrection.”<sup>185</sup> This rich familial identity with Christ as our Brother, and with one another  
 18 as brothers and sisters in Christ, defines the distinctly rich contours of resurrected gospel  
 19 identity – both *now* and in the *not yet*.

20  
 21 In related fashion, we should note how various interpenetrating strands of rich  
 22 theology spring from select biblical terms. For example, throughout Scripture *imago Dei*,  
 23 created and adoptive sonship, the ministry of the Holy Spirit (as the breath of original life  
 24 and the breath of *new* resurrection life), the Fatherhood of God and Sonship of Jesus Christ,  
 25 all possess interlocking and enriching features which, for proper understanding, depend  
 26 upon their explicit and consistent translation. We become partakers of the divine nature  
 27 (2 Pet. 1:4); we must be peacemakers because our Father is a peacemaker (Matt. 5:9); we  
 28 must be perfect because our Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). The whole of creation cries out  
 29 for the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:16-23), who as Jesus’ brothers will be glorified  
 30 and conformed to the image of the One True Son (Rom. 8:28-30), who in turn is not  
 31 ashamed to call us brothers (Heb. 2:10-13; Matt. 28:10). Faithful translation of such terms  
 32 allows readers to grasp divine revelation: the singular authorship of Scripture, its intra-  
 33 canonical unity, the deep structures and realities of redemptive grace, the splendor of  
 34 covenant theology, and the eschatological age ushered in by the eternal Son made incarnate

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<sup>184</sup> See, for example, in the Gospel of Mark. D.R. Bauer, “Son of God,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downer’s Grove: IVP, 1992), p. 772.

<sup>185</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1930), p. 152; cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.18.3.

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

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

## 14 **Summary of Principles**

- 15  
16  
17 1. Scripture is the Word of God. Scripture’s inherent divine authority demands a  
18 particular measure of reverence, theological self-consciousness, and methodological  
19 caution in biblical translation.
- 20 2. Scripture is a gift of God for his elect people. Recognizing its covenantal character –  
21 that it is God’s Word for those whom he has and will redeem – precludes  
22 accommodation of Scripture for the receptor’s religious palatability.
- 23 3. Scripture translation must be combined with evangelism, discipleship, church  
24 planting, and leadership training, all in dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit  
25 through his Word.
- 26 4. Scripture reveals Jesus Christ as the Son of God: eternal, messianic, and resurrected.  
27 References to Christ’s sonship entail a complex of meaning, which cannot properly  
28 be atomized. Scripture presents Christ’s Sonship as a rich complex of ontological,  
29 redemptive-historical, and eschatological themes. While certain texts may possess  
30 stronger emphasis on one *aspect* of his Sonship, faithful translation recognizes that  
31 the theologically rich term of “Son” necessitates the strongest genetic filial term  
32 available in the receptor language.
- 33 5. Consistent language for the Son of God is critical to biblical integrity, and with an  
34 eye to the archetypal character of eternal Fatherhood/Sonship for familial identity in  
35 creation and redemption (Eph. 3:14), the most common generic sonship term in a  
36 given language will almost always best convey a son’s engendered relationship to his  
37 father and deliver biblical meaning faithfully. Any confusion about this terminology  
38 will need correction by teachers and preachers, but no such changes to the text of  
39 Scripture in any language are tolerable.

- 1       6. Translation methods must honor Scripture’s verbal and plenary authority, the Holy  
2       Spirit’s Authorship, and the divinely selected terms for the manifestation of the  
3       character of God and the work of his redemption. Cultural, religious, or linguistic  
4       resistance are not sufficient reasons to change terms when those terms carry critical  
5       theological weight within particular books of Scripture or in any intra-canonical way.  
6

## 7       **A Return to Istanbul**

8  
9       In closing this section on theological implications, we return to the four Bible  
10      translations discussed in Section A. Each of these translations was completed prior to the  
11      Istanbul consultation (August 2011), so it may be helpful to compare these translations with  
12      the documents from Istanbul to see how the new SIL guidelines interact with actual  
13      translation products which limited or avoided biological sonship terms.  
14

