The Terms of Translation

A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms

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1. The Problem

"I can't accept this! We know that Jesus was born from a virgin and did not have a human father!" Such was the reaction of one educated non-Christian woman who was reading a traditional translation of the Gospel of Luke for the first time. Her outburst occurred when she came to the passage where Mary and Joseph find their young son Jesus in the Jerusalem temple, and Mary says to Jesus, "Son … Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you" (Luke 2:48 ESV[1]). Upon reading this passage, the woman protested strongly that Joseph could not have been Jesus' biological father. She cited the passage as "proof that the Bible has been corrupted and is unreliable," meaning the translation was corrupt. What could have been the cause of her misunderstanding?

The problem for this woman was that the word from her language that was used for "father" in the Bible translation that she was reading is biological in meaning. It is not normally used for non-biological fathers, such as stepfathers and adoptive fathers. Thus it implied that Joseph had sired Jesus by having sex with Mary. The word was equivalent in meaning to the English phrase *biological father*. The biological father is the one who sires the children by inseminating the mother, whether he raises them or not. The social father is the one who raises the children as their father, looks after them, and has authority over them, whether he sired them or not.

In a prototypical family (and in a patrilineal culture) the same man is both the social and biological father; i.e., he is a parenting father, meaning he is the provider of both paternal DNA and paternal nurturing to the same child. In some cases, however, the social father of a child is not the biological father. An adopted child, for example, has an adoptive father and a birth father. These categories are shown in Table 1.

It is crucial to note that social father and biological father are overlapping categories, and a parenting father is in both categories. So a man can be described

as a child's social father without implying that he is the child's biological father as well, even if most social fathers are also the biological fathers of the children they raise. In Luke 2:48–49, both Joseph and God are called in Greek Jesus' *patêr* "social father." Since neither one passed his own human seed (DNA) to Jesus, the paternal relationship was not only social but also non-biological.[2] This in no way denies that the Son is of the same divine essence as the Father; rather, it reflects the biblical teaching that Jesus Christ is not the genetic offspring of God the Father.

In most cultures and languages there is a distinction between biological kinship and social kinship, with an emphasis on one or the other.[3] So social scientists use the terms *pater* and *mater* to designate a social father and mother and the terms *genitor* and *genitrix* to signify a biological father and mother. As shown in Table 1, the English word *father* is broad in meaning and does not imply that every father-son relationship is biological, since one can be a father to someone without having sired him or her. In some languages, however, the kinship terminology is strictly biological, so the word used for one's biological father is not used of a stepfather or adoptive father. In the translation read by the woman above, the word used to translate Greek *patêr* "social father" actually meant biological father in her language; this implied that Joseph had sired Jesus

and hence that Mary was not a virgin when she conceived him. It was not an accurate translation.[4] In languages that limit kinship terminology to biological relationships, there are often social terms for the extended family, because this is the basic family unit in many or most cultures. In patriarchal cultures, like those of the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans, or the modern Indians and Arabs, the extended family is headed by a patriarch (paterfamilias), who is a social father to the whole family.

The woman mentioned in the opening paragraph regarded it as incorrect for a word meaning biological son or offspring to be used to describe the relationship between Jesus and Joseph (see John 1:45; 6:42). She felt the words for biological son and mother were appropriate for describing Jesus' relationship with Mary (Luke 2:48), because she gave birth to him, but that a word meaning biological son did not accurately describe Jesus' filial relationship to Joseph, because he did not inseminate Mary. This reflects a distinction between *social son*, which signifies a filial social relationship to a father, whether he is biological or not, and *biological son*, which signifies a filial biological relationship to the man who contributed his own human seed (DNA). Again, in a prototypical situation the same person has both kinds of filial relationship, i.e., is a parented son, meaning the same man both passed his seed (DNA) on to him by inseminating

his mother and is raising and nurturing him as his son. In some situations, however, this is not the case, such as when a boy is the birth son of one man and the adopted son of another. Joseph raised and nurtured Jesus, but he did not beget him biologically, so he was not his biological father. These categories are shown in Table 2.

The English word *son* covers all three categories, but in some languages the word commonly used for a male child of the family is limited in meaning to biological offspring. That is the case in the language of the woman above. In her language their commonly used terms for family members are equivalent in meaning to the English terms *biological father (*or *genitor* or *procreator*), *biological mother* (or *genitrix*), *sibling*, and *offspring (biological son/ daughter)*. A word meaning biological son does not accurately describe Jesus' filial relationship to Joseph. To express a non-biological familial relationship in such languages, speakers must use a phrase or a less common word.

The significance of this for our discussion is that in contrast to the language of the woman above, the Bible often uses social familial terms for fathers and sons that do not specify whether their relationship is biological or not. In English, the relational noun *son* signifies a filial relation with someone of any kind, whether it is the result of biological procreation or not. So a person can become a "son" to someone on the basis of procreation, adoption, marriage, or upbringing (a so-called "son of the family"). When there is a need in English to be specific as to the origin of the sonship, one can use a phrase, such as *my biological son*, *my adopted son*, *my stepson*, or *like a son to me*.[5] In contrast to *son*, the English words *offspring* and *issue* are limited in meaning to biological children. The original Greek terms used in Luke 2:48 for "father" and "son," namely *patêr* and *teknon*, are social in meaning and are not limited to strictly biological relationships. That is

Table 1: Categories of fatherhood and corresponding English terms

Broad categories and their names	FATHER		
		Social father, pater, paterfamilias	
	Biological father, genitor, procreator		
Narrow categories and their features	biological, non-social, paternal	biological, social, paternal	non-biological, social, paternal
Examples of narrow categories	birth father, absentee father	parenting father	adoptive father, foster father, stepfather, secondary father, father figure

to say, their meanings are not limited to familial relations resulting from procreation but can include familial relationships resulting from adoption or marriage as well. The same is true of their usual Hebrew and Aramaic counterparts, namely *âb* "father" and *ben/bar* "son." Ideally, these words would be translated in target languages using expressions that signify the same social familial relationships.

Biblical Greek and Hebrew have one set of terms signifying social familial relationships, similar to English *father* and *son*, but with broader application, and a second set for biological familial relations, like English *procreator* and *offspring*.[6] In a nurturing biological family both sets of terms apply to the same people. A stepson, however, is not called a biological son in Hebrew or Greek, and a disowned biological son is no longer a social son.

It is important to realize that to express divine familial relationships, the Bible uses Greek and Hebrew social familial terms that do not necessarily demand biological meanings. It presents God's fatherhood of us in terms of his inclusion of us in his family and in his paternal care for us as his loved ones rather than in terms of siring us as biological offspring.[7] In regard to sonship to God, the New Testament uses four different Greek familial terms for Jesus, and two for believers, all of which are terms for social sonship, so none of them imply that sons of God *must* be his biological offspring.[8] Instead the terms allow for the different kinds of generation presented in the Bible.

While in Hebrew and Greek the social familial terms are the ones commonly used to refer to members of one's family, in some languages the biological terms are most commonly used. Some languages, like Arabic and various Turkic languages, do not have a set of social or non-biological kinship terms per se, and either they use a phrase to convey a non-biological paternal relationship, (e.g., *he is like a genitor to me*), or if appropriate

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they use a term for the male head of family (paterfamilias). When translating the Bible into such languages, it would be inaccurate to translate the Hebrew or Greek word for a social father or son using a word for a biological father or son in the target language unless the relationship is truly biological. This is especially the case with regard to the divine Father-Son relationship, which was generated non-biologically, without procreation. Translating Father and Son with biological terms has caused some readers and listeners to think the text claims that Jesus is the offspring of God procreating with Mary. The Lord's Prayer is misunderstood as meaning "Our Begetter, who is in heaven," and Jesus is understood as "God's (procreated) offspring." The "longing of creation" (Rom. 8:19) is understood to be "for the revealing of God's biological children." *Such wordings are inaccurate because they add a procreative meaning that was absent from the original, and this obscures the important interpersonal relationships that were expressed in the original text.* Many Muslim readers reject such translations as corrupt and even blasphemous.

According to the agreed professional standards in *Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation,* the task

of Bible translation is to communicate "the meaning of the original text … as exactly as possible … including the informational content, feelings, and attitudes of the original text" by re-expressing it "in forms that are consistent with normal usage in the receptor language," noting that "the receptor audience may need access to additional background information in order to adequately understand the message that the original author was seeking to communicate to the original audience."[9] The informational content consists of concepts and propositions. Much of the conceptual knowledge, including word meanings, was assumed by the biblical authors to be familiar to the audience, because the text was composed in their language and context. Today this essential conceptual information is often provided in the paratext, meaning the introductions, notes, glossary, etc. that explain unfamiliar concepts and other essential background information.

