A Further Look at Translating "Son of God"

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Introduction

A controversy has emerged in recent years over the best way to translate certain New Testament terms for Muslim cultures—terms like "Son of God" for Jesus and "Father" for God.

Many Muslims believe that when Christians call Jesus the Son of God it means that God physically (sexually) sired Jesus by Mary. Such an idea is so repellent to Muslims that when they encounter it in the Bible, some refuse to read further! Christians of course vigorously deny this idea. Nevertheless, this misunderstanding is widespread in Muslim societies.

Because of this and other concerns, some translators concluded that using a word-for-word translation for Son of God and Father in Muslim languages communicates a *wrong meaning*. In a series of articles from 2000 to 2007, Rick Brown documented alternate ways in which some translators have avoided the connotations sometimes evoked by traditional approaches.[1] At that time, he suggested meaning-based (rather than form-based) translations would provide accurate meaning and avoid offensive connotations. In particular, at that time Brown proposed the use of *synonyms* like "Christ of God" or "Christ sent from God" along with an explanation about the meaning of divine familial terms in the translation's introduction.[2] As translations using non-traditional terms or phrases for Son of God began to appear, many missionaries, national church leaders and other Christians reacted with alarm.[3] Subsequent writings refined the approach and addressed criticisms,[4] but the controversy continued, intensified and polarized.

Due to public pressure over the issue, Wycliffe Bible Translators took the step to submit their policies on translating these terms to a binding external and independent review.[5] This step, now underway, represents a pivotal moment for progress toward resolution of these questions. As Wycliffe and SIL submit to external critique of their translation policies, we believe it is important for all those connected to this conflict to review where the controversy stands and what the key issues are that still need to be resolved. Recognizing the opportunity of the moment, our hope is to contribute toward such progress in this article.

We approach this topic as a missionary (Basheer Abdulfadi) with nineteen years of experience in evangelism and discipleship in the Middle East and a pastor (Michael LeFebvre) with a scholarly background in Old Testament studies and ancient Near Eastern law.[6] We also take up this topic with appreciation for the missiological goals that prompted the use of non-traditional translations for Son of God and Father, along with an awareness of the importance of the word-for-word forms for their theological significance. We offer perspectives on some of the key issues of this

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debate to affirm what is best, explain what is not, and call all sides to engage with renewed hope for resolution.

We understand that the present controversy is much larger than the focused issues we take up in this paper. For instance, the controversy is no longer just about translation issues, but there are also personal affronts and charges of ungodliness in the way various efforts have been pursued. These matters of moral offense also need to be resolved (Matt. 18:15–20). We do not attempt to address allegations of sin in this paper, but neither do we intend to whitewash or belittle such concerns by not dealing with them in this place. Furthermore, we understand that this debate is related to another, larger controversy concerning what is commonly called the Insider Movements.[7] Many advocates of Insider Movement approaches will also advocate for non-traditional, meaning-based translations of Son of God and Father. But there are also proponents of meaning-based (rather than form-based) translations who are not proponents of the Insider Movement. Our paper focuses on this controversy as it relates to traditional missionary approaches without taking up Insider Movement issues. We are not ignoring the importance of that other debate, nor are we denying the overlap between these two controversies. But in this paper, we are not addressing Insider Movement motivations for non-traditional translations of divine familial terms.

We have labored to give as fair a representation as possible of various parties with whom we interact in this article. We solicited feedback on an earlier form of this paper from an extensive circle of persons from all sides of this controversy. We are grateful for the criticisms and corrections which we received. Hopefully we have adequately taken those criticisms into account, as was our earnest intent especially in our effort to represent others' positions accurately. We recognize there will always be points where we have fallen short. In advance, we ask forgiveness for those shortcomings and assure all involved that we genuinely desire to deal accurately and charitably in these proposals.

Summary of Recent Progress and Evaluation

It is ironic that the present translation controversy has become increasingly polarized at the same time significant progress has actually begun to emerge. A timeline of key events of the last 18 months will provide perspective both to those who have been engaged in the controversy and those who are new to it.

In February of 2011, *Christianity Today* published an article on the controversy.[8] This was followed by articles in *World Magazine*.[9] These articles effectively moved the debate from the confines of Muslim mission circles into the wider Christian public.

In early June 2011, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) approved an amended overture (Overture 9) from the Potomac Presbytery. This overture called

on the PCA to declare as unfaithful those translations that "alter" the filial relationship between God the Father and God the Son.[10] The overture was concerned primarily with the missiology of "insider movements" and perceived the new translation policies as motivated by the philosophy behind those movements. Additionally, a study committee was formed to further examine the issue. That committee has recently issued their report which will be taken up at the June 19–20, 2012, General Assembly of the PCA.[11]

In late June 2011, a consultation called Bridging the Divide brought together missionaries, missiologists and theologians to attempt to reduce the escalating tension between critics and advocates of insider movement approaches and to discuss the current translation controversy. To the surprise of many, the participants agreed to a statement that included an affirmation to "practic[e] 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."[12] Furthermore, there was a growing realization (though not expressed in writing) that the translation issue is not necessarily an artifact of insider movement philosophy, but can stem from a desire to communicate *meaning* as opposed to preserving *form*.

Then in early August 2011, SIL convened a meeting of its personnel with invited observers[13] to determine best practices for translation of key familial terms. The resulting "Statement of Best Practices" affirmed the importance of retaining familial terms, stating, "Scripture translations should promote understanding of the term 'Son of God' in all its richness, including his filial relationship with the Father, while avoiding any possible implication of sexual activity by God."[14] The statement further confirmed the importance of the word-for-word forms by requiring SIL translators to present and explain Son of God and Father in the paratext—marginal or footnotes—if synonyms, similes, or other meaning-based translations were used. To quote the SIL statement, "… non-literal options for the text may be considered which conserve as much of the familial meaning as possible, provided that the paratext includes the literal form."[15] Not all parties to the controversy are satisfied that these Best Practices statements say enough, but they represent progress.[16]

The September 2011 issue of IJFM published a pair of papers by Rick Brown, Leith Gray and Andrea Gray which reassess the issue from the point of view of the affirmed importance of the familial titles Son of God and Father. The papers contain many important insights, some of which will be considered below. Most significantly, the authors strongly affirm the need to retain the familial nature of the titles *and discourage the use of "Messiah" to translate Son of God*. They wrote,

> We now believe it is ideal to express the familial component of meaning in the text … 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.[17]

This statement represents a positive shift in emphasis and demonstrates further progress. However, the change has been greeted with suspicion and skepticism by some. In particular, both the SIL Best Practices statement and the new articles by Brown, Gray and Gray give *priority* to the word-for-word translation of Son of God and Father where they do not communicate wrong meaning (especially the implication of sexual behavior on God's part), but some contend that word-for-word translations of these terms needs to be *exclusive*.