### 15      **1. Bangla: *Injil Sharif***

16  
17      The 2005 edition translated “Son of God” as “Messiah,” and thereby violates the  
18      Istanbul commitment to filial language. The 2008 edition solution of “God’s Uniquely-  
19      Intimate Beloved Chosen One” may convey the special affection God the Father has for his  
20      unique Son, but such social terms, while allowable as “filial language” under Istanbul 3.0’s  
21      guidelines, omit crucial information about Jesus’ relationship with the Father. The glossary  
22      entry describing this term only as a title of Israel’s kings would require substantial revision  
23      to adequately capture the eternally generative aspects of Jesus’ pre-temporal and incarnate  
24      Sonship.  
25

### 26      **2. Arabic: “Stories of the Prophets”**

27  
28      These “Stories” clearly violate the Istanbul standards since they strategically avoid  
29      Bible verses which refer to Jesus as “Son of God,” translate “Son” as “Messiah,” and  
30      translate “Father” as “Lord” or “God.”  
31

### 32      **3. Arabic: *True Meaning***

33  
34      The 2008 edition initially used “guardian” or “Lord” for *pater*. The “Lord” solution  
35      would not pass muster under Istanbul 3.0, but “guardian” and “only-beloved” might be  
36      justified as “social filial terms.” The 2008 edition most commonly rendered “Son of God”  
37      literally as *ibn Allah*, which conforms to Istanbul 3.0. However, if *ibn Allah* is followed by a  
38      parenthetical “God’s Loved One,” it seems likely that in the mind of the reader, *ibn* will be

1 limited to a social term of affection. Istanbul 3.0 emphasizes the need to test such paratext  
 2 for “effectiveness” in the targeted community, but might deem a strictly social  
 3 understanding of Jesus’ sonship as “effective” for conveying the proper filial meaning, when  
 4 in fact social or royal sonship without begotten-ness should be declared inadequate. The  
 5 accompanying essays which limit Jesus’ Sonship to his messianic status clearly violate  
 6 Istanbul 3.0. Finally, the Istanbul documents do not indicate whether false interpretations  
 7 which stem from the reader’s false religious convictions are grounds to alter key Biblical  
 8 terms; greater clarity on this issue would enhance Istanbul’s specificity.

#### 9 10 **4. Turkish: *Noble Gospel***

11  
12 Our Turkish respondents reported that *vekil* and *mevla* are not specifically familial  
 13 terms, so their use in the paraphrase text for *huios* and *pater* violates Istanbul. Some might  
 14 attempt to argue, since the woodenly literal translation on the interlinear pages does contain  
 15 traditional “father” and “son” terminology, that therefore the work as a whole complies with  
 16 Istanbul 3.0. The Istanbul Statement does not address parallel Bibles explicitly, but  
 17 presumably the “test for effectiveness” rules intended for paratext would apply here as well.  
 18 One would expect that readers defer to the natural-sounding paraphrase to inform the  
 19 meaning of the interlinear. If that proved true, then the non-familial terms *vekil* and *mevla*  
 20 would fail the Istanbul test.

21  
22 While Istanbul shows an admirable philosophical commitment to the idea of  
 23 accuracy in Bible translations and fidelity to Trinitarian doctrine, taking the four translations  
 24 together, only one (“Stories of the Prophets”) is clearly excluded under the new SIL guidelines,  
 25 along with some of the essays in *True Meaning*. If SIL intends to prevent translations like  
 26 these, the guidelines require revision to specify that familial terms must be not only social but  
 27 biological, and that parallel paraphrases should be tested by the same methods as paratext.  
 28 Furthermore, while the SCIM would encourage further improvements to the Istanbul  
 29 guidelines, the greatest challenge for all translation agencies lies in implementation,  
 30 oversight, and accountability. It is here that the role of the church becomes paramount for  
 31 encouraging faithfulness not only in translation guidelines, but more so in translation practice.