A key procedure of the *Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation* is to "test the translation as extensively as possible in the receptor community to ensure that it communicates accurately, clearly and naturally."[10] Applied to translating difficult key biblical terms, the procedure is to test

Table 2: Categories of sonship and corresponding English terms

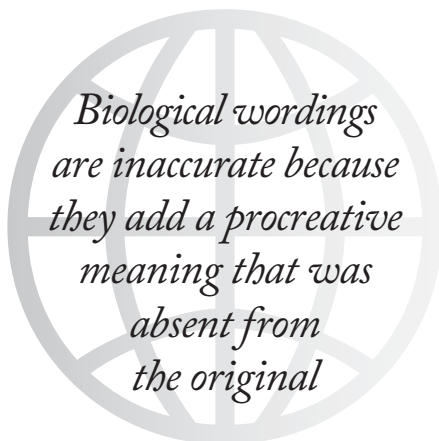| Broad categories and their names	SON		
		Social son	
	Biological son, offspring, issue		
Narrow categories and their features	biological, non-social, filial	biological, social, filial	non-biological, social, filial
Examples of narrow categories	birth son	parented son	adopted son, foster son, stepson, son of the family, like a son

audience comprehension of translated passages that use a variety of expressions for the terms to find out which expressions best enable the audience to understand the original concepts without communicating unintended informational content, feelings, or attitudes.[11] Translators continue to revise the terminology and drafts until they communicate the intended meaning, and they continue testing difficult key terms for the life of the project, replacing them when problems are discovered or better expressions are found. It might seem astounding, therefore, that Bible translations would ever use expressions that misrepresent the divine relations by implying they arose from sexual procreation. However, this has happened in the history of Bible translation for two main reasons.

2. Sources of the Problem

Translators have historically preferred word-for-word translations of key biblical terms, and many are under pressure to translate Greek *patêr* and *huios* with single words, even if doing so misrepresents the meaning. In some languages, there is simply no single word that is an exact equivalent of the Greek and Hebrew words, so the translators use a word that is similar in meaning, even though the meaning is different.[12] One reason for using biological terms is that the target language has no single-word terms to signify a social son or father, and it requires the use of a phrase to express a non-biological familial relation. So the translators used the one-word terms available for a biological son or father, equivalent to *offspring* and *procreator,* even in passages where the relationship is not biological, as with the fatherhood of Joseph and God.

A second reason is that to keep the style simple, some translators use the most common words in the target language over ones that are less commonly used, even if the meaning is slightly different from the Hebrew and Greek. For example, there is a seman-

tic mismatch between Hebrew and English terms for uncles, aunts, and cousins. Hebrew does not have a word equivalent in meaning to English *uncle*; instead it has two separate words, one equivalent in meaning to *maternal uncle* and one equivalent to *paternal uncle*, but most English translations render both words as *uncle*. Hebrew has no word equivalent to *cousin* but instead distinguishes four kinds of first cousin, but most English translations just say *cousin*. So when the Hebrew Bible says a slave may be redeemed by his paternal uncle or his male paternal cousin, the ESV simply says, "his uncle or his cousin may redeem him" (Lev. 25:49), thereby including extra relatives that were excluded in the original text.[13] Similarly in some languages

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translators have used biological terms equivalent to *procreator* and *offspring* to translate expressions of divine fatherhood and sonship simply because these are the most common words in the target language for family members, and different, specialized terms or phrases are required to express social or non-biological familial relationships. Such terms might be suitable to describe familial relations that are biological as well as social, but in passages where the relationships mentioned are non-biological, using the common kinship terms distorts the meaning of the biblical text. Once such wordings become entrenched, they are hard to change, and that becomes a third reason why they continue to be used.
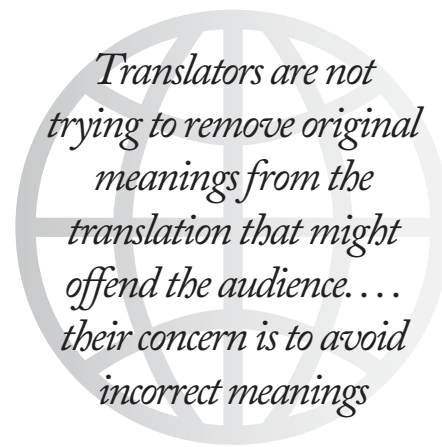
Many speakers of English have little familiarity with linguistic diversity, and this leads them to mistakenly assume that their English words and phrases must have look-alike counterparts in other languages, with the same meanings and the same frequencies of usage; they then assume that if an expression looks different in another language it must have a different meaning from the English. As a result, when they see literal back-translations into English of expressions used in a language different from English, they are disturbed when these differ from the expressions in their English Bible. The fact, however, is that there are usually semantic mismatches between many of the words in any two languages, especially if they are from different language families and different cultures, and translators often have to use phrases in the target language to express the intended meaning of a single-word term in the Greek or Hebrew text.

Not understanding this, some well-intentioned Christians outside particular language communities have insisted that the Bible translators working in those communities produce word-for-word translations of familial terms because they mistakenly assume that every language describes familial relations in the broad sense expressed by the common English, Hebrew, and Greek familial terms, and that such descriptions will communicate the divine familial relations the same way they are communicated in the original languages. But that is not the case, and the common, one-word terms used for family members in some languages are strictly biological and are inappropriate for describing the family of God. The problem is that such translations end up attributing a biological meaning to the fatherhood of God, implying he reproduced the Son, the angels, or even the spirits of people through sexual activity. Mormons misinterpret the terms in this very way, and many Hindus, animists, and Muslims do as well. Some Hindu background believers attend church for years and study the Bible, firm in their belief that God

produced his Son through procreation with a goddess. This demonstrates the seriousness of the problem, because *the original-language terms did not imply divine procreation, and this is contrary to the original meaning of the text*. In many (but not all) language communities that are predominantly Muslim, people regard the phrase "children of God" to be an insult to God that incurs misfortune and damnation, because it implies that God is a physical being who engages in sexual activity to beget biological offspring, like the gods of paganism.[14] They view this as proof that translators have corrupted the Bible. These misunderstandings disappear, however, when translators express the divine familial relationships in ways that do not imply sexual activity on the part of God. Readers and listeners can then focus on the message without being preoccupied with the fear of attributing carnality to God, and when they do, they recognize that the deity and mission of Christ is evident throughout the Gospels. This highlights the fact that translators are not trying to remove original meanings from the translation that might offend the audience. On the contrary, their concern is to avoid incorrect meanings that fail to communicate the informational content, feelings, and attitudes of the original inspired text.

3. Some Responses

The question then arises how the biblical expressions of divine fatherhood and sonship can be translated in languages where the commonly used kinship terms are procreative in meaning without implying sexual activity by God. In an article published in 2007,[15] Rick Brown described four different approaches that had been used in a number of translations and paraphrases in languages where appropriate social familial terms were not readily available. The four approaches he observed are the following: (1) Functional equivalents for the traditional interpretations of "Son of God," such as "God's Christ/Messiah" for economic sonship, "Word of God" for ontological sonship, and "God's beloved people" for adopted

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sonship, with a "literal translation of the original-language term … presented and explained in a footnote, the glossary and the introduction"; (2) A simile, such as "like offspring to God," which highlights the analogy with human familial relationships; (3) A sonship phrase worded differently from phrases that imply sexual activity by God, along the lines of "the Offspring from God"; (4) A phrase imported from the Greek New Testament, such as *Huios Theou* (which means "Son of God"), with an explanation of its meaning in the paratext. In that article Rick did not recommend any particular expression, but he noted that misunderstanding and fear had been overcome by using different wordings in the text, and he urged translators to always provide word-for-word translations of the Greek in the paratext, and an explanation of their components of meaning.[16]

Since that time many churches, missions, and translators have investigated various approaches, while Bible scholars like Profs. Vern Poythress, Roy Ciampa, and Scott Horrell have given constructive feedback.[17] There have also been recent multi-agency consultations, such as the 2011 consultation at Houghton College. These have helped to clarify the issues and address misunderstandings. After many years of testing and reviewing feedback, it is now possible to recommend certain approaches and not others, and to present several wordings that have been successful in different languages.