In early January 2012, an online petition called on Wycliffe and SIL "not to remove *Father*, *Son* or *Son of God* from the text of Scripture."[18] As of mid-May, 2012, over 13,000 people have signed the petition. This petition effectively changed the nature of the conflict from intramural dispute to public controversy, ratcheting up the pressure for an absolute commitment to the literal word-for-word translation that preserves the form of divine familial terms without exception. Inevitably, the application of financial pressure has impacted the work of Bible translation worldwide, not just work in Muslim contexts.

The increasingly public pressure led Wycliffe and SIL to issue a series of statements affirming their commitment to the authority of Scripture and the deity of Christ. Wycliffe furthermore committed their organizations to the outcome of a commissioned global and independent review, and agreed to slow the publication of affected translation projects until the review is completed.

While this summary of events shows the increasing polarization that has taken place, we want to highlight the significant progress which has also occurred. Furthermore, while the crisis threatens Wycliffe and SIL translation in Muslim contexts and beyond, it also represents opportunities. Scholars and missionaries have been forced to re-examine important theological and missiological issues, and we pray God will bring much fruit from this study. The result of increased study has the potential to greatly clarify issues in Christology that past formulations have not expressed.

Key Issues

The debate over translating Son of God terminology is complex and multidimensional. The debate involves more than linguistic issues; it also involves socio-religious, philosophy of ministry, and other kinds of issues. To make progress, it is important to respect the complexity and unravel the many layers involved. We identify five distinct issues: two involving biblical linguistics, one involving linguistic issues in target languages, one involving Islamic theology, and one touching on philosophy of ministry issues. This list is not exhaustive, but these are topics at the core of the crisis.

1. The multi-faceted nature of the title Son of God

Rick Brown's 2000 article "The 'Son of God': Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus" was the ground breaking argument for meaning-based rather than form-based translations of Son of God. While the article proved controversial in its conclusions, some components of his argument drew on widely accepted characteristics of the title, including its *multi-faceted meaning*.

The term Son of God has many facets of meaning. It expresses *love*—the close relationship of God to the one he calls "son." It also speaks of *authority*—the delegation of power from God to one he makes his agent. The title underscores a person's *work*—the "son" carries out God's mission among humankind. It communicates *holiness*—the "son" bearing God's likeness manifests his righteousness. And in addition to these and other facets of meaning, the title conveys *identity*—the "son" is one who embodies the presence of God among humanity.[19] The meaning of Son of God is rich and multi-dimensional.

Only Jesus manifests all these facets of meaning perfectly, so that we rightly speak of Jesus as *the* Son of God preeminently. Nevertheless, Jesus is not the only person in Scripture who is called by this title. This brings us to a second point, generally acknowledged, which was a key component of Brown's early articles; the title Son of God is used for other persons in Scripture in addition to Jesus. It is used chiefly for Jesus, but it is also used for Adam (Lk 3:38), David and his heirs (Ps. 2:7; 89:26–27; 2 Sam. 7:14), the whole nation of Israel (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1), the church (Jn. 1:12; Gal. 3:26; Rom. 8:14–16), and others.

These two points—that the title has many facets of meaning, and that the title has been used for several persons in Scripture—are generally agreed. Neither are new insights by Brown, but his early articles gave helpful summaries of these two points. But we still need to resolve the proper implications of these points. Here are two questions of particular importance: First, does the title's multi-faceted nature indicate multiple meanings for the term or multiple emphases of a single meaning? Second, only Jesus perfectly fulfills this title, but to what extent does the meaning of *divine identity* attach to others when Scripture calls them by the same title? We take up the first of these questions presently; the second will be addressed under the subsequent heading.

The title Son of God has often been treated as though it produces different meanings in different contexts. In some passages it is the facet of *love* which is recognized, while in other passages it is the facet of *mission* (doing the Father's work) which is drawn out, and so on.[20] If the title takes on different meanings in different contexts, it becomes important to determine *which* of the title's meanings is intended in a certain passage in order to translate its meaning.

For example, Romans 9:25–26 quotes this promise of God to his "sons"—

> Those who were not my people I will call "my people," and her who was not beloved I will call "beloved." And in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they will be called *"sons of the living God."*

In this passage, the title "sons of the living God" brings out God's love. Therefore some have suggested that an alternate translation expressing belovedness would be appropriate: "[To avoid procreative connotations,] translators ... sometimes use similes, as in 'God will say they are like children to him,' 'God will consider them as if they were his children,' or 'God will have a relationship with (or, will care for) them like a father with his children.'"[21] Notably, these similes emphasize the loving relationship expressed by the term. But does a simile focusing on certain facets of the term's meaning really convey the meaning adequately?

Rather than seeing the nuances of the title as a catalogue of meanings to choose from, we argue it is more accurate to see them as multiple facets of a stable, single meaning. Like a diamond, even though one facet of this title might be prominent in a given passage, the luster and color are a result of the light from all its facets. In the title "sons of the living God" in the Romans passage above, God's love for Israel is on the surface. However, the *holiness* God desires for his people, their faithful service in his *work* and their status as *heirs* are still important parts of the loving relationship which is on display. Furthermore, the term "sons of the living God" communicates more than paternal love: it promises *all the privileges and qualities that go along with restored sonship*, such as moral transformation, restoration to God's service, and the blessing of God's presence.

We believe that the many nuances of Son of God should not be treated as distinct meanings that depend on immediate context. The supposition that one aspect of this title's meaning is adequate to substitute for the whole in translation needs to be corrected.[22] While a given nuance may be prominent, it never excludes the other meanings. The practical import of this is to highlight the importance of the *form* of the title Son(s) of God for its meaning. An attempt to translate the meaning of the term by focusing on one or another of its nuances rather than translating its form actually leads to a loss of meaning. Thankfully, as noted earlier, there is a growing awareness of the importance of the form of familial terms to understand their meaning; these insights further affirm that direction.

