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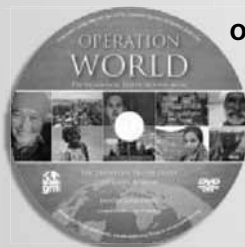
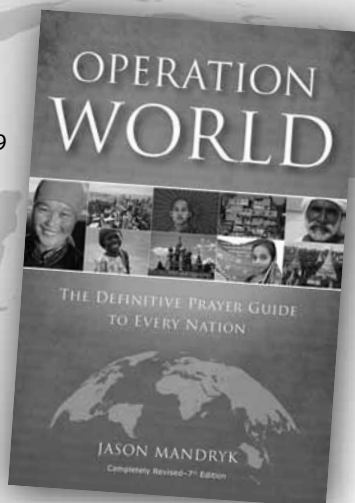
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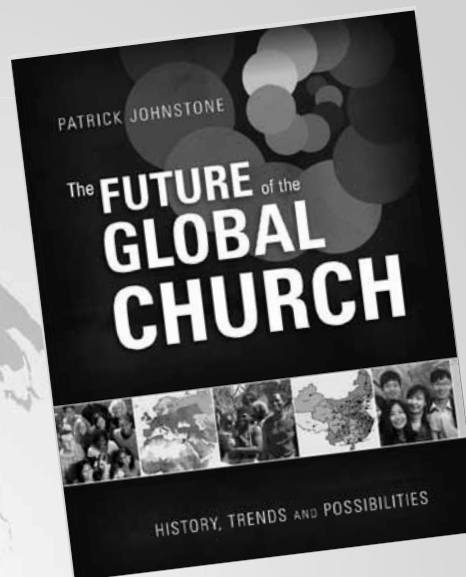


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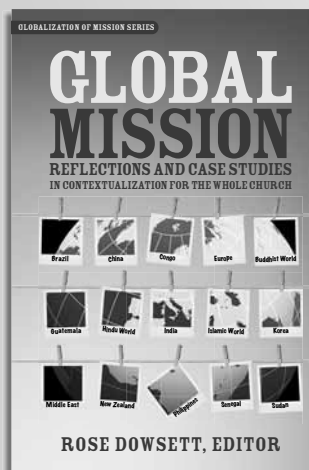
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Loaded Language

Translation is an earmark of the Christian movement. The ‘terms of translation’ were determined from the outset. The Incarnation anchored those terms theologically, and Pentecost’s diversity humbled any assumption of a sacred language. Hebrew had already surrendered to Greek and the original Scriptures were written in a different language than its founder’s. The onus was on any language to prove its religious superiority. Over the centuries, it took another monotheism’s sanction of one singular language—a regional dialect of Arabic—to contrast so markedly with Christianity’s natural abandon in translating this gospel of Jesus Christ. The Reformation’s *sola scriptura* overcame a centuries-old Latin dominance in the heartland of Christendom and the DNA of Protestant mission became first and foremost to translate the scriptures into the mother tongue. For the past half a century, the tools of linguistic science have been harnessed in a breathtaking advance in translation efforts.

Quite suddenly, the ‘terms of translation’ of this noble enterprise are under public review and censure. This is true *in principle* and for actual *words*. The pre-eminence of meaning-based translation, which is the practice and orientation of all good translators, has hit a force field of reaction in applying these same principles to the translation of terms such as “Son of God” for languages spoken by Muslim peoples.¹ Over fourteen centuries, this term became an identity marker between Muslim and Christian. It has implicated any dialogue with Muslims, evidenced in the early attempts of John of Damascus and the Patriarch Timothy to communicate the divinity of Christ and the nature of the Trinity in the face of Muslim misunderstandings of the term ‘Son’.² Such a long history reveals how the inter-religious contexts of Muslim and Christian have skewed terminology towards dichotomy, reduction and distortion. The heat of this religious rivalry has welded certain terms with certain meanings, and solidified unfortunate connotations in the mix. And behind all the historic theological resistance and confusion are the unintended meanings set off by hidden cultural nuance in the translation process. This is the real pitfall in Muslim-Christian dialogue. Language gets loaded—or at least certain terms do—and these phrases become so very difficult to unpack.