In what follows we make the case that when translating these terms, priority should be given to wordings that express the familial components of meaning in the text, while supplying the other components in the paratext. More specifically, the divine sonship of Jesus should be expressed in the text using approach (3) above, namely social filial expressions that do not demand a biological meaning involving sexual activity by God, yet still allow for the filiation derived from the Son's eternal generation and incarnation. We recommend a similar approach (3) or a simile (2) above for describing believers who are adopted as sons to God. Following that we discuss English back-translations of expressions translators have used in some languages to express divine sonship while avoiding the implication of divine sexual activity, and the process by which such decisions are made. We note as well the need to define these expressions in the paratext, the nature of which is discussed in a sidebar. Finally we discuss some current misconceptions about the translation of familial terms.

4. The Meanings of Divine Familial Terms

Analyses of biblical expressions of divine sonship can be found in Bible dictionaries and Bible encyclopedias, as well as in academic books and articles. The terms are used in reference to entities of the following categories: (1) people created by God, especially Adam; (2) God's old covenant community as a whole; (3) members of God's old covenant community individually; (4) men of God, i.e., godly, righteous people within his community; (5) members of God's heavenly court, i.e., angelic beings; (6) rulers, especially leaders of God's people; (7) the king anointed by God to rule and guide his people; (8) Jesus Christ; (9) members of the Kingdom of God, i.e., the new covenant community, the family of God. In this article we will consider references to Jesus and members of his kingdom.

The Son of God

In theological usage the term *Son of God* is used primarily to designate the eternal Son in the "immanent" or "ontological Trinity." But theologians have traditionally recognized that the Bible primarily presents an "economic" Trinity in which the role of divine sonship is functional as well as ontological, meaning it often signifies the Messianic mission of the Son.[18] Just as the "firstborn son" of a Jewish noble managed his father's household of family and servants,[19] the Christ, as God's "firstborn" Son, is Lord and Savior over his Father's household (Heb. 3:6; Rom. 8:29) and over all mankind (Ps. 89:27; Col. 1:18), as well as being the firstborn of creation (Col. 1:15). He is both the creator of all things (Col. 1:16) and the King over God's people (John 1:49). So the traditional understanding from the earliest church fathers is that in the Bible the phrase *Son of God* refers to Christ, sometimes in respect to his eternal sonship and sometimes in respect to his mediatorial sonship as the Messiah. Calvin wrote, "For ever since Christ was manifested in the flesh he is called the Son of God, not only because begotten of the Father before all worlds he was the Eternal Word, but because he undertook the person and office of the Mediator that he might unite us to God." (*Institutes*, 1.13.24) Calvin himself used *Son* with both meanings, sometimes clarifying whether he meant it in the eternal sense or the mediatorial sense. Later theologians emphasized this point as well. Charles Hodge, the great 19th century theologian, wrote, "The term Son, as used in the Scriptures, . . . may refer or be applied to the Logos, or to the Theanthropos . . . and preeminently, the Messiah may be so designated."[20] In all these cases the term designates the same divine Person, but in respect to different aspects of his being or mission. This subtle distinction goes back to the church fathers themselves. Augustine said all of the catholic interpreters before him had made this distinction, and he regarded it as the "canonical rule" of biblical interpreta-

tion and a necessary guard against heresy (The Trinity, 2.1.2).[21]

In general Bible scholars continue to support these two components of meaning of divine sonship, but they note that the Bible also invests other meanings than these into the concept associated with *Son of God* and *Christ*. So for a mini-article in the paratext to explain the biblical concept more fully, it would need to cover as many as possible of the following aspects of meaning, including at a minimum the first three, and footnotes should explain the first three as well:

Familial/Relational/Beloved

As the Son, Jesus is close to God the Father and loved as his Son.

Ontological/Metaphysical/Essential

As the eternal Son he is consubstantial with the Father (i.e., of the same individual essence and nature) and eternally generated from the Father in a non-procreative way, as light from light (Heb. 1:3).

Mediatorial/Messianic/ Economic/Missional

As the Son of God he is sent by the Father to mediate God's rule, grace, and salvation to his people, to impart sonship to them, and to be their Lord, Savior, and Advocate.[22]

Incarnational/Natal

As the incarnate Son he is born of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, and is both fully God and fully human, i.e., with a human soul, including mind, will, and action.

Revelational/Iconic

As the incarnate Word of God he is the visible image of God; he makes God known to people and reveals the mysteries and ways of God's Kingdom.

Instrumental/Agentive

As the eternal Word of God he is the divine mediator of God's creation of the world, and through the Holy Spirit he is the mediator of God's continuing work in the world and communication to it.

Ethical

As the incarnate Son of God he is the true man of God, the "Righteous One," the "Holy One of God."

Representational/Covenantal/ Substitutionary

As the incarnate Son of God he represents the descendants of Adam and Israel, who were also called God's son, but he is perfectly righteous and faithful where those sons were not, and he shares his righteousness with those who believe in him and dies in their place for their sins. As the incarnate Son of God he is also the Son of David and is the fulfillment of the covenantal promises made to David.

Thus divine sonship is a single concept with many components of meaning. Certain contexts focus on particular components of the concept, but this does not exclude the others, because it is the nature of language that terms evoke the whole concept associated with them in the mind of the reader. The problem is that there is no simple word or phrase in any target language that evokes all these aspects of meaning to anyone who is unfamiliar with biblical theology, especially in people groups outside the Judeo-Christian heritage. Any expression chosen from their language for use in the text will encode at best one or two of these aspects of Christ's divine sonship. It is essential to provide readers with an explanation of the biblical concept through the paratext and to let them see how different contexts contribute to this meaning or bring out different aspects of meaning. In these ways the term accrues a full range of meaning, so that eventually it evokes all of these aspects of meaning for experienced readers.

In audio recordings of Scripture for people groups with little knowledge of the Bible, the term is often explained briefly in the introductions to audio portions. They explain, for example, that the phrase "Son/Offspring of God"

does not mean God's procreated offspring but means that Jesus is the eternal Word of God, who is of God's very essence (ontological and revelational), who entered the womb of Mary (incarnational), was born as the Messiah (mediatorial), and relates eternally to God as Son to his Father (familial). An explanation of the Trinity does not normally appear in the explanation of the term "Son of God" because the Trinity requires a mini-article of its own, presented with a humble sense of mystery towards the one God existing eternally as three Persons.

Sons of God

Believers in the Son of God receive "the Spirit of his Son" (Gal. 4:6) and are born again into God's Kingdom (John 1:12–13; 3:2–7) as God's sons. Their divine sonship, however, does not include all the aspects that pertain to Christ; their sonship is limited to an adoptive filial relationship to God the Father and an increased ethical likeness to the Son. This too needs to be explained in the paratext.

Father

In the ancient world, family units could be quite large, including not only one's children but also their spouses and the grandchildren, along with other relatives and slaves that lived within the family. Everyone was under the care and authority of one father, who was the paterfamilias or patriarch of the family. He was usually father, grandfather, or father-in-law to most of the family members, and they were expected to honor and obey him. It is usually in this sense that God is described as the Father of his people, but he also "fathers" them by adopting them into his family.

5. The Essential Role of the Paratext

The primary goal of translation is to enable modern-day readers to understand what the biblical authors would have communicated to their envisaged audiences in the original languages

Translators provide much of this information in the paratext, which consists of the introductions, notes, glossary, and mini-articles

and contexts via their texts. Since modern-day readers lack a knowledge of the original languages and contexts, they do not know the original meanings of some of the words and phrases, nor the concepts they evoked in their original contexts. Translators provide much of this information in the paratext, which consists of the introductions, notes, glossary, and mini-articles that the translators produce to accompany the text as an essential part of the translation. The paratext is needed to explain biblical concepts that are unknown or unclear to modern-day readers, especially ones outside the Judeo-Christian heritage. These include concepts of the Christ/Messiah, of the Holy Spirit, of the Kingdom of God, and so on.

The paratext does not need to explain everything, because the Scripture text itself will fill out the concepts. But the paratext needs to provide the foundational concepts so the biblical text can fully develop them. For this to work, however, the terms used for those concepts need to be translated in ways that avoid wrong meaning. For example, if a phrase of the form "Holy Spirit" already exists in the language as the name of a particular angel, then the translated Scriptures will be building on an erroneous foundation and will fail to develop in the minds of readers a biblical concept of the Holy Spirit. So translators form an expression that is free of unbiblical meaning, such as "the Spirit of God" or "God's Holy Spirit," and then explain its biblical meaning in the paratext, along with a word-for-word translation of the original phrase.