2. *The divine implications of the title Son of God*

Among the many facets of the title Son of God discussed above, we will here argue that the most significant is the idea of *identity*—that the son is *one who manifests God's presence*. Muslims react to this implication of the title's meaning: that Son of God implies Jesus is divine (as well as any reaction to its perceived sexual implications). It is also this aspect of the title's meaning which can make Christians uncomfortable when the term is ascribed to persons other than Jesus. Is Scripture really saying, for instance, that Adam was in some sense an embodiment of deity

when he is called son of God in Luke 3:38? If Son of God implies the deity of Jesus, why doesn't it imply the same for Adam?

We believe a resolution to this question about the divine implications of this title requires understanding that central to the term Son of God *in all its uses* is the idea of one who embodies (or incarnates) God's presence. Certainly such embodiment occurs in many different ways. Jesus alone *fully and perfectly* fulfills this qualification; but even in its other uses, the title always expresses the idea, in some sense, of a human embodiment of God's presence.

The question of divine implications of Son of God was the early focus of the current controversy. The debate has since moved on to involve a constellation of familial terms for a variety of relationships with God and within the Godhead. We return to a focused look at the divine implications of Son of God, but not in order to bypass the importance of other terms.It is our sense that the controversy has "moved on" to terms other than Son of God without adequately resolving its divine implications. The lack of resolution contributes to the continuing impasse where some see Son of God as primarily functional while others see it as primarily ontological.[23] We believe that to resolve the impasse, it is essential to understand the divine implications of Son of God. We can see this feature of the title both in its use throughout the ancient Near East and in its biblical usage.

Rulers throughout the ancient world bore the title son of god. In Egypt, pharaoh was given a "Horus name" upon coronation. This name was part of an elaborate myth wherein the god Osiris begat a divine son Horus, ritually identified with the new pharaoh. Jarl Fossum explains, "The enthronement was the definitive act of begetting or deification in Egypt."[24] An inscription from Horemhab's coronation includes the pronouncement from the sun god Amun-Ra: "You are my son and my heir who has come out of my members."[25] Thutmosis III confessed on his coronation, "[I am Ra's] son, whom he commanded that I should be upon his throne ... and begat in uprightness of heart."[26] It was specifically upon enthronement that pharaoh "received ... all the magico-religious consecrations which transform him into a living incarnation of Rā, the sun-god, creator of the world."[27]

In Mesopotamia the picture is more varied. Kings in the Fertile Crescent were sometimes regarded as divine, sometimes as men filled with the "seed" or spirit of the gods, and sometimes as stewards of the gods.[28] When the gods created Gilgamesh king of Uruk, they made him "Two thirds ... god and one third man."[29] In Sumer, "kings ... had their names prefixed by the determinative for divinity."[30] Gudea, king of Lagash, declared to the goddess Gatumdu, "My seed [i.e., the seed of my Father] You have received; in the sanctuary You have begotten me."[31] The literature is replete with such examples, so that scholars conclude: "in the entire Near East, the king could be called 'Son of God' or even 'God'."[32] And there is a reason for this widespread connection between kingship and deity.

In Egypt, for example, the principle duty of the king was "to maintain *maat*... [which means] 'right order'—the inherent structure of creation... Thus the king, in the solitariness of his divinity, shoulders an immense responsibility."[33] The entire creation order (*ma'at*)—not just political order—was on the king's shoulders. In the modern world, we conceive of civic power (politics) as distinct from natural power (e.g., the seasons and agriculture) and supernatural power (religion). Such distinctions were unknown in the ancient world. Kings were expected to uphold all aspects of right order so the gods would be pleased, the rains would come at the right times, crops would flourish, and justice would prevail.[34] In short, kingship required superhuman power. The ancient myths of divine begetting are repulsive to Christians for many reasons. But they represent a widespread conviction that a society achieves righteous order only when a king who is, in some sense, divine is on the throne.

The Old Testament exhibits similarly lofty expectations of kingship, though strikingly without myths of divine copulation.[35] When David was identified as the next king of Israel, Samuel anointed him "and the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward ... [and] the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul..." (1 Sam. 16:13–14). Like the coronation professions of other lands, the Davidic coronation includes the announcement of divine begetting (Ps. 2:7). We must hasten to add that the "begetting" of the Davidic king was by divine *covenant* (Ps. 2:7a, 2 Sam. 7:8–16) and not by divine copulation.[36] This is a radical difference with the nations that surrounded Israel. Nevertheless, David was endowed with the Holy Spirit in a manner that set him apart as an embodiment of God's presence in Israel, marked by the title "son of God." David feared the consequences for Israel if he should ever quench the Spirit by his sins and be abandoned to rule without God's presence as had happened to Saul before him (Ps. 51:11; cf., 2 Sam. 7:14–15; Ps. 89:20–34). As one who bore the title son of God, David was not "very God incarnate" like Jesus. Nevertheless David, by means of his filling with the Spirit, imperfectly yet really embodied God's presence in Israel.[37]

Not only kings, but judges, who served as extensions of the king's justice, were sometimes called "gods" in the Bible (e.g., Ps. 82:1, 6; Exod. 4:16; 7:1). This use should not be overread, but neither should it be ignored. These judges were not deified, but they needed the presence of God's Spirit to administer justice (e.g., Num. 11:11–30; cf., Prov. 16:10–11; 2 Sam. 14:17, 20). For this reason judges also bore a divine title. And all Israel (Exod. 4:22) and all the church are granted the profound wonder of being called sons of God *because of God's presence manifested through them* (Gal 4:6).

Those called son of God embodied God's presence in different ways and in varying degrees. The term does not apply to Adam in exactly the same way as it does to Jesus. But the core meaning is unchanged in each instance: God manifests his presence among humanity through the ones he designates as "sons." In fact, other facets of the term's meaning—beloved of God, holiness, authority, and so forth—are secondary ideas which flow from the term's central concept: *God's manifest presence.* In Jesus, one who is not just Spirit-filled but fully divine perfectly fulfilled

the title.[38] But in every case, the term expresses the same basic idea of one who embodies God's presence.

Some have argued that the title has little or no reference to divine embodiment except as ascribed to Jesus. For instance, in 2000 Brown wrote concerning Egypt's use of this title: "This was more a functional than ontological title—though a few kings became arrogant and actually claimed divinity for themselves."[39] He then went on to suggest that the title, when used for Israel's kings prior to Jesus, refers to the belovedness and God-given mission of those who bore it, not to divine manifestation. Brown was not (as some have claimed) denying the deity of Christ nor the importance of the title Son of God when ascribed to Jesus as a witness to his deity.[40] However, Brown and others were overlooking the idea of divine embodiment which is present in some sense in all uses of this term, not just in reference to Jesus. However, we believe it important to recognize the hope of divine manifestation as central to this term's meaning *in all its uses*. Translating the term with a meaning-based expression that lacks or obscures this sense of divine embodiment loses a vital aspect of its meaning.