Editorial continued on p. 104

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In earlier articles Rick Brown described several approaches people have used to communicate the biblical meaning of 'Son of God' in Muslim contexts.³ More recent critiques call for a more careful examination of how we guard the meaning of filial language in the translation process. Rick is joined by colleagues Leith and Andrea Gray in offering a 'new look' at this subject (p. 105). This article has gone through a gauntlet of New Testament scholars who recommended that the authors also provide an appendix dealing specifically with the biblical terms of filial relations (p. 121).

It's important that we get below this radioactive religious encounter between Muslim and Christian to the more basic complexity of meaning in language. You'll note that the *Forum for Bible Agencies International* is oriented towards meaning-based translation (p. 149). They assume that words are loaded with meaning and that accuracy requires one to investigate and choose from a field of meanings. Donna Toulmin attempts to frame the different dimensions of meaning we find in those special biblical terms that

provide a backbone to our theology (p. 127). She explores how translators handled the much less controversial title "Son of Man" among a Hindu people. You'll note that in one dimension, the "thought world", she faces a startling contrast between her context and most Muslim contexts.

Finally, Roy Ciampa wants us to consider how the 'direct transferability' of biblical terms can breed unfortunate consequences (p. 139). This New Testament scholar is concerned that our cultural or personal ideologies can drive how we correlate biblical terms with our own contexts. Political power, economic interest, and profound moral concerns can blind us to how we inappropriately select, interpret and apply biblical terms. He highlights some historical and contemporary examples from our English-speaking world that may help us 'feel' just how easily ideology can muddy our use of terms.

As editor, I invite your responses on this subject of translation (brad.gill@ijfm.org). We're conscious that many are engaged in dialogue over these translation mat-

ters, and we hope to include further exchange and different points of view in future issues of the journal. We do apologize that we're still tardy in our publication schedule, but we should be caught up by the end of January 2012.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ Emily Belz, "Holding Translators Accountable", *World Magazine*, Oct. 8, 2011, pp. 45-47; Collin Hansen, "The Son and the Crescent", *Christianity Today*, Feb. 2011, pp. 19-23.

² In John's own writing on heresies, he emphasizes the divinity of Christ, not by separating the Christian God from Allah, nor by insisting on using the term 'Son', but through an understanding of Christ as the incarnation of the Word of God, and that this Word is one with the very being of God. [John of Damascus, *Writings (Fount of Knowledge)*, trans. Jr. Frederic H. Chase (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1958) p. 745.] On the Patriarch Timothy, see Samuel Moffett, *The History of Christianity in Asia: Volume One* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998) pp. 349-354.

³ Rick Brown, "Explaining the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts", Part One (*IJFM* 22:3, July-Sept. 2005) pp. 91-96; Part Two (*IJFM* 22:4, Oct.-Dec. 2005) pp. 135-145.

The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The *World Consultation on Frontier Missions* and the *International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions*. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.

A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms

by Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray

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 ESV¹). 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

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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' *patēr* "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 *patēr* "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 *patēr* 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 *ab* “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

To express divine familial relationships, the Bible uses Greek and Hebrew social familial terms that do not necessarily demand biological meanings

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

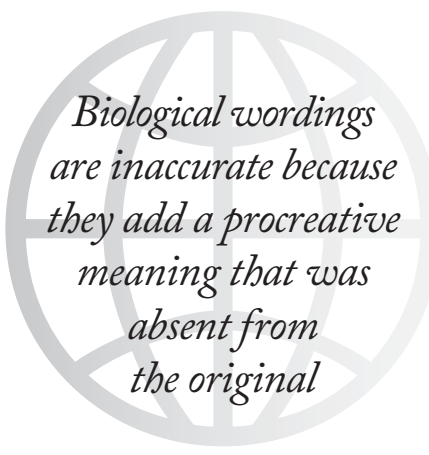
audience comprehension of translated passages that use a variety of expressions for the terms to find out which expressions best enable the audience to understand the original concepts without communicating unintended informational content, feelings, or attitudes.¹¹ Translators continue to revise the 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 *patēr* 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



*Biological wordings
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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.