One might think translators could put a term with wrong meaning in the text and then try to erase that meaning in the paratext, but this generally fails for two reasons: (1) If the word is

familiar and its wrong meaning fits the context, then that is the meaning that comes to mind when people read the text, because it is entrenched in their minds. It works much better to create a new expression and define its biblical meaning in the paratext. (2) A second reason is that readers and listeners revere the text more highly than the paratext, making it difficult for the paratext to overrule any wrong meaning in the text, although it can add meaning to it. If the two are in conflict, readers become distrustful of the translation.

Translators base their explanations on what conservative Bible scholars and lexicographers have said the terms mean. They then test their explanations with the audience, along with draft translations of Scripture passages, to see what is understood. They revise the wordings in both the text and paratext until they find a combination that communicates the original meaning accurately.

For audio Scriptures the paratext consists of succinct introductions to short portions of audio text, enough to provide the conceptual and background information the audience needs in order to understand that portion. Listeners hear the introduction each time they listen to the audio portion.

Since God communicated his word in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, the text of Scripture in these languages is the only truly authoritative text. The task of translators is to enable readers to understand the message that God communicated via this authoritative original-language text. Ultimately it is not just ink on paper that is authoritative but the message of God that it conveys, and to communicate that message in another language requires both text and paratext.

6. Advantages of Expressing the Familial Component of Meaning in the Text

Given the fact that no term in a target language can encode all of these components of meaning, and that most will need to be explained in the paratext, which aspect of meaning should be expressed directly in the text? There are a number of reasons why it is preferable for the familial aspect to receive priority for encoding in the text, rather than the ontological or mediatorial aspects.

First of all, since the fourth century familial terms like *Father* and *Son* have been the names commonly used for the first and second Persons in discussions of the Trinity, following the baptismal formula in Matthew and the usage in John, and there are advantages to maintaining this tradition of familial usage.[23]

Secondly, the Father-Son relationship is the basis for the divine sonship of believers. The social sonship that Christ has by nature is offered by grace to believers (Rom. 8:15–17; Gal. 4:4–7; John 8:35–36).

Thirdly, the Bible describes relationships within the Kingdom of God in familial terms all through the Bible. They are used to describe not only relations within the Trinity, but the relationship of believers to God as their loving father and to one another as brothers and sisters in "the household of God" (1 Tim. 3:15), and "brothers" to Christ (Matt. 12:50; 25:40; 28:10; Heb. 2:11) and "fellow heirs" (Rom. 8:17) with him who is "the first-born among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29) and is "faithful over God's house as a son" (Heb. 3:6). "And we are his house" (Heb. 3:6), for the "Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). So there is a need to communicate the loving familial nature of the Kingdom of God and the Persons of the Trinity as a component of the Good News.

This can be achieved most directly if familial expressions are used in the text itself and not just the paratext.

Fourthly, it has been traditional to use filial terms to translate *ben/huios*, even in contexts where the mediatorial component of meaning is focal, and this provides consistency among different translations.

Fifthly, since the second century the use of *Son* as a name of the eternal Second Person has been explained as signifying God's Word and Wisdom in respect to his generation before time.[24]

Sixthly, many people consider the loving filial relationship between Jesus the Son and God the Father to be the most important aspect of divine sonship.[25]

> *No term in a target language can encode all of these components of meaning . . . most will need to be explained in the paratext*

For these various reasons we believe the familial aspect of the unique divine sonship of Christ, and the adoptive divine sonship of believers, should be expressed directly in the text if at all possible, with wordings that signify paternal and filial relationships that are social but not necessarily procreative. Other components of meaning in section 4 should then be explained in the paratext, particularly the deity of the Son and his mediatorial mission.

7. The Meanings of Familial Terms in Other Languages

Languages assign meaning in different ways, with the result that words and phrases in one language do not exactly correspond in meaning to their closest equivalent in other languages, or they differ in frequency of usage. As mentioned previously, in some languages the relational nouns commonly used for family members are procreative in meaning, with the result that the term normally used for a son means "biological son" or "offspring." The term is not used for a foster son, adopted son, stepson, created son, inherited son, levirate son, son-in-law, disciple, deputy, or any other son-like relationship, but only for one's own biological offspring. One should not be confused by the fact that words can be used quite differently in fixed idioms (e.g. *a son of a gun*, *a son of the Nile*) and are often broader in meaning when used as terms of address than when used to make an assertion (e.g. *Honey!*). In Arabic and in Central Asian languages such as Uzbek, Kazakh, and Turkmen, the words commonly used for a son usually signify a direct biological relationship, an offspring. In those languages one can address the sons of a close friend socially as "my offspring" but only when directly addressing them, not when referring to them. If a naïve foreigner kindly mentions to someone that a particular boy is "his offspring," using the common term for "son," he unwittingly implies that he impregnated the boy's mother, to the horror of those listening. Similarly one can address an older person respectfully as "my procreator" even if he is a stranger or has no paternal relationship, but if one says "that man is my procreator" to a third party the meaning is usually biological. If translators of the Bible in these languages use the common terms for family members rather than expressions equivalent in meaning to the Hebrew and Greek terms, they end up with translations in which the range of filial relationships are reduced to procreated offspring. Worse yet, the divine relations are distorted.

In some polytheistic cultures, when people read a phrase in Genesis or Job that means to them "God's biological sons," it implies to them a claim that God procreates offspring, either humans

from a woman or gods from a goddess. They interpret the sonship of Jesus in the same way. Many Muslims make the same interpretation, but unlike polytheists they reject this possibility as abhorrent and conclude that the text of the Bible has been corrupted. For neither group does it communicate the biblical meanings of divine fatherhood and sonship. If a translation presents Jesus as God's son from procreation, then this precludes his being consubstantial and co-eternal with the Father, thereby contravening the Nicene and Athanasian creeds. Some Muslim language communities have a word for social son that could be interpreted non-biologically, but people have been warned since childhood by their families and religious teachers that when that word occurs in the phrase "son of God" it implies that God engages in sex to produce children, and hence the phrase is an insult to God. They consider this phrase so insulting to God that they will go to hell if they utter it, regardless of what they mean by it. The result is that some readers are so fearful of this phrase that once they encounter it in a translation they quit reading, beg forgiveness from God, and throw the book away or destroy it in fear of God.

Translators increasingly use the paratext to explain the original terms and concepts of the Bible, usually following the examples one finds in study Bibles. This is vital for explaining the rich concepts intended by various biblical terms, especially those of divine fatherhood and sonship. Some translations now have mini-articles at the beginning that explain the biblical usage of divine familial terms, as well as terms for other key biblical concepts.[26] A Christian teacher, if available, could explain the terms as well. In printed Scriptures key terms are also explained in the marginal notes, and it would be good if these key term notes were repeated as often as necessary.

For many readers and hearers, however, while an explanation of kinship terms dispels the misunderstandings, it fails to

*I*n Central Asian languages such as Uzbek, Kazakh, and Turkmen, the words commonly used for a son usually signify a direct biological relationship

nullify the indecent meanings evoked by using procreative kinship terms for God, and it fails to dispel the fear of offending God with such thoughts. Even those who understand the term from the paratext or from Christian teaching are often hesitant to utter the term when reading aloud from Scripture. So it is essential to use more accurate expressions that describe the divine paternal and filial relationships without attributing carnality to God. Those expressions can then be defined in the paratext to include additional components of meaning listed in section 4. It is this definition that will initially be communicated by whatever expression is used in the text, as long as the expression does not already have another meaning that fits the same contexts. The biblical concept can then be enriched by the whole body of Scripture itself. But if translators use an expression that already has a different meaning, then the wrong meaning will continue to come to mind when people read the translation. So translators need to avoid expressions that evoke the wrong meaning in the contexts concerned.

8. Some Possible Expressions for the Concepts of Father and Son of God

In languages where, as in Greek and Hebrew, expressions of the form "heavenly Father," "sons of God," and "Son of God" are understood as signifying social relationships that are not necessarily biological in origin, such expressions are to be preferred in translation, although comprehension testing is still needed to ensure accuracy and clarity of understanding. For example, the Kresh language of Africa has a word *kopo* for biological child and a word *liti* for social child, with the social usage being similar in breadth to that of Greek *huios* "son." (Like many African languages, Kresh does not have separate words

for son and daughter.) The Catholic Church is the only church among the Kresh, and it decided long ago to use the social sonship term *liti* to speak of Jesus as the Son of God, rather than use the biological term *kopo*. That of course makes it easier to speak of believers in Jesus becoming sons of God as well, since adoption never makes one someone's "biological son." In addition, the Kresh people traditionally shared the common African belief that God has a wife, so if the biological term *kopo* had been used to translate "Son of God," it would have left no doubt in their mind that God procreates. Using the word *liti* made it possible to deny this meaning.