## 32 33 **Conclusion**

34  
35 Christ’s divine Sonship suffuses the New Testament. It binds up the Gospels, with a  
 36 divine Son revealed in the cross (e.g., Mark) and gloriously worshipped as divine Son (e.g.,  
 37 John). A divine Son caps the entire Judaic *cultus*, as revealed in Hebrews. Divine Sonship  
 38 pre-exists Jesus’ incarnation (Luke 1), and its revelation climaxes with the adoration of the

1 Lamb of God in the Revelation which John received on the Isle of Patmos. It exists in the  
 2 earliest Christian communities, as Acts briefly alludes and Paul more clearly trumpets.<sup>186</sup>  
 3 “The highest possible Christology, the inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity, was  
 4 central to the faith of the early church before any New Testament writings were written,  
 5 since it occurs in all of them.”<sup>187</sup>  
 6

7 The glue that binds the biblical text together is not only the kingly Messiah; it is the  
 8 condescended, loving presence of God the Son, fully God and fully man who is both Agent  
 9 of salvation and Object of worship. Though some have observed the ways in which the  
 10 worship of Jesus works its way through believing communities, there is a more profound  
 11 dimension to his revelation as divine. A strictly monotheistic people learned to embrace  
 12 Jesus in worship, not slowly but with breathtaking speed following the crucifixion and  
 13 resurrection. This was not a grudging process of socialization to a new faith, but a revolution  
 14 reverberating from the empty tomb as people became convinced that the Son of God was no  
 15 mere Messiah, but one who embodied every aspect of his name.<sup>188</sup>  
 16

17 Scripture’s presentation of Christ’s Sonship is complex formulation, in the sense that  
 18 while certain contingent, redemptive features of his Sonship identity may appear  
 19 prominently in a text, the eternal and ontological always remain implicitly, permeatingly,  
 20 and essentially present. In other words, we cannot think properly of Christ properly apart  
 21 from his eternal Sonship. This would be like speaking of a human while denying or ignoring  
 22 his essential personhood.  
 23

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

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

<sup>187</sup> Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998), p. 27.

<sup>188</sup> 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, *The Person of Christ*, Studies in Dogmatics [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954], p. 176).



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

6  
 7 Bible translators subscribe to the rule that translations should “make every effort to  
 8 ensure that no political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agenda is allowed to  
 9 distort the translation.”<sup>189</sup> When Bible translators operate under the belief that Jesus’  
 10 Sonship is primarily messianic *or* can be accurately captured by non-biological terms of  
 11 social relationship, this rule is violated, as such a translation injects a controversial  
 12 theological agenda into the translation process.

13  
 14 Indeed, to change or substitute non-familial or social familial terms with the common  
 15 biological terms in Scripture is to move in a direction contrary to Scriptural intent.  
 16 Therefore, if a translator seeks to find a more “culturally responsible” or “culturally  
 17 sensitive” form because the word in the target language arguably contains primary or  
 18 secondary nuances that differ from the original language (Greek), this aim *does not warrant*  
 19 *the translator’s selecting a less than explicit term for the Son of God*. The biological sonship  
 20 term may need to be explained, but it cannot be substituted without compromising the  
 21 revelation of Christ’s person. Translation decisions that violate these parameters functionally  
 22 eclipse the perspicuous verbal authority of Scripture regarding the Son of God. By  
 23 truncating the identity of Christ in the minds of the reader, replacement terms can even  
 24 distort the gospel.

25  
 26 No matter our motivation, there is no pure Gospel apart from the  
 27 ontological and incarnational *sonship* of Jesus Christ. Some will protest:  
 28 sonship and messiah-ship are functionally interchangeable.<sup>190</sup> To be sure, the  
 29 redemptive-historical theme of Scripture interweaves Christ’s kingly and  
 30 messianic functions with his sonship status. But the Christological fabric  
 31 becomes unraveled when we rip the messianic warp from the filial woof. We  
 32 cannot speak of Christ as Messiah apart from understanding that regal and  
 33 redemptive functioning *in light of him being the Son of God*. We also cannot  
 34 speak of his exalted Sonship apart from his reign as King. Sonship and regal  
 35 redemptive reign are mutually informative and indivisible; but though the  
 36 ideas share referentiality, their meanings are not identical. So when the

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<sup>189</sup> “Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation,” Forum of Bible Agencies International, October 2006, Goal #5.