There is merit to Brown's statement that son of God was "more a functional than ontological title" in the ancient world. But this claim anachronistically projects the modern distinction between *function* and *ontology* and thereby obscures the divine expectation inherent even in "functional" uses of the term.[41] In many cases, the ancients recognized their kings were still men (ontologically) who functioned in their kingly office with divine authority. But rather than asking whether kings were seen as *ontologically* divine, we should ask whether they were believed to be *really* divine.[42]

There was, after all, *real* power conferred during the king's enthronement. And that power, which continued with the king throughout his reign, was perceived as *really* divine. *By modern distinctions,* we might say that kings of the ancient world were men (ontologically) who took on divine functions. Israel did not see in King David an incarnation of Yahweh. But there was *real* spiritual power, and by ancient perceptions *real* divine presence, conferred upon kings on their enthronement. This was the significance of the Holy Spirit's presence first with Saul, then later with David. Inherent in this royal title is the expectation, made explicit by the prophets, that a more perfect king than David would even more perfectly manifest God's presence. Even though the Old Testament saints may not have universally imagined the divine Word himself becoming flesh to fill that office, the title Son of God always involves the hope of some manner of divine manifestation in the king.[43]

When Brown distinguishes the ontological deity of Christ from the functional deity of other ancient kings, he is theologically correct. But to impose that distinction of function versus ontology upon the term Son of God obscures the real, divine expectations inherent throughout its biblical usage, even in its "functional" appearances.

To sum up, throughout the ancient world *and in its many uses throughout Scripture,* Son(s) of God always included the concept of real divine presence. As scholars frequently note, the ascription is often more functional than ontological by modern terms. Nonetheless, the form Son(s) of God captures the idea of a real embodiment of God's presence. For this reason we advocate the importance of the word-for-word form of Son of God. It is *part* of the biblical witness to Israel's need for a king who manifests God's presence and the fully divine King Jesus who perfectly does so.

This leaves us with one further question under this topic: recognizing that this title is part of Scripture's witness to Christ's deity, should we conclude that simile and other meaning-based translations that replace the sonship *form* are implicit denials of Christ's deity or that they undermine the doctrine of the Trinity? Some critics have made those charges.[44] And there are grounds for concern that something is lost. We concur with those who see the form Son of God as an important *part* of the biblical witness to Christ's deity. But we also caution against the presumption some have drawn that translators are *trying* to obscure the deity of Christ when they use alternate translations for Son of God. God's Word teaches us to make careful distinctions between those who are well-intentioned but (in our judgment) wrong, and those who are wrong with ill intentions.[45] In both cases, where error is recognized there needs to be confrontation, but the nature of that confrontation is different where an opponent's motives are honorable. Even when the doctrinal stakes are high—*especially* when doctrinal stakes are high—"the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but ... able to teach... correcting his opponents with gentleness..." (2 Tim. 2:24–25).

Those who have promoted alternate translations for Son of God report that they have done so to bring out what they have understood to be the primary meaning of the title: "God's Messiah" or "like children to God." Those are intentions to be faithful to the Word, even if critics deem the resulting translations to be unfaithful to the Word. Good intentions never excuse from responsibility. But they do compel those who criticize to do so with patience in hopes of winning a brother or sister and not just winning an argument.

We would caution against impugning the motives of those who have advocated untraditional translations for Son of God. Alternate translations do not necessarily undermine the title's witness to Christ's deity if the word-for-word form is provided in paratext material as Rick Brown advocated in his 2005 articles[46] and the Best Practices statement now requires.[47] Nevertheless, based on the above evidence for the divine expectations which are *primary* in the title's meaning and expressed by its form, we would urge translators to use word-for-word translations of Son of God in the text.

3. The use of biological and social terms for Father and Son

Now that a consensus is emerging to retain familial translations, a further issue follows: *which* familial terms? In some languages, there are terms for a *biological* father/son relationship (e.g.,

physiological offspring) and other terms that indicate a *social* relationship (e.g., adoption). This issue is the major focus of Brown, Gray and Gray in their recent articles on "A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible" and "A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms."

Rather than discussing non-familial alternatives for Son of God and Father (like "the Christ from God"), the discussion is now re-focusing around which familial terms to use. "Things have changed," Brown, Gray and Gray explain, "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."[48] While there are still issues to be resolved, we believe it is important to acknowledge the progress which this shift in focus represents.

In these articles, Brown, Gray and Gray offer an extensive analysis of various Hebrew and Greek familial terms. They identify terms that express biological relationships and terms that express social relationships which may or may not be biological. Their finding is that whenever Scripture expresses *divine* sonship, the terms used express the possibility of social sonship and never *demand* a biological relationship.[49] Even where typically biological terms are used, they are never terms that *demand* a biological interpretation. From this analysis, the authors conclude that when translators use terms which are definitively biological to express divine sonship, their translations "*are inaccurate because they add a procreative meaning that was absent from the original...*"[50] There is much to unpack in the reasoning laid out in these articles. We will focus on only one point of critique here.

Based on the conclusions just quoted, Brown, Gray and Gray urge, "the divine sonship of Jesus should be expressed in the text using ... *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."[51] There is a Catch-22 here, and Brown, Gray and Gray have taken a categorical decision how to resolve it. On the one hand, to provide a filial term which unequivocally expresses the Son's shared essence with the Father, a biological term is typically necessary. On the other hand, a translation which avoids a procreative connotation requires a social sonship term; but social sonship terms allow for shared essence without requiring that idea. The guidance by Brown, Gray and Gray is to always give priority to avoiding sexual connotations, even though it means using social terms that allow the idea of shared essence between Son and Father without requiring that idea.

For example, they recommend the phrase "the Son *from* God" which signifies "a relationship that is filial ('Son') and not necessarily biological, yet ... is compatible with eternal generation *from* the essence of God..."[52] But what if a given text needs a translation that is not merely "compatible with eternal generation" but *expresses* that shared essence? It is not obvious that the priority of avoiding biological connotations should always outweigh the priority of expressing shared essence. When translating in Muslim contexts, the position taken by Brown, Gray and

Gray is understandable. But there is loss of meaning where this is done—especially when it is done systematically. Typically it is biological sonship language which most clearly brings out the idea of shared essence between Son and Father.