The Kresh language had words for both kinds of sonship relation, and the term for social son was the one commonly used, but in some languages the commonly used familial terms are biological, with meanings like *procreator* and *offspring* in English, *and in some languages there are no single-word social familial terms at all*. If comprehension testing shows that using biological terms for the divine relations evokes the wrong meanings, then most languages afford other ways to express these relations without implying procreation. These are discussed in what follows.

Sons of God

The most common way for such languages to express non-biological familial relations is to use the equivalent of "to" or "like." For example, a boy is described as one's non-biological social son by saying "he is (like) an offspring to me," and the boy can say the man is "like a procreator to me," meaning the man is his social father. Similar constructions are found in Hebrew as well; a literal translation of Deuteronomy 14:1 is "you [are] sons to the Lord your God." Additional wordings are found in the ancient Jewish

translations of this verse into Aramaic: "you are (like) (beloved) sons before the Lord your God" and "you are loved ones before the Lord your God." The use of words such as "like" block the biological meaning, while words for "loved one" bring out the ongoing quality of the familial relationship. Similar translations can be found today, where expressions of the form "God's loved ones" imply a familial relationship and communicate the original meaning better than "God's offspring" does, and somewhat better than "like offspring to God."

In some of these languages people refer to their children with phrases of the form "my family," "my household," and "members of my family." Expressions like these are non-biological in most languages because a family or household can include children-in-law, stepchildren, and adopted children as well as biological children. Such constructions are found in New Testament Greek as well for the adopted sons of God: "the household of God" (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 4:17) and "members of God's household" (Eph. 2:19). So translations in some of these languages express the sonship of believers non-biologically by describing them as "the family of God" rather than as "God's offspring."[27]

Father

The ancient Jewish translations of the Old Testament (Targums) expressed divine fatherhood in a similar way to divine sonship, by using an analogy: "He will be beloved before me like a son, and I will have compassion on him like a father" (1 Chron. 22:10). In this way they blocked misinterpretations of divine fatherhood and sonship and focused on the relational aspect of meaning. In passages where the Hebrew text has the form, "you are our Father" (Isa. 63:16; 64:8), the Aramaic translation says "you are the One whose compassion upon us is greater than a father upon sons." This avoids any thought of procreation and expresses the paternal compassion intended by the original term. This mean-

ing is declared by God himself in Psalm 103:13: "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him." The Hebrew and Aramaic word for compassion is derived from the word for womb, indicating its origin in parental love. The Jews began using *Rahmana* "the Compassionate One" as a name for God, and some of the pre-Islamic Christians in Arabia used this as their name for God the Father, as seen in ancient rock inscriptions.[28] Muslims use the term as well, in its Arabic form, *ar-Rahman*.

While God's paternal compassion is part of his fatherhood, so is his paternal guidance and authority, because he is paterfamilias to the whole family of God; this means he is the one who cares for

In both cases the Son is generated, but in neither case is procreation involved
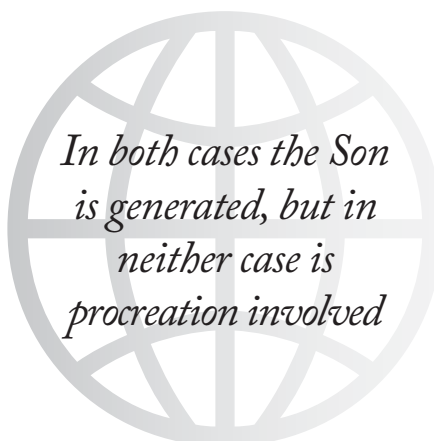
and guides the family and has authority over it. The term *paterfamilias* is rarely used in English because it does not fit individualized Western cultures, but equivalent words are more commonly used in cultures where extended families form the basic social units, along with social familial terms equivalent in meaning to *family, loved ones, household,* and *dependents*. For example, Classical Arabic had two terms for paterfamilias, namely *rabb* and *walĩ*. The first is from a verb that means to cherish children and raise them well, but the noun highlights the patriarch's authority. The second noun, *walĩ*, depending on context, means to have a close relationship to someone or to have paternal oversight over a family.[29] In many cultures the paterfamilias is
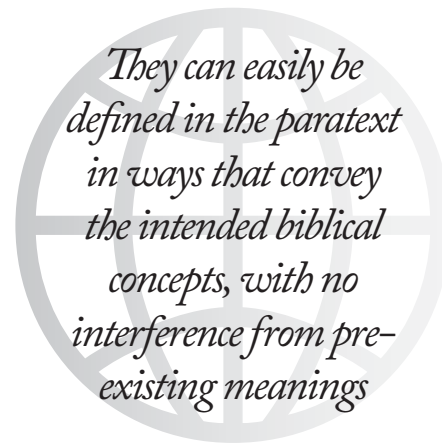
over an extended family that includes his children-in-law and the like, so his relationship to family members does not have to be biological but signifies a fatherly role of care and authority. For this reason some translations have used it to express the fatherhood of God towards his people, regarding it as closer to the biblical meaning than a word that means procreator. At the same time, terms for paterfamilias are nicely compatible with generation, including non-biological generation, such as God generating his people (Deut. 32:6; Mal. 2:10) or eternally generating his Wisdom and Messiah (Prov. 8:25: Mic. 5:2). The intended components of paternal meaning can be reinforced in the paratext.

It should be remembered that while these examples use English terms, this is simply to facilitate the discussion of other languages. There is no need in English to use a term like *Paterfamilias* for God, because English has the broad word *Father*, and it works nicely. In some languages, however, there is not a suitable equivalent to English *father* and the choice is between a biological word meaning procreator and a social word meaning the paternal head of the family (the patriarch or paterfamilias). In that case the social term is closer in meaning to the original Greek and Hebrew terms than a word meaning procreator, and it is a more accurate description of God's paternal role. In the Baatanum language of Benin, for example, there is a word for biological father, a casual word for dad, and a word for the patriarch of a family. In considering which term to use to express the fatherhood of God, the Catholic and Protestant churches rejected the biological term outright. After trying the other two terms for a while, they all agreed to use the word for a patriarchal father (paterfamilias). The Indonesian language has the word *ayah* for biological father and *bapak* for social father. Indonesian Christians use *Bapa*, a special form of *bapak*, for God as their spiritual Father. They do not call God their *ayah* (biological father).

The Son of God

While the divine sonship of believers can be expressed as being "like offspring to God," rather than as "God's offspring," most translators and their sponsoring churches and societies have regarded such phrases as insufficient for the unique Father-Son relation, because the Father generates the Son non-biologically in eternity and generates his human nature by the virgin Mary. In both cases the Son is generated, but in neither case is procreation involved. Since these forms of generation are unique in history, most languages lack terms for them, and translators have to investigate different expressions in the language to find suitable ones, then define them carefully. They have found that in some languages a preposition like *from* works fine, as in "the Son from God." This expression signifies a relationship that is filial ("Son") and not necessarily biological, yet it is compatible with eternal generation <u>from</u> the essence of God and with being sent <u>from</u> God to be born from a virgin by power from God. A variation on this is an expression of the form "the Son who comes from God" or "the honored Son who comes from God," where the verb for "come from" means "originates from." The fuller meaning developed in the Bible can then be explained in the paratext, describing the components of meaning described in section 4.

In languages where the commonly used terms for a father and son are procreative in meaning, equivalent to *procreator* and *offspring*, there are often socially focused terms as well for a loving father who nurtures his children and for the children who receive loving paternal care. In other words, speakers of the language can distinguish between a merely biological father and a nurturing father, and between a merely biological son and a son who is cared for as a loved one. As mentioned above, in many such languages people have found it acceptable and appropriate to refer to God using the term for a

They can easily be defined in the paratext in ways that convey the intended biblical concepts, with no interference from pre-existing meanings

loving, nurturing father, and they have also found it appropriate to refer to the Son using the term for a son who is nurtured as a loved one. Some of the translations in such languages express the divine sonship of Christ in terms of being "God's Loved One" or "God's Unique Loved One" rather than as "God's Offspring." Such terms clearly signify to readers that the paternal and filial relationship is about familial love in the present rather than procreation in the past. The filial meaning can be reinforced in the paratext as well, along with the other components of meaning listed in section 4.

In some languages translators have succeeded in suppressing the procreative meaning of a phrase like "God's Offspring" by adding a phrase like "(God's Loved-One)" in parentheses after it, or by using a phrase like "God's Spiritual Offspring," where the word for "spiritual" means non-physical rather than metaphorical. Unfortunately, there are very few languages that have a term like *spiritual* that can be used in this way.