<sup>190</sup> 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).

1 biblical authors employ language laden with such distinct qualities, we have  
2 no interpretive right to regard that language as negotiable.  
3

4 And it is because Jesus is Son of God that we *must* speak of  
5 Christians as adopted sons and daughters of God. We must express Gospel  
6 truth in a way that honors the true familial expressions of Scripture, and  
7 avoids compromise by unintentional truncation or even well intended yet  
8 obstructive contextualization. We cannot speak of the true Gospel apart from  
9 the filial character of our union with Christ, for we are united to the Son of  
10 God and no one else. The filial and familial language of the Gospel then is  
11 not contextually optional; it is transcendentally central.  
12

13 Paul's warnings in Galatians 1 ought give us terrifying pause.  
14 Removing familial language eclipses the *Christ of the Gospel* and it distorts  
15 the *Gospel of Christ*. Ultimately an incognito Christ is a misrepresented  
16 Christ. A misrepresented Christ is a false gospel. A false gospel is the turf of  
17 the sons of darkness. . . . Some may be mercifully rescued; others will die in  
18 their sins.<sup>191</sup>  
19

20 The stakes are that high.

---

<sup>191</sup> David B. Garner, "A World of Riches," *Reformation 21* April 2011,  
<http://www.reformation21.org/articles/a-world-of-riches.php> (accessed April 2012).

## 1 **Recommendations to Organizations Doing Translation**<sup>192</sup>

2  
3 No institution, including the PCA, operates above reproach in all its members and  
4 methods. Our concern is not that the average translator is failing his charge, or that  
5 translation failures necessarily evince heterodox beliefs among translators. Rather, the  
6 response to the representative problematic translations identified in this report and others  
7 like them reveals institutional weaknesses which raise questions as to whether translation  
8 agencies are prepared to redress the situation quickly, or in some cases at all. Current  
9 evidence from agencies points at best to a lack of unanimity, and in some cases to frank  
10 resistance, concerning a strong commitment to biological divine sonship terminology. Given  
11 the inadequate attention they have given heretofore to the theological implications of Jesus’  
12 begotten-ness, we lack confidence at the present time to accept blanket statements made by  
13 translation agencies or their representatives that there exist languages in which the use of  
14 non-biological kinship terms constitutes best practices.

15  
16 The church bears the privilege and responsibility to engage fully in translation matters  
17 (*WCF* 1.8), and this report seeks to assist translators and organizations doing translation in  
18 correcting any of the failures named in this report. To that end and for the good of the global  
19 church and for the honor of the Lord God who has exalted above all things his name and his  
20 word (Ps. 138:2), we present the following recommendations to organizations doing  
21 translation:

- 22  
23 1) Bible translations should always use biological terms for divine familial relationships.  
24 a) “Messiah” and “Beloved One” fall far short of the needed breadth of meaning.  
25 b) Social sonship terms fail to capture the generative and genetic dimensions of identity  
26 inherent in the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father, and thus inadequately  
27 substitute for terms with the begetting connotations of the original Greek and  
28 Hebrew terms.  
29 c) If two biological terms equally convey the generative and social dimensions of  
30 family, then the one with lesser sexual connotation could be more appropriate,  
31 *ceteris paribus*.  
32 2) Organizations should not use translation workers or consultants who advocate the  
33 avoidance of biological familial terms applied to persons of the Godhead.  
34 3) Organizations should not aid or approve translations which avoid biological familial  
35 terms applied to the persons of the Godhead.

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<sup>192</sup> “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.