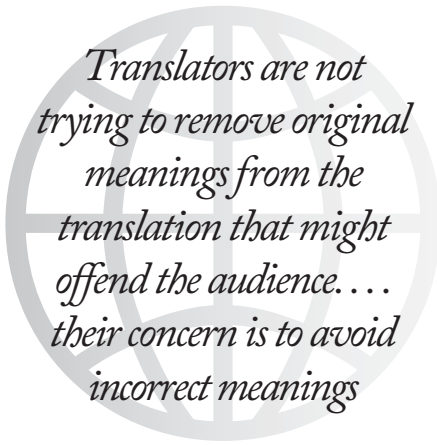
Many speakers of English have little familiarity with linguistic diversity, and this leads them to mistakenly assume that their English words and phrases must have look-alike counterparts in other languages, with the same meanings and the same frequencies of usage; they then assume that if an expression 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



Translators are not trying to remove original meanings from the translation that might offend the audience. . . . their concern is to avoid incorrect meanings

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).

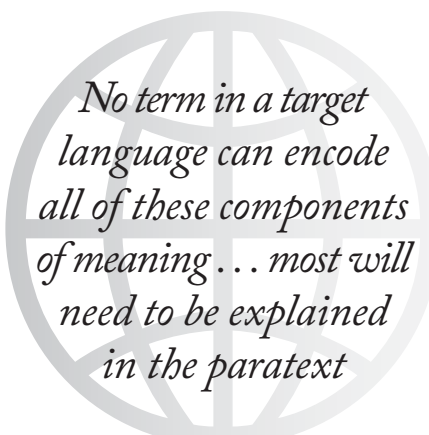
Thirdly, the Bible describes relationships within the Kingdom of God in familial terms all through the Bible. They are used to describe not only relations within the Trinity, but the relationship of believers to God as their loving father and to one another as brothers and sisters in “the household of 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/huiois*, 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

In 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.”

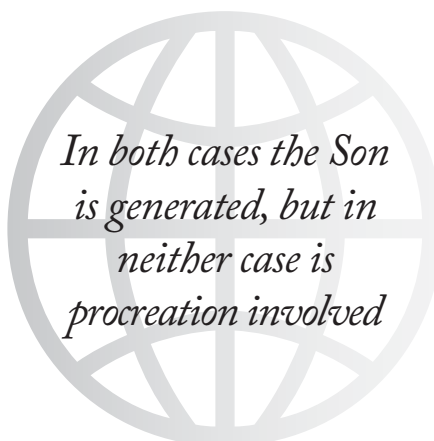
In some of these languages people refer to their children with phrases of the form “my family,” “my household,” and “members of my family.” Expressions like these are non-biological in most languages because a family or household can include children-in-law, stepchildren, and adopted children as well 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



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 *wali*. 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, *wali*, 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

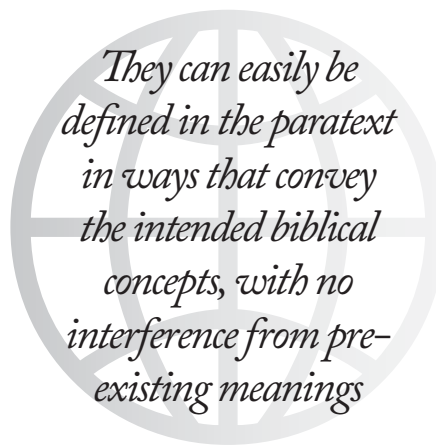
over an extended family that includes his children-in-law and the like, so his relationship to family members does not have to be biological but signifies a fatherly role of care and authority. For this reason some translations have used it to express the fatherhood of God towards his people, regarding 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 *from* the essence of God and with being sent *from* 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



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

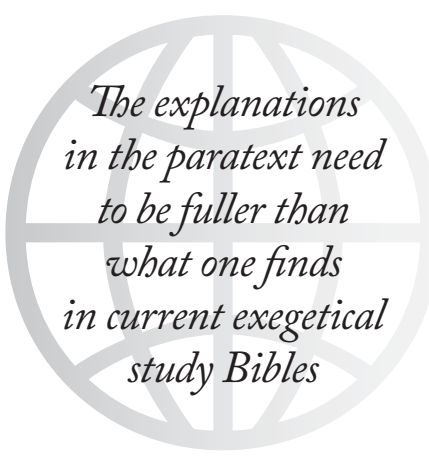
biological procreation. This also fits the Bible's description of believers as Christ's "co-heirs."