We do not raise this critique to contradict the authors' conclusions, simply to qualify them. Where target languages offer familial terms that lack sexual connotations, it is prudent for translators to consider them. But we question whether biological terms must be so dogmatically avoided as Brown, Gray and Gray seem to insist (compare topic number 4, below).

By and large, we are actually in agreement with the overall thrust of Brown, Gray and Gray in their recent articles. We affirm their basic point that translators in Muslim contexts should give preference to terms which avoid sexual connotations wherever possible. But we think they overstate their case when they categorically argue that translations which do use biological terms "are inaccurate because they add a procreative meaning that was absent from the original."[53] Bringing out the shared essence of the Son of God with the Father is arguably one reason some biblical passages use biological sonship terms in the first place.[54] Bringing out that shared essence would potentially be necessary for an accurate translation and might be difficult to achieve without a biological term. In principle, we appreciate what Brown, Gray and Gray are recommending. But we caution against categorically denying the legitimacy of biological sonship terms, so long as paratextual clarification is offered to correct procreative connotations.

4. What really is the Muslim objection to Divine Familial Titles?

The previous three topics dealt with linguistic issues. This next topic moves us into Muslim theology. The reason for the present controversy is because some Muslims perceive sexual behavior on the part of God when they read or hear the titles Son of God and Father. However, this perception is not the only reason why Muslims reject divine familial titles. Failure to account for the full orb of reasons behind the reactions of individual Muslims may oversimplify the problem and its solutions. There has been less attention to the role of other Muslim beliefs. Furthermore, the perception that Son of God and Father imply carnal activity by God is not universal nor is it uniformly serious.

The conceptual heart of Muslim rejection of the title Son of God is their doctrine of *tawhiid*, the absolute, undifferentiated oneness of God.[55] This belief automatically excludes the Trinity. It is the root of Islamic refusal to even consider distinctions within God and to reject out of hand the divinity of Jesus.

Closely related to the absolute oneness of God is his utter uniqueness and transcendence. Christians likewise confess the transcendence of God, but in Islam transcendence excludes the idea of someone, even Muhammad, knowing God or even communicating directly with him; the *Qur'an* is entirely a first-person address to Muhammad *through the medium of Gabriel*. Some Muslims, especially Salafists, react to the title Son of God because they see that it places Jesus

on an unacceptable level of familiarity and intimacy with God. This is the essence of *shirk*, associating "partners" with God, which is the worst sin in Islam.[56,57] So there are more reasons why Muslims react to Son of God and Father than just the perception of carnal behavior.

In addition, the perception of divine sexual behavior is neither universal nor uniformly serious. Islam is not monolithic. Many Muslims are poorly educated about Islam itself and are even more ignorant about what the Bible says. In the collective experience of missionaries (including BA), while many Muslims in one Arabian Peninsula country do react negatively on encountering divine familial terms, it is not uncommon for them to hear or read Son of God and Father and continue to read without any negative reaction. And when the traditional translations of Son of God and Father raise the question of divine procreation, as they frequently do, a brief explanation is enough to dispel their concerns.

One of the authors (BA) recently started a study of Mark with a seeker who had limited exposure to the Bible. Since Jesus is called the Son of God in Mark 1:1, the issue came up immediately. After hearing that it doesn't mean that God had sexual relations to beget Jesus, as many say, the seeker responded that this was evidence that Muslim scholars were lying about what Christians believe! Other missionaries and believers active in sharing their faith relate numerous similar stories.[58]

Such evidence is admittedly anecdotal. But it illustrates the fact that the perception of sexual activity in the divine familial titles is not universal, even, in the case of Arabic, in their traditional Arabic form. Furthermore, the case for it being a universal problem is similarly based on anecdotal evidence. We would not deny the documented reactions to Son of God,[59] but warn against the danger of universalizing experience as a basis for translation policy. Conversely, we would warn against the danger of universalizing the experience in one Arabic context to the rest of the Muslim world. The lack of a universal negative reaction to Son and Father in this context may not apply to other parts of the Muslim world or even other parts of the Arab world.

The reasons for Muslim perception that Son of God and Father imply sexual activity on God's part include simple misunderstanding of Christian teaching, problems with the words used to translate and basic Muslim beliefs. These misperceptions can often be removed with a brief explanation. Muslim reactions to this title based on our different understanding of God's oneness (as triune) and the real possibility of nearness to him in Christ are points of conflict that cannot be avoided. Muslim objections will necessarily continue even if the perceived sexual implications of the title are resolved. It seems unrealistic to expect any translation of the Son of God titles would be adequate to overcome even one of these deeply involved problems, let alone to adequately address all three (and potentially more)! As we will explore more fully under the next topic, translators can make an important contribution toward clarifying the meaning of this title. But in light of the complexity of the problem, even the best translation will not be adequate to clarify the term. But, as we explain under the next heading, this is not as serious a problem as it might initially appear to be.

5. Clarifying the translator's role

This next topic follows on the previous topic and moves us into another subject area: philosophy of ministry. What is the role of the translator? More specifically, when there is a culture-wide point of confusion (e.g., the meaning of the term Son of God), to what extent should the translator *interpret* that term *in the translation itself?* The question we pose is not absolute, as though a translator either should or should not take such misunderstandings into account. The question is one of extent: to what extent is the translator responsible to resolve those interpretation problems in the translation?

Acts 8:26–40 is an important model to consider. In that text, we are told about an official from Ethiopia who was reading a scroll of Isaiah. He was struggling to understand what he was reading: "does the prophet say this about himself or about someone else?" (v34). Then the Holy Spirit miraculously carried Philip to his side to explain: "Beginning with this Scripture, [Philip] told him the good news about Jesus" (v36). Here is one example of a biblical norm, that an inquirer struggling to understand the written Word finds help from a human witness.

The passage in Acts is not teaching us *how* the Spirit typically brings such witnesses to inquirers. Even in New Testament times, evangelists like Paul traveled by mundane means. But this text does teach us *how important it is* that an evangelist would serve as the normal interpreter of Scripture. The Spirit went to great lengths to ensure the Ethiopian traveler had a witness by his side as he struggled to understand the written Word. The biblical pattern of witness here illustrated leads us to expect that the written Word will normally require a human witness to explain its difficult teachings. This is not just an isolated example. The Acts 8 pericope is illustrative of a biblical pattern.