In many cultures there is a unique social relationship between an only son and his parents, with a special term for an only son. Since the term focuses on the close relationship rather than on its origin in procreation, the term is often regarded as social rather than strictly biological in meaning. Greek has two such terms that it uses for an only son, and the New Testament uses

both of them for Jesus as God's only son. One has the form God's "One-of-a-kind" (John 1:14), meaning his one and only Son, and the other has the form "the Loved one" (Eph. 1:6) or God's "Loved one" (Matt. 12:18), again meaning his special Son. (This latter title often appears in the early Christian literature.) Similar terms for an only son are found in many other languages. These have been used in translations to express Jesus' divine sonship in languages where the only alternative means "God's Offspring," thereby avoiding the wrong meaning of a sexually procreated child. In language communities where people have refused to use a translation that spoke of "God's Offspring," people have been receptive when this was reworded to speak of "God's One-and-only," even though in their language the term "one-and-only" always means an only son.

In many cultures there is a special role for the firstborn son as well. As mentioned earlier, the firstborn son in a wealthy Hebrew family was the ruling heir and would manage both the family and estate on the father's behalf. The Bible describes King David as God's firstborn among the kings of the earth, and it describes Christ as God's Firstborn, in several capacities, and as God's "Heir" (Heb. 1:2), meaning the one in charge of "all things." Many other languages have a word for firstborn / ruling-heir as well. This is not the usual word for an heir but names the ruling heir who rules on behalf of someone, usually the firstborn son on behalf of his father, especially if his father is the king, yet it does not require a biological relation. The verbal form is used for giving birth to one's likely heir/ successor, but also for appointing an heir/successor, so it does not imply a biological relationship. In some of the languages that lack a non-biological word for "son," it has nevertheless been possible to use expressions meaning "God's Firstborn" and "God's Ruling-heir" to describe the unique filial relationship of Christ, without implying
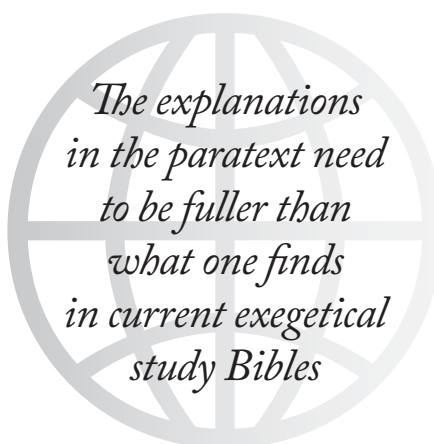
biological procreation. This also fits the Bible's description of believers as Christ's "co-heirs."

A language in Asia has multiple words used in reference to sons. The common term means an offspring, regardless of gender, but a less common term is masculine and signifies a son of the king. Parents sometimes use it to refer to their own son with great respect and affection. Used as an absolute noun it signifies one in authority. Thus it has high social content. Some non-Christians prefer this term to the traditional translation not only because it is gender specific, but also because it presents the Father-Son relationship with more depth. While the term is still new to many in the Christian community, the sense is that most are comfortable with it although some will continue to prefer that which is familiar.

Most of the phrases mentioned above are innovations in the languages concerned, with no prior meaning. As a result they can easily be defined in the paratext in ways that convey the intended biblical concepts, with no interference from pre-existing meanings. In this way translators can use expressions that are as equivalent in meaning as possible to the Greek and Hebrew expressions, while avoiding the procreative meaning of "God's offspring." Yet regardless of which wording is used in the text, the phrase used needs to be adequately defined in the paratext, both in order to convey its original lexical meaning and to allow it to accrue the deeper meanings the biblical authors invest in it. These fuller components of meaning pertain to the biblical teaching about the Son, and they can also be summarized in an introductory mini-article.

The explanations in the paratext need to be fuller than what one finds in current exegetical study Bibles, which are nevertheless a step in the right direction. In Ephesians 1:6, the NLT translates a Greek phrase of the form "the Beloved" as "his dear

Son," then puts "the Beloved" in the notes as the "Greek." This is because many English speakers would not realize that the Greek expression behind "the Beloved" often signifies an only son in Greek. Similarly in Hebrews 11:17 most English translations translate the Greek term *ho monogenês* "the one-and-only" as "his only son," since English speakers would not otherwise recognize that in Greek this meant one's only son, and similarly at John 1:14. In more literal translations the reverse is done, putting a word-for-word translation of Greek phrases in the text and then clarifying the meaning in the notes. At Matthew 3:17, for example, where the English text has "This is my beloved Son,"

The explanations in the paratext need to be fuller than what one finds in current exegetical study Bibles

the notes in conservative study Bibles explain this statement as announcing, by allusion to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, that Jesus is the Messiah. (See Reformation Study Bible, NIV Study Bible, UBS Holy Gospel, NLT Study Bible, NET Bible, HCSB Study Bible, and ESV Study Bible.) This accords with the functional aspect of divine sonship in the economic Trinity, which highlights the divine Son's Messianic mission as the Mediator/Redeemer.[30] But these study Bibles could have had a mini-article explaining more fully how Matthew and the New Testament go on to develop the concept of divine sonship.

To avoid using procreative kinship terms for divine relations, producers of an audio Bible drama in the 1990s used expressions like "the Christ sent from God" in their story of Jesus. This was mentioned in the October 2007 EMQ article, along with other approaches to solving the linguistic problem mentioned in section 1. On the other hand, although most Bible scholars agree there is often a Messianic meaning to expressions of divine sonship and that the Bible presents the Messiah as divine, there are other components of meaning as well, as listed in section 4. We now believe it is ideal to express the familial component of meaning in the text, for the reasons stated in section 6 above, and that terms like "Christ/Messiah" should be used only to translate *Christos/Meshiach* and should not be used to translate *huios/ben*. We would discourage anyone from doing this.[31]

9. Deciding Which Expressions to Use

In virtually all translation projects, decisions on the translation of key biblical terms have five stages.

1. The translation team, which consists of local translators and outside advisors, study the meanings of biblical terms by consulting Bible dictionaries and commentaries and by analyzing its usage in the biblical text.

2. The team considers the possible expressions they could use for the meaning of that key term in their own language, based on their study of its meanings in the original language and context, and with consideration of wordings used in similar languages. For example, if a language lacks a non-biological word for "Son" or a non-biological expression for "Son of God," it might nevertheless have filial words that can be used in phrases

like "God's Offspring," "God's Ruling-Heir," "God's One-and-Only," and "God's Unique Loved-One." The translators select such phrases as candidates for comprehension testing, with the understanding that in most cases the biblical meanings of the terms will still need to be explained in the paratext. For that purpose they prepare one or more appropriate explanations for the paratext.

3. The translators then prepare alternative translations of particular Scripture passages using the candidate phrases, and test them extensively with native speakers of the language to find out what the people understand these phrases to mean in context and how this differs according to each candidate wording. They also test explanations of those terms for use in the paratext. In addition they talk with people about the theological implications of the passages in which those terms occur in order to discover which wordings best communicate biblical theology. In this way it becomes evident which of the candidate expressions best communicate the biblical meaning that was communicated in the original languages.

4. The local translators present their findings to well-informed believers and church leaders in the target language community, usually as an editorial committee, and they decide which wordings to use in the text and paratext from among those which were found to be adequately communicative. A guiding principle for selecting key terms is to choose the wording that communicates the intended meaning and is as similar as

*T*he local translators present their findings to well–informed believers and church leaders in the target language community

possible in form to the original language expression. Another principle is that the choice of key terms should never be made by outsiders (and rarely has been), but that it should meet with approval by an outside translation consultant who has not been a member of the translation team.

5. Testing of the text (and paratext) goes on continually, for the life of the translation project, and feedback is also received from trial editions and from the first portions that have been published. During this time problems sometimes emerge or better wordings are found, leading to a revision of the key term in subsequent editions of the translation. In some cases the intractability of a wrong meaning has not been evident until Scripture portions using procreative terms had been in circulation for a long time and were finally abandoned by all parties as misleading and indecent.

10. Clarifying Some Misperceptions

There have been a number of misperceptions about the translation of divine familial expressions, especially in languages spoken by Muslims. The explanation above clearly states that this is a linguistic issue in which translators seek to communicate the social familial meanings of the Greek and Hebrew expressions while avoiding the wrong meaning that God reproduces children through procreation. This is required for accuracy in translation.