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 monogenēs* "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
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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

The 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

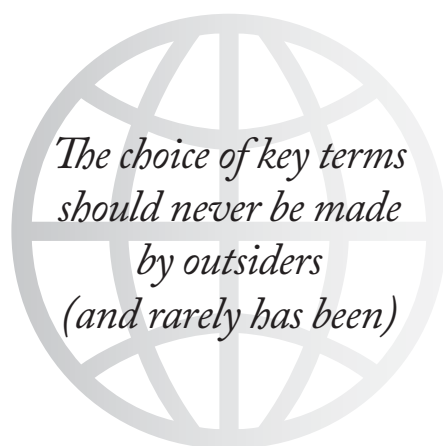
relations but lack a full set of terms for social familial relationships, just terms for loved ones, family, head of family, and firstborn or heir. In a few cases producers of Bible stories for such languages sought to avoid the unbiblical biological meanings by expressing the mediatorial component of 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 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 (*patēr* 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

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all English Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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: *huiōi* “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 Rahmān and his Christ and the Holy Spirit.” For photo and discussion see Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum; Pars Quarta: Inscriptions Himyariticas Et Sabaeas Continentes* (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 Rahmān 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 *wali* 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 *wali* 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>>

A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible

by Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray

In “A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms,” appearing in this issue, we stated that the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible express divine familial relationships by using general and social familial terms rather than biological terms. In what follows we offer a more detailed analysis of familial terms in the biblical languages. We will begin with a review of biological and social kinship terms, then move into an explanation of absolute nouns, relational nouns, and terms of address. We will then look at filial and paternal terms, as well as terms for generation in the Bible. Through these examples, we will show that Hebrew and Greek use social terms for the divine familial relations, arguing that modern Bible translations should follow the Hebrew and Greek by using expressions in the target language for general or social familial relations.

Categories of Familial Terms

The ideal in translation is to find target-language expressions that match the original-language terms in scope of meaning. With regard to terms that describe familial relations, there is a need to distinguish between terms that signify a biological familial relationship and ones that signify a social familial relationship or more generally a familial relation of any kind. These categories are summarized in Table 1.

Terms for biological family members signify kinship relations based on procreation, such as *biological child* in English, while terms for social family members signify ongoing familial relations whether they are biological in origin or not. English words like *father* and *son* cover the whole range; hence they denote both

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Table 1: Categories of familial relations

General familial relations (broad scope)		
	Social relations	
Biological relations		
biological, non-social	biological, social	non-biological, social

biological sons and adopted sons or stepsons, biological fathers and adoptive fathers, parenting (social) fathers and absentee fathers. Anthropologists use the terms *genitor* and *genitrix* for a biological father and mother, and *procreator* for both, and the terms *pater* and *mater* for a social father and mother.

Relational Nouns Versus Absolute Nouns and Terms of Address

Languages make a distinction between absolute nouns like *man*, which signify a property of something, as in *John is a man*, and relational nouns like *friend*, which signify a relation between two things, as in *John is a friend of Jack*, or *Jack and John are friends*. Languages commonly derive relational nouns from absolute nouns, with an accompanying change of meaning. In English the absolute noun *child* (*Sammy is a child*) signifies a human less than 14 years old, whereas the relational noun *child* signifies a familial relationship irrespective of age, as in *Sammy is Gertrude's child*.

Languages also derive terms of address from relational nouns, as when someone addresses another person as "friend." Terms of address usually express politeness or social distance rather than a relationship, as when one addresses a stranger as "friend," "son," or "sir." Thus they are used more broadly than their relational noun counterparts.