In fact, in all the New Testament there are no examples of unbelievers coming to faith by private reading of the Scriptures. The story of the Ethiopian official is the closest Scripture comes to a private conversion account. Certainly, the Spirit does sometimes bring people to faith by private reading of Scripture. It is a marvelous testimony to God's grace when that happens. But private conversion is not what Scripture teaches us to expect. The New Testament emphasis is on commissioning witnesses who carry and explain the Word (e.g., Matt. 28:18–20; Lk. 10:2; Rom. 10:14–15).[60]

We believe a significant factor in the current crisis is the unspoken assumption[61] that a translator should translate Son of God in ways that convey its biblical meaning (translation) *and* overcome culture-wide misunderstandings (interpretation). This is a noble goal, but it potentially confuses the roles of translator and interpreter. Translators should exercise sensitivity to potential misunderstandings as they translate, but they should not labor under a burden to resolve those misunderstandings *at the translation level.*

There are statements in the SIL Best Practices guideline that indicate some progress in drawing this distinction, but we believe it needs to be strengthened. In that statement, the following two-

part explanation of paratext material is given: "The primary purpose of the paratext is to help the reader to infer the intended meaning from the text. It also presents more literal translations of phrases used in the text." The guidance which accompanies that definition urges translators to strive for literal translations in the text wherever possible, using the paratext for further explanation. As a secondary option, the statement recognizes the use of non-literal translations in the text with the literal word-for-word rendering in the paratext. We appreciate the order of emphasis in that guidance. The text is the preferred place for the word-for-word form.

As far as it goes, the Best Practices statement offers helpful guidance in this regard. What it lacks is attention to the fact that, even with excellent translations, *witnesses in the field are still necessary* to explain the written Word. Surely this is assumed,[62] but without acknowledging this point as part of translation policy, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that a good translation is a crucial *tool* of missions *but is not the missionary.* Translators might be left with the sense that full clarity ought to be achieved in the translation itself, rather than recognizing that their work is to provide a tool for others who will serve as witnesses. Full clarity in the face of culture-wide misunderstanding is simply not going to be possible. But that is okay. Translators do not need to produce self-interpreting translations. It sounds reverent to say that "the Bible is its own best missionary," but *by God's design* the Bible is not its own missionary.

In light of the insights drawn together under the previous topic (number 4) and this topic (number 5), we conclude that even if Son of God cannot be *fully explained* in the translation itself, it does not need to be.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that Son of God has multiple nuances that center around the core meaning of divine presence. Those rich expectations inherent in every use of this title were perfectly fulfilled only in Jesus, who is fully divine. We further argued that Muslim objections to Son of God go beyond the perception of sexual activity by God and stem from their doctrine of the absolute oneness and utter transcendence of God. These objections are so deep-seated that they cannot be solved completely in translation, and translators should not take on the burden of resolving every objection because God's plan is to use witnesses to win people to Christ. The many points that have been raised in this article lead to two primary conclusions.

First, wherever possible, the form Son of God should be preserved in translation. The term is too rich and theologically important to be substituted with meaning-based translations where some facets of the title's meaning are substituted for a formal equivalent of the title itself. The goals which led some to suggest non-traditional translations—namely to bring out what was assumed to be its primary meaning (beloved) and to avoid Muslim reactions—were worthy motives. We commend those two goals as marks of missionary love and zeal. But it is now apparent that divine presence is at the heart of this title's meaning. Too much is lost theologically, exegetically

and evangelistically when Son of God is rendered by meaning-based alternatives. Son of God should be translated preserving the word-for-word form.[63]

The statement of Best Practices has already pointed translators toward retaining word-for-word forms for divine familial terms. But we believe the Best Practices policy needs to be strengthened. Translators should be instructed to use the word-for-word form to render the exegetically and theologically important term Son(s) of God, only considering alternate forms in extreme (and rare) exceptions. We also commend guidelines that will ensure that exceptions will not be made to serve a particular missiological ideology.

Some might go so far as to argue no exceptions to a literal word-for-word treatment of Son of God should be allowed. As a point of principle, such a strong commitment is appealing. However, languages are complex and a uniform policy cannot be expected to encompass every conceivable problem; blanket prohibitions often result in unforeseen problems down the road. There may be instances where an idiomatic translation in a certain passage is prudent. We call on the critics to accept the practical and imperfect solution of giving the literal word-for-word form in the paratext if a non-literal form is used in the translation text. Nonetheless, we urge again the importance of preserving the central idea of divine presence in the title Son of God.

We have argued that amending translation policies to give priority to formal equivalence (rather than meaning-based alternatives) is needed. But more important than policies on paper is the education of our own hearts as translators, pastors, missionaries, and other Christian workers. Policies on paper should reflect the consensus of a community's convictions in the heart. What is most needed is a strengthened conviction concerning the importance of the form Son of God in communicating the meaning of that title, especially its central idea of manifesting divine presence. We hope to have contributed in some measure toward encouraging that conviction.

The second conclusion is the need for *continued* patience and direct engagement between parties. After engaging in the debate for several years, some critics have turned to indirect methods to influence events, like the recent online petition. In a document explaining the reasons for that petition, the author said, "[...T]he petition was started only after every effort had been made to call Wycliffe, Frontiers and SIL to biblical faithfulness."[64] In light of the progress shown above and ongoing discussions with the leadership of Wycliffe and SIL that were taking place *as the petition was launched*, the insistence that "every effort had been made" was an overstatement. There actually has been significant progress already, as we have endeavored to document here. More progress is needed. But rather than taking preemptive steps to bring external pressure upon those with whom we disagree, it is crucial that we continue to address our opposites on the issue directly, face-to-face as much as possible, patiently appealing to one another reasonably and charitably.

Furthermore, a new window of opportunity is opening as an external and independent commission organized by the World Evangelical Alliance is reviewing Wycliffe and SIL

translation policy. Now is the time to engage with our counterparts, and to hopefully and thoughtfully identify the issues that still need to be resolved. We especially appeal to critics of Wycliffe and SIL not to prejudge the work of the commission before it is completed. Finally, we urge that those concerned with this controversy would commit themselves to prayer and fasting for God's blessing on both the formal and informal dialogue around these matters in the coming months.