Some languages, however, have a full set of terms for biological kinship relations but lack a full set of terms for social familial relationships, just terms for loved ones, family, head of family, and firstborn or heir. In a few cases producers of Bible stories for such languages sought to avoid the unbiblical biological meanings by expressing the mediatorial component of Christ's sonship in the body of the story and then explaining the other components of divine sonship in the introductions to the stories, where they could explain the non-biological nature of divine sonship. At that time we regarded the divine and mediatorial components of meaning to be more important than the familial-relational component. Since then, however, things have changed. We (the authors) now believe that the familial-relational component underlies the other components of Christ's sonship and is the most important one to express in the text, as also for God's fatherhood and the adopted sonship of believers. In addition, storiers and translators working in biological kinship languages have found ways to express divine familial relationships within the body of the story or text without ascribing procreative activity. Nevertheless, the few instances in which mediatorial expressions were used has spawned misperceptions that have now grown to extraordinary and unwarranted proportions and need to be corrected. The facts are these: Contrary to what some people imagine, the use in translation of non-biological expressions for Father and Son

- is not imposed by outsiders but is decided by believers in the language community;
- is not limited to languages spoken by Muslims but is a challenge for any language in which the normal kinship terms are biological in meaning and imply procreation;

- is not intended to lead audiences into any particular form of church, whether Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox or "insider";
- does not itself constitute an "insider" translation or even a "Muslim-idiom" translation;
- is not contrary to normal translation principles but seeks to follow them by using phrases to translate the meaning of Greek and Hebrew terms that lack a semantic counterpart in the target language and by explaining the meaning of the terms in the paratext;
- is not limited to "dynamic" translations of the biblical text but is used in more "literal" ones as well;
- is not intended to change or obscure the theological content of Scripture or make it more palatable to the audience but seeks rather to convey it as accurately as possible;
- does not hinder the audience's perception of Jesus' deity but rather seeks to facilitate it;
- does not stem from liberal or unorthodox theology on the part of translators or from a liberal view of Scripture but from interaction with the interpretive and theological tradition of historic Christianity and the results of conservative biblical scholarship, with the goal of communicating the verbally inspired message of the Bible as fully and accurately as possible.

Various Bible agencies are seeking to explain translation principles and dispel misperceptions. Wycliffe Bible Translators (USA), for example, includes the following point in its statement of basic translation standards:

> In particular regard to the translation of the familial titles of God we affirm fidelity in Scripture translation using terms that accurately express the familial relationship by which God has chosen to describe Himself as Father in relationship to the Son in the original languages.[32]

The choice of key terms should never be made by outsiders (and rarely has been)
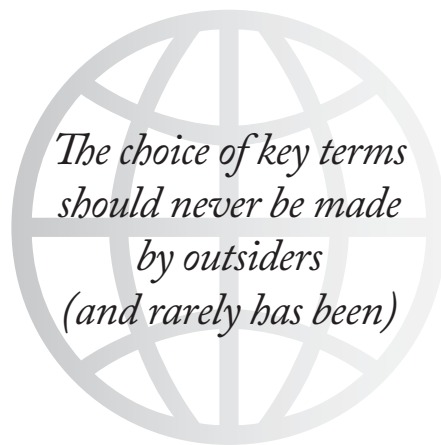
The same policy was unanimously approved at a conference representing concerned missions and churches held at Houghton College in June 2011. This policy stresses accurate expression of the familial relationships that were expressed in the original Greek and Hebrew. It is not accurate to use expressions which mean Jesus' sonship consists of being the offspring of God's procreation with a woman, thereby reducing Jesus to a mere human and God the Father to a demigod.

11. Conclusion

Whenever we are communicating between languages, we need to be aware that not only are the words and phrases going to be different, but the concepts signified by those words will also be different. The goal of translation is to use wordings in the text and explanations in the paratext that enable the audience to understand the biblical concepts in the way the original author would have expected his original audience to understand them in the original language and context, and without communicating unintended meanings. In order to accurately convey divine fatherhood and sonship, translators need to use expressions that are as equivalent in meaning as possible to the Greek and Hebrew terms for social son (*huios* and *ben*) and social father (*patêr* and *âb*) and to avoid biological expressions of the form *God's Offspring* or *the Procreator*

of our Lord Jesus Christ, because these are understood to signify biological relations generated through a sexual act of procreation. This is a simple matter in many languages because the languages reflect a social kinship system or both social and biological kinship systems, but it is more complicated in languages where kinship relations are mainly biological. It is a precious discovery when translators find the perfect phrase that will achieve this, but in many cases, they have to use a near-equivalent expression, with no wrong meaning, and then use the paratext to fill the term with biblical meaning. In this way translators can enable new audiences to understand the biblical sense in which God is our father and Christ is his son, as well as understand the relationship of Joseph to the boy Jesus.

Ultimately it is comprehension testing that plays the crucial role in the process of translation, because there is no other way to ascertain what a particular wording in the text and paratext actually means in the target language or to discover which wordings communicate most clearly and accurately the meanings of the inspired biblical texts. Testing enables translators working in their own language to discover ambiguities and inadequacies in their draft wordings, so they can revise the wordings and test them again until they find ones with the intended meanings in the contexts concerned. Across the world, this meaning-based approach to first-time translations has been found repeatedly to offer the best success at enabling new audiences to comprehend the biblical message accurately and to respond in faith, as God enables. **IJFM**

Endnotes

2 The ancients did not refer to "DNA" being passed from parents to offspring but rather to part of their own "human essence" dividing off and being passed to the conceived child as "seed." The creeds and councils affirmed that Jesus has a human essence like ours, which he received from Mary alone. They said Jesus has the same divine essence as the Father, not one "like" the essence of the Father and not the result of a reproductive division of God's essence, but the numerically same essence as the Father. They said it is the person of the eternal Son which was generated in eternity, while the one divine essence is unbegotten. Later theologians affirmed this as well, including John Calvin.

3 For a brief description, see the article on kinship in Geoffrey Duncan Mitchell (ed.), *A New Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (2nd ed., 2007), 109–112.

4 Translators could use a term in the text that means "your biological father" and then add a note saying the phrase does not really mean that but rather means "the husband of your mother" (if this is the normal expression for a step father). Unfortunately this often leads readers to doubt the reliability of the translated text or the notes or both. A common response to such strategies is, "If that is what it means, then why doesn't it say that?" This is especially the case when trying to explain to Muslims why a translation says "biological sons of God."

5 It is not uncommon for a word in one language to have, as its closest semantic equivalent in another language, a phrase rather than a single word. For example, to translate the English word *cousin* into Arabic, one has to choose among four different phrases, each distinct in meaning, equivalent to "the son/daughter of my maternal/paternal uncle." Biblical Hebrew is similar.

6 See "A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible" in *The International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28:3 (2011).

7 The Old Testament speaks of God as father of his people Israel, and the New Testament speaks of God as father of his people in Christ. The line of descent in Luke 3 traces back through Adam to God, suggesting that God is father of Adam either by having created him in his image or by having a fatherly relationship to him. Both the image and the relationship were disturbed by the fall.

8 For Christ: *ho huios* "the Son," *ho monogenēs* "the One-and-only," *ho agapētos* "the Loved one," *ho prōtotokos* "the First-born." For believers: *huioi* "sons/children," *tekna* "children.

9 See *Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation*, as agreed upon by the Forum of Bible Agencies International, at www.forum-intl.org/uploadedFiles/about_ifoba/Translation%20Standards.pdf.

10 Ibid.

11 See the editorial 'Battle for the Bible Translation' in *Christianity Today*, September (2011), page 55: "The only criterion for a good translation is this: Does it accurately convey what the authors said and what the original listeners heard?"

12 For example, word-for-word English versions translate Psalm 34:4 as a request to be delivered "from all my fears," and readers commonly understand this to mean deliverance from anxiety, but the meaning of the original Hebrew noun is not the emotion of fear but an object of fear, in this case David's enemies. But English lacks a single word for "object of fear," so English translators used the single word *fear*, even though it signifies a subjective emotion rather than an objective danger. Later English translators simply followed this tradition.

13 As another example, Hebrew has a relational noun (*yeled*) that is equivalent in meaning to English *biological son*, but most English versions translate it with the common English word *son*.

14 Biological descent to a woman is commonly understood as being born from her. She may be called the birth mother as well as the biological mother. Descent from a man is commonly understood as having "seed" from him, and that seed is understood to have been delivered to the mother through sexual activity. So Muslims refer to Jesus as the biological son of Mary, knowing full well that Mary was a virgin, because he descended from her biology. They do not regard Joseph or God as Jesus' biological father, because Jesus is not descended from their human semen. Since God does not have a corporeal body, he does not have semen.