In a semantic analysis of nouns, therefore, it is important to keep in mind that absolute nouns (e.g., "look at that *child*"), relational nouns (e.g., "this is my *child*"), and terms of address (e.g., "Yes, *child*?") have different scopes of meaning, even where they have the same form (i.e., *c-h-i-l-d*). So one cannot assume the meaning of a noun in one class is exactly the same as a noun of the same form in another class, unless there is clear evidence for such usage. For example, a term of address like "my son" is used in Greek and He-

brew to address people who are merely friends or even just strangers seeking help; this does not entail, however, that the meaning of the relational noun *huios*, as in "he is my *son*," can also mean "friend" or "suppliant," because it is a different class of noun, with different meanings. One has to investigate how a relational noun is actually used and not assume it is the same as its counterparts in other classes, because usually it is different.

Filial Terms in Hebrew and Greek

There are multiple terms to consider with regard to familial relationships. In Biblical Hebrew, the absolute noun *yeled* signifies a male child or youth, but the relational noun *yeled* (same spelling) signifies a kinship relation of biological son (e.g., 2 Kings 4:1). Another word from the same root, *môledet*, can signify offspring of any gender (Gen. 48:6) or other consanguineous relatives (Gen. 24:4). The absolute Hebrew word *bên* signifies a boy, and the plural form signifies children (Isa. 13:18) or youth (Prov. 7:7), while context can add a familial meaning (Gen. 3:16). The relational noun *ben* (different spelling) usually signifies a filial social relation. Unlike the relational noun *yeled*, which signifies a biological relationship to a biological father (genitor), the relational noun *ben* signifies any kind of filial relationship, whether biological in origin (Gen. 4:17) or not (Exod. 2:10), but usually it involves an active social relationship to parents, with rights to inheritance. Since a *ben* is a social son, his sonship and rights can be transferred from a biological father to a non-biological father (Gen. 48:5).

Beyond the family *ben* signifies sonlike subordinate relations to an authority figure. Examples of *ben* with the meaning of a close subordinate include "disciples of the prophets," (2 Kings 2:3) "followers of a fortune-teller" (Isa. 57:3), "officials of the king," "people of God" (Deut. 14:1), "nation of God" (Exod. 4:22), "God's man" (on the

throne) (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7; 89:27). There are additional usages as well, in which Hebrew uses *ben* "son of" where English would use "man of" or "person of," such as "people of the east" (1 Kings 4:30), "people of Zion (Jerusalem)" (Lam. 4:2), "people of a foreign country" (Isa. 56:6), "people of Israel" (Exod. 1:7), "members of the choir" (Neh. 12:28), "man of malice" (Ps. 89:22), "man of forty years (old)" (Gen. 25:20), etc. According to Strong's Concordance, the King James Version, in spite of being a "literal" translation, translates *ben* over a hundred different ways in English.

The usage of *huios* in Judeo-Greek often followed that in Hebrew, so we find *huios* where Jesus would have used the word *ben*, or its Aramaic counterpart *bar*. Examples are when he mentioned "attendants of the bridegroom" (Mark 2:19), "members of the Kingdom" (Matt. 8:12), "officials of the king" (Matt. 17:25), "people of this age" (Luke 20:34), "people who belong to the evil one" (Matt. 13:38; cf. 1 John 3:10), and "disciples of a teacher" (Matt. 12:27), all of which translate Greek *huios*. Adam is presented as God's son, evidently because God created him (Luke 3:38). In the wider Greek context, writers used *huios* for non-biological relations as well. According to Irenaeus (180 AD), "when any person has been taught from the mouth of another, he is termed the son of him who instructs him, and the latter [is called] his father."¹ In this vein Peter refers to Mark as his son (1 Pet. 5:13), and Paul refers to Timothy in similar terms (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; cf. 1 John 2:1; 3 John 4).

When *ben* is used in reference to a social son, that sonship could have been generated by procreation (Gen. 11:31), adoption (Exod. 2:10), levirate law (Ruth 4:17), or marriage (1 Sam. 26:17-25). Children can also be inherited from deceased relatives (Esther 2:7). A clear example of the distinction between biological and social sonship occurs in the book of

Ruth, in which Naomi's biological sons are each described as her *yeled* "biological son" (Ruth 