The progress which has taken place thus far is a testimony that God's Spirit has already been at work in our midst. We must not deny him glory by ignoring the progress with which he has blessed us. Let us continue to trust the Spirit to work as we persevere in the patient task of Christian debate. The Lord is doing something unusual in the Middle East in our generation. May he be pleased to use us, sharpened by the present controversy, to show his great love through his Son to the Muslim world.

Endnotes

[1] Rick Brown. "The 'Son of God': Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus." *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17.1 (2000); "Part I: Translating the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts." *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 22:3 (2005); "Part II: Translating the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts." *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 22:4 (2005). But see later in this paper the discussion of Brown's revised position.

[2] E.g., Brown, "Part I: Translating", (2005), p139.

[3] Roger Dixon, "Identity Theft: Retheologizing the Son of God", *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 43:2 (2007). Basheer Abdulfadi, "Modern Arabic Translations and Their Witness to Christ", *Seedbed* XXII (Fall, 2008).

[4] Rick Brown, "Part I: Translating" (2005; "Part II: Translating" (2005). Brown, Rick, Leith Gray and Andrea Gray. "A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms" *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 28:3 (2011), pp105–20; Brown, Rick, Leith Gray and Andrea Gray. "A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible" *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 28:3 (2011).

[5] http://www.wycliffe.org/SonofGod/PreviousResponses.aspx, http://www.wycliffe.org/SonofGod.aspx.

[6] Michael LeFebvre, *Collections, Codes, and Torah: The Re-characterization of Israel's Written Law*. LHBOTS 451 (New York: Continuum, 2008).

[7] For an introduction to insider movements, see Rebecca Lewis, "Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 26:1 (2009). Available from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/26_1_PDFs/26_1_Lewis.pdf. See also the response by Dick Brogden, "Inside Out: Probing Presuppositions among Insider Movements", *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 27:1 (2010). Available from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/27_1_PDFs/27_1_Brogden.pdf.

[8] Collin Hansen, "The Son and the Crescent", *Christianity Today*, 55:2 (February, 2011). Available from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/february/soncrescent.html.

[9] Emily Belz, "Holding translators accountable", *World Magazine*, 26:20 (2011). Available from http://www.worldmag.com/articles/18687. Emily Belz, "The battle for accurate Bible translation in Asia", *World Magazine*, 27:4 (2012). Available from http://www.worldmag.com/articles/19184.

[10] The text of the overture is available from http://www.pcaac.org/2011GeneralAssembly/Overture%209%20Potomac%20Faithful%20Witness%203-31-11.pdf.

[11] The PCA Study Committee report is available from http://www.pcaac.org/Ad%20Interim%20on%20Insider%20Movements%20Report%205-17-12.pdf. Readers should note that the report is not official PCA policy until the General Assembly acts on it.

[12] The text of the Bridging the Divide conference statement is available from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/octoberweb-only/missions-muslims-criticisms.html?start=3

[13] One of the authors (BA) was an observer at the consultation. See also the comments of another observer and participant, Stephen Taylor, at
http://www.wrfnet.org/c/portal/layout?p_l_id=PUB.1.48&p_p_id=62_INSTANCE_XnIU&p_p_action=0&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-3&p_p_col_pos=1&p_p_col_count=3&_62_INSTANCE_XnIU_struts_action=%2Fjournal_articles%2Fview&_62_INSTANCE_XnIU_groupId=1&_62_INSTANCE_XnIU_articleId=472&_62_INSTANCE_XnIU_version=1.0,.%20.

[14] The text, with commentary, of the SIL statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Language is available from http://www.sil.org/translation/divine_familial_terms_commentary_full.pdf.

[15] We struggled to find the right word or phrase to indicate what is meant by translation that preserves the word-for-word form with the common equivalents for "son" and "father". "Literal" is what a non-specialist would say, but there are too many ideas about what literal means for this to be helpful. Except when quoting other authors or documents, we will use the phrase "literal word-for-word" and sometimes add to it the phrase "preserving the form".

[16] Collin Hansen, "Wycliffe, SIL Issue Guidelines on Translating 'Son of God' Among Muslims", *Christianity Today,* 55 (Web Only), (2011). Available from http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/octoberweb-only/son-of-god-translation-guidelines.html?start=1.

[17] Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look,", p116.

[18] The petition was posted on www.change.org on January 4, 2012.

[19] For a catalogue of concepts expressed by this title, see, Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look," pp110–11.

[20] E.g.: "An examination of the passages where Paul uses [the term 'Son'] shows that in most cases he is focusing on the dearness of Jesus to God... In John, on the other hand, 'Son' occurs mostly in contexts emphasizing ... perfect obedience." (Brown, "Son of God," p46.) Also, "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." (Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look," p110.)

[21] Barclay Moon Newman and Philip Stine. *Helps for Translators. A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew* (London: UBS, 1988) p113. Cf. Brown, "Son of God," p40.

[22] We are not suggesting that translators have been *explicitly* arguing for the approach here critiqued or that it is currently an issue in translation practice; but the assumption here critiqued is *implicit* if a search for meaning allows immediate context to obscure the wider context of Son of God.

[23] For representative defenses of the case for primarily ontological meaning for son of God, see David Abernathy, "Jesus Is The Eternal Son Of God", *St.Francis Magazine*, 6:2 (2010); David Abernathy, "Translating 'Son of God' in Missionary Bible Translation: A Critique of 'Muslim-Idiom Bible Translations: Claims and Facts', By Rick Brown, John Penny And Leith Gray," *St.Francis Magazine*, 6:1 (2010); Scott Horrell, "Cautions Regarding "Son of God" in Muslim-Idiom Translations of the Bible: Seeking Sensible Balance", *St.Francis Magazine*, 6:4 (2010). For a very recent defense of the position that son of God did not "attribute deity", see Bradford Greer, *St.Francis Magazine*, 8:2 (2012), p188.

[24] Fossum, "Son of God" (1995), p1488. Jarl Fossum, "Son of God." In: Karel van der Toorn, et al., eds. *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (*Leiden: Brill, 1995) pp1486–98.

[25] Fossum, "Son of God" (1995), p1488.

[26] James H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), pp2.59–60 (§138).

[27] Georges Foucart, "King (Egyptian)." In: James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethic* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908–26) pp7.712. Some scholars would say the one crowned had been divine from birth, and that "his coronation was not an apotheosis but an epiphany." Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1955) p5.