15 Rick Brown, "Why Muslims Are Repelled by the Term 'Son of God'," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 43/4 (2007). See also "Translating the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 22/4 (2005).

16 See also Rick Brown, "Explaining the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 22/3 (2005), 91–96 at http://www.ijfm.org/archives.htm.

17 See Vern Poythress, "Bible Translations for Muslim Readers," at http://www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_

articles/2011Bible.htm OR www.mission-frontiers.org/blog/post/bible-translations-for-muslim-readers. We also owe Prof. Poythress a debt of gratitude for examining an earlier draft of this article and its companion piece, "A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible," and making several helpful suggestions to ensure its clarity and accuracy. Prof. Roy Ciampa of Gordon-Conwell Seminary and Prof. Scott Horrell of Dallas Theological Seminary examined a later draft of the main article and made additional comments and suggestions, which were quite helpful.

18 This distinction dates back to the church fathers. They used the Greek word *oikonomia* and the Latin *oeconomia* to refer to the triune God's mission of salvation in the world, as revealed in Scripture, particularly the sending of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is the source of the term *economic Trinity*. They used *theologia* in both Greek and Latin for their "account or explanation of the divine nature" (Augustine, *City of God*, 8.1). This generally focused on inferences from Scripture about the ontological Trinity, meaning the nature of the triune God in himself apart from his interaction with creation. They concluded that God is a single essential Being Who exists eternally as three hypostatic Persons. The Holy Spirit confirmed these conclusions at the ecumenical church councils, and they are embodied in the creeds and confessions.

19 See for example Gen. 21:5-10; 25:29-34; 37:21-22; 43:33; 48:3-5.

20 See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 474.

21 See Augustine (*The Trinity*, 2.1.2). The church fathers applied this rule of interpretation to all passages that speak of Jesus but especially those that refer to Jesus as "Son," because they said heretical views of Jesus' divine sonship arose from a failure to make this distinction. See Athanasius (*Against the Arians*, 3.26ff.), Gregory of Nazianzus (*Theological Orations 3 and 4, on the Son*), and Marius Victorinus (*Against Arius*). All were writing against semi-Arians and Arians, who interpreted all instances of *ho huios tou theou* to the eternal Second Person, even when it was referring to that Person humbly incarnate "in the form of the servant" in his mission as "Savior" and "Mediator." This led to tritheistic and subordinationist heresies. Against such interpretations Marius Victorinus noted that "it is especially in the flesh that he is called Son" (*Against Arius*, 1.28).

[22] The biblical usage of the term *Christ* to refer to Jesus in his Mediatorial role as the Messiah does not detract from his deity or his position as the Second Person of the Trinity. The title *Christ*, which is Greek for *Messiah*, is the most prominent designation for Jesus in the New Testament. It is also the most unique, given that many people are called "sons of God." Paul uses the term *Christ* in his high Christological statements (e.g. Phil. 2:5–11), and also in his references to the pre-existent Second Person apart from the incarnation (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:4). He uses *Christ* or *Lord* in most of his Trinitarian statements to designate the Second Person (e.g. 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Cor. 12:4–6). He also uses *Christ* in reference to believers dwelling "in Christ" (1 Cor. 1:30) and he dwelling in them (2 Cor. 13:5). Peter uses *Christ* in these same ways. All of these usages invest the component of deity in the meaning of the term *Christ/Messiah* and hence in the Messianic usage of "Son of God" as well. Those who would claim the title *Christ/Messiah* lacks a meaning of deity in the New Testament would remove the deity of Jesus in over 500 passages of the Bible.

[23] Prior to the fourth century, the term *Logos* "Word," also used in John, was the more commonly used term for the eternal second Person, and *Christos* for the incarnate second Person. *Christos* is the most common term for the second Person in most of the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul. Both terms continued to be used throughout church history to name the eternal Second Person, although not as often as terms for Son, but today the usage of *Logos* has declined.

[24] The earliest known example is Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* (160 AD). Athanasius (337 AD) wrote with regard to eternal sonship, that "*Son* is nothing else than what is generated from the Father; and what is generated from the Father is His Word, and Wisdom, and Radiance," for "the Son is the Image and Radiance of the Father." (*Orations Against the Arians*, 1.5.14; 1.6.20). Calvin (1559 AD) wrote that "he is the Son of God, because he is the Word, begotten of the Father before all ages" (*Institutes*, 1.13.23). Since the fourth century this meaning of *Son* has been the basis for distinguishing the First and Second Persons in the one essence of God: the Father and Son are the same divine being, but the Person of the Son is generated from the Person of the Father and is therefore eternally distinct. The doctrine of eternal generation

has been based on the generation of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22–26, and the eternal nature of that generation has been based on Micah 5:2. The unity and co-eternity of God and his Word have been based on John 1:1, as well as passages like John 10:30 ("I and the Father are one"). The manner of generation has been described as emanation, based on Hebrews 1:2–3, where the "Son" mentioned in verse 2 is described in verse 3 as "the radiance of his glory." This was enshrined in the Nicene Creed as "Light from Light." These facts highlight the importance of filial terminology for systematic theology.

[25] The interpretive tradition of the historic Church has located the principal meaning of the Second Person's divine sonship in (1) the ontology of the Trinity, namely the eternal generation of the Son's divine personhood from that of the Father, while remaining one being with the Father (as in the Nicene Creed), and (2) the economy of the Trinity, namely the incarnate Son's subordination and mission as the Christ/Messiah to mediate God's saving kingdom, grace, and truth to humankind. Contemporary Bible scholars find the economic (missional) aspect of Christ's sonship to be focal in many contexts. Modern theologians, on the other hand, are recognizing the importance of familial love as a component of divine fatherhood and sonship, and this is the principal component of divine sonship that Christ imparts to believers.

[26] Examples of mini-articles are "Why is Jesus called the Messiah?" "Why is Jesus called the Son of God?" "Why did God become man?" "Why is God called Father?" "Who is the Holy Spirit?" "What is redemption?" "What is the Kingdom of God?"

[27] The King James Version translated Acts 17:29 as "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." The term translated as *offspring* is Greek *genos*, which was translated into Latin as *genus*, and means much the same as *genus* in English, namely a generic category. In other words, since God and humans are of the same generic category of being, we should not think that God is gold or stone. The Latin *genus* can also mean offspring, and this evidently gave rise to the English translation *offspring*, but the Greek has other words for offspring, and *genos* means a class, a people group, a clan, or even a family, A clan, of course, consists of descendants of someone, and we are de-

scendants of Adam, who was created in the image of God and is called "son of God," evidently for that reason.

[28] In 541 AD, King Abraha, the Christian ruler of Yemen and southern Arabia, placed an inscription on the dam at Marib that began with an expression of the Trinity: "By the power and grace of the Raḥmān and his Christ and the Holy Spirit." For photo and discussion see Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum; Pars Quarta: Inscriptiones Himyariticas Et Sabæas Continens* (vol. 2; Paris: Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres, 1911), fig. 541, p. 278. Abraha also placed an inscription on a cliff at Mureighan that begins "by the power of the Raḥmān and his Christ." For a fuller description see Wickens, A. G. M., Beeston, Alfred F., and Daniels, J., 'Notes on the Mureighan Inscription', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies,* 16/2 (1954).

[29] The *walî* or *rabb* of a household is usually the genitor of the men folk in the family, the grandfather of their children, and the father-in-law of their wives, but if he is deceased the eldest son may inherit this position. Both terms are used in Arabic to refer to God. There is a second meaning of *walî* that means a person close to God, namely a saint, but context distinguishes the two usages.

[30] From the time of the church fathers until now, theologians have recognized that the Bible presents an economic Trinity that reveals God the Father as creator/initiator, God the Son incarnated as mediator/redeemer, and God the Spirit poured out as finisher/sanctifier, while ontologically there is one triune God who does all these things. They concluded that the three Persons are distinct yet inseparable and consubstantial in the one undivided essence of God; this is the doctrine of the ontological Trinity.

[31] Rick Brown wrote an article in IJFM 17:1 (2000) on the "Titles of Jesus," in which he noted the use of *ho huios tou theou* for both the pre-incarnate Word and the Word incarnate as the Christ/Messiah. It has been reported to us that some readers did not realize that *the Word* and *the Christ* designate the Second Person of the Trinity, and they thought Rick was saying that Jesus could be presented as a Jewish messiah that is merely human. That was certainly not Rick's intent, and he regrets the lack of clarity.

[32] See <www.wycliffe.org/TranslationStandards.aspx> See also <http://www.wycliffe.net/AboutUs/PositionStatements/tabid/97/Default.aspx?id=2396>