- 1 4) Parentheticals, footnotes, and other ancillary paratextual materials should not explicitly  
2 or implicitly subvert the begetting dimensions of biological familial terms which appear  
3 in the main text. Rather, when used, they should articulate specifically the biblical  
4 meaning of the terms, as understood in historic, confessional orthodoxy.
- 5 5) One text of a parallel Bible (e.g., a paraphrase) should not subvert the begetting  
6 dimensions of biological familial terms in the other text (e.g., an interlinear).
- 7 6) Organizations should institute and strengthen policies which ensure that orthodox  
8 theological training and orthodox theological review integrally inform the translation  
9 process from start to finish.
- 10 7) Non-Christians may help assess the intelligibility of translations in their native tongue  
11 but they should not govern, make, or unduly influence translation decisions, as these  
12 tasks are inherently and irreducibly theological.
- 13 8) Adequate accountability information should be pushed to donors and other interested  
14 parties. Within a given language, if the most common biological term for a familial  
15 relationship (e.g., father, son, child, etc.) is not used, translators should prepare  
16 numerous examples substantiating the reason.
- 17 9) More generally, translators should seek in all ways to cooperate with the visible church  
18 and its ordained leaders in the shared work of gospel ministry. Translators should resist  
19 the temptation to exposit in their translations, thereby wittingly or unwittingly usurping  
20 the teaching and preaching offices of the church.
- 21 10) Due to limited resources, most languages in the world will only get a single Bible  
22 translation in the foreseeable future. Therefore, that single translation must not saddle its  
23 reading church with a “baby Bible”<sup>193</sup> which emphasizes immediate payoff over long-  
24 term value, and which divorces that church from the larger Body of Christ through  
25 idiosyncratic language.
- 26 11) Translators should consider the long-term uses of Scripture, including how the  
27 translation can be used for in-depth study by God’s covenant people.
- 28 12) A deep commitment to faithful rendering of the Biblical text should take decisive  
29 precedence over concerns that the clear teaching of Scripture will be found unacceptable  
30 by an unbelieving or an untaught audience.
- 31 13) Distinctions between Bible paraphrases and Bibles should be made clear in all  
32 references. Just as translations are field-tested to ensure that their meaning is understood,  
33 paraphrases and paratextual apparatus must be tested to assess whether their intended  
34 audiences actually use them and understand their relationship to the Bible proper.

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<sup>193</sup> Poythress, “Bible Translation and Contextualization: Theory And Practice in Bangladesh.”

- 1 14) Because the church bears responsibility to preserve the integrity of Scripture, faithful  
2 local churches should be involved in the production and approval of Bible translations in  
3 their areas.<sup>194</sup>
- 4 a) In the absence of a faithful local church or denomination, the next closest ecclesial  
5 body should have input.
- 6 b) Translation projects which go forward over the objections of the local church (e.g., if  
7 the local church is not in fact faithful), should thoroughly document the necessity of  
8 such action, for the sake of concerned parties.
- 9 15) Published articles should clearly identify relevant institutional affiliations of the  
10 author(s), with pseudonymity minimized to avoid confusion.
- 11 16) Disagreements about the meanings and implications of published works should lead to  
12 open discussion. Authors should avoid hasty charges of “bearing false witness,” and  
13 organizations and individual authors should promote cordial public discourse rather than  
14 stifling academic debate.
- 15 17) The review of Wycliffe’s Bible Translator’s practices and policies by WEA should be  
16 made public after its completion.
- 17 18) Existing translations which do not consistently and comprehensively use the common  
18 biological terms for divine Son and divine Father should be corrected.

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<sup>194</sup> “Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation,” Forum of Bible Agencies International, October 2006, goal #14.

## 1 **Recommendations to Churches**

2  
3 Implications of our findings bear directly not only upon organizations doing  
4 translation, but upon our own church. With that awareness in mind and in keeping with the  
5 explicit mandate of Overture 9, we provide the following recommendations to PCA  
6 churches and presbyteries:

- 7
- 8 1) Churches should support the work of faithful Bible translation around the world.
  - 9 2) Churches should lovingly correct translation workers engaged in Bible projects that lack  
10 faithfulness in some respect.
  - 11 3) Should such attempts at correction fail, PCA churches and committees should redirect  
12 missions resources away from projects<sup>195</sup> which deviate from the translation principles  
13 articulated in this report.
  - 14 4) Churches should regularly evaluate their contributions to Bible translation efforts to  
15 ensure that the work incorporates adequate attention to the theological dimensions of  
16 Bible translation. To discern the faithfulness of translation projects, ask translators and  
17 others involved in the translation projects questions such as these:
    - 18 a) How do you ensure that the training and competence of translation workers is not  
19 only linguistic but also properly theological?
    - 20 b) What is your approach to the translation of divine familial terms such as “Son of  
21 God”? Do you use a begetting term, a social term, a term of affection, a royal term,  
22 or something else? Do you use such terms consistently or are there exceptions? If so,  
23 what are those exceptions and why do you make them?
    - 24 c) Does your translation work describe Jesus’ divine Sonship with the most common  
25 filial term in the target language, allowing Scripture itself to inform the meaning of  
26 that term?
    - 27 d) How do the established churches within your field of service perceive your  
28 translation project(s)?
      - 29 i) In what ways are they involved?
      - 30 ii) If they are not involved, why not?
      - 31 iii) If they are opposed, why are you proceeding?
      - 32 iv) If there are no established churches within your field of service, what other  
33 ecclesial bodies are involved in your translation work?
    - 34 e) How does the national Bible society within your field of perceive your project? If  
35 they are opposed, why are you proceeding?
  - 36 5) Churches should exercise extreme caution when using back-translations to evaluate the  
37 results of translation products, as the potential for misunderstanding is high.

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<sup>195</sup> Including funds for translators, consultants, and other expenses.

- 1 6) Churches should support the training and labors of competent preachers and teachers  
2 who are committed to evangelizing, preaching, and explaining the Scriptures and serving  
3 in communities around the world. Such a commitment should include:
  - 4 a) Supporting trained missionaries and national pastors and teachers willing to commit  
5 to long-term placement in those communities.
  - 6 b) Supporting church leaders willing to pursue advanced theological training.
  - 7 c) Supporting the theological training of translation workers.
  - 8 d) Targeting areas for support where such church and theological leaders are clearly  
9 needed.
- 10 7) Churches should pray for the truth of the gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the  
11 concerted efforts of believers and churches to break down the racial and cultural barriers  
12 which retard the progress of Christian word and deed ministry in the West and around  
13 the world.
- 14 8) Denominations should offer highly qualified persons for regular engagement with  
15 translation agencies to improve institutional implementation of the aforementioned  
16 priorities, including theological oversight.
- 17 9) Missiological and theological scholars of the PCA should engage these issues in peer-  
18 reviewed journals, books, lectures, and other formats in order to frame the debate within  
19 the bounds of a robust Christian orthodoxy.
- 20 10) The PCA should request that a representative be invited to major meetings of translation  
21 agencies at which familial language translation policy will be discussed. PCA leadership  
22 or its delegate(s) should accept such invitations when offered.
- 23 11) Churches and denominations should pray and strive for a unity reflecting the purity and  
24 peace of Christ's church.

## 1 Epilogue

2  
3 The success of Bible translation, especially since the Reformation, remains  
4 thoroughly stunning. From only a brief survey of completed translations and the thousands  
5 of projects that continue to this day, we are left to marvel at the ways in which the Scriptures  
6 have become accessible to millions of people in their own tongues. In combination with the  
7 works of evangelism, discipleship, and church planting, Bible translation has, by the  
8 illumining work of the Spirit of God, enabled these millions to know, love, and worship the  
9 Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God.

10  
11 In view of the palpable fruit throughout the world, the SCIM celebrates the work of  
12 thousands who have invested their lives in faithful Bible translation. In this same spirit of  
13 celebration in gospel integrity, we also now urge those who currently undertake this  
14 privilege and responsibility to do so with the humility, theological responsibility, and filial  
15 joy incumbent upon them as sons and daughters of the living God.

16  
17 Deo Patri sit gloria,  
18 eiusque soli Filio,  
19 cum Spiritu Paraclito,  
20 et nunc, et in perpetuum.  
21 - *Ambrose of Milan*

22  
23 All praise be to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who by his redeeming grace  
24 has united us by the Holy Spirit to his Son. All praise be to this Triune God who has exalted  
25 above all things his name and his Word (Ps. 138:2).

26  
27 Respectfully Submitted,

28 THE PCA *AD INTERIM* STUDY COMMITTEE ON INSIDER MOVEMENTS (SCIM)

29 May 14, 2012

30  
31 *“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*  
32 *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.*  
33 *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”*

34 - 1 John 4:13-15



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