[28] W. G Lambert, "Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia" in John Day, ed. *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*. JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) pp54–70.

[29]*The Epic of Gilgamesh,* N. K Sanders, translator (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970) p59.

[30] Fossum, "Son of God" (1995), p1486.

[31] Fossum, "Son of God" (1995), p1488.

[32] Jarl Fossum, "Son of God" in: David Noel Freedman, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), pp6.128.

[33] Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods,* p51.

[34] Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (esp., pp3–12); Ivan Engnell,. *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967); John Baines, "Ancient Egyptian Kingship: Official Forms, Rhetoric, Context," pp41–46 (in Day, *King and Messiah,* pp16–53). Cf., 2 Sam. 21:1–14; Ps. 72.

[35] Note Ezekiel's critique of the divine claims of Tyre's king in Ezek. 28.

[36] David was made a "son of God" by adoption with the Holy Spirit filling him upon his anointing. Not surprisingly, one of the early Christian heresies conceived of Jesus as similarly a mere man "adopted" when the Holy Spirit filled him (this adoption usually being identified with his baptism; e.g., *Shepherd of Hermas* 6:5). This heresy (commonly called "Adoptionism") illustrates an early awareness that some of those called "son of God" in Scripture were so designated by the infilling of the Holy Spirit "adopting" them. But *Jesus'* sonship involved much more than that, as orthodox apologists affirmed in the early Creeds and Councils.

[37] John Day, "The Canaanite Inheritance of the Israelite Monarchy," pp81–6 (in Day, *King and Messiah,* pp72–90); Fossum, "Son of God" (1998), pp6.128–9; Aubrey R Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1967).

[38] Note how Paul, preaching to a synagogue of Jews in Pamphylia, applies Psalm 2 to Christ's *resurrection.* "We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'" (Acts 13:32–33; cf., Rom. 1:4; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). Though Jesus is eternally God, it was not with his birth or his baptism that he fulfilled the "*this day* I have begotten you" of Psalm 2, but on his victorious resurrection (cf., Php. 2:6–11; see Brown, "Son of God," pp46–7).

[39] Brown, "Son of God," p42. For a recent similar argument see Bradford Greer, "Revisiting "Son of God" (2012).

[40] Even as long ago as his 2000 paper, Brown affirmed, "The Scriptures ascribe divinity to Jesus in a variety of ways, but not by merely calling him 'the Son of God'," thereby affirming this title as one of Scripture's witnesses to Jesus' deity. Brown, "Son of God," p46. See also the list of misperceptions that Brown, Gray and Gray specifically denied in Brown, "New Look…", p 117-118.

[41] Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) pp2–9, 204.

[42] Baines explains that, in Egypt, it was recognized that only "full deities" existed in the divine domain, sometimes taking manifestations in the human realm, while the reigning pharaoh was only earthbound with no concurrent existence in the divine realm. Thus, according to Baines, Egypt's pharaohs were a "lesser deity." Nonetheless, as "a token of the divine in this world," pharaoh's divinity was still regarded as a *real* "manifestation of the world of the gods" on earth. (Baines, "Egyptian Kingship," pp16–24.)

[43] On a few occasions, Old Testament and inter-testamental writers even use intensely divine expressions—even more exalted than Son of God—for the awaited Messiah (e.g., Isa. 9:6; Ps. 45:7).

[44] See for example the charge in the online petition, http://www.change.org/petitions/lost-in-translation-keep-father-son-in-the-bible.

[45] Cf., Exod. 21:33–22:15; Rom. 14:5–10.

[46] Brown, "Part 1: Translating" (2005) and "Part II: Translating" (2005).

[47] The final point (#4) of the guided process in the Best Practices states, "If no possible option [for a literal rendering] has been identified through this process, non-literal options for the text may be considered which conserve as much of the familial meaning as possible, provided that the paratext includes the literal form."

[48] Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look," p117.

[49] "*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.*" (Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look," p107. Emphasis original.)

[50] Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look," p107. (Emphasis original.)

[51] Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look," p109. (Emphasis added.)

[52] Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look," p115 (Emphasis original.)

[53] Brown, Gray and Gray, "A New Look," p107.

[54] This is especially true where the title is used for Jesus, but might also be understood in reference to others. The bestowing of the Spirit upon God's people is a real bestowing of God's presence, so that 1 John 3:9 even speaks of believers in the profoundly biological language of having "God's sperm" in them.

[55] The Arabic word *tawhiid* is an infinitive of the intensified form of the verb that means to be one.

[56] See in this vein Matthew Carlton, "Jesus, The Son of God: Biblical Meaning, Muslim Understanding, and Implications For Translation and Bible Literacy," *St. Francis Magazine*, 7:3 (2011), especially pp10–17, available from http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/Matthew%20Carlton%20August%202011.pdf, and Fred Faroukh, "Is the Scandal for Muslims the *How* or the *Who*?," *St. Francis Magazine*, 8:2 (2012) pp213–24 available from http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/7-SFMFred%20Farrokh.pdf.

[57] The Qur'an calls *shirk* the unforgivable sin. See for example Suurat Al-Nisa (4), verses 48 and 116.

[58] One colleague highlighted the role of deceptive Muslim apologists in stirring up negative reactions. "I have met many [for whom Son of God] is not an issue, and it seems mainly because they have not been taught the negative reading." Private communication, 14 May 2012.

[59] See the examples documented in Rick Brown, "Why Muslims Are Repelled by the Term 'Son of God'", *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (October 2007). Even these examples raise the question of whether the response was genuinely spontaneous or was generated by Muslim religious leaders who seized on Son of God for other purposes.

[60] By witnesses we do not mean foreign missionaries exclusively or even primarily. God is raising up witnesses from the Muslim world for the Muslim world.

[61] We are not suggesting that anyone is explicitly arguing for self-interpreting translations that will not require a human witness. To our knowledge, no one in this controversy is making that case *explicitly*. However, we believe there is an implicit effort to make translations less dependent on a human witness by trying to resolve more at the translation level than possible or necessary. It is that implicit effort which we seek to address.

[62] The Best Practices statement does allude to this point in its opening line: "Bible Translation is an integral part [of] the worldwide Church's participation in God's mission."

[63] By extension, Father for God should also be translated word-for-word with common language equivalents. We have not dealt with Father directly in this article, but the translation of Son of God is intimately related to the translation of Father in relation to the Son.

[64] http://biblicalmissiology.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/LostInTranslation-FactCheck.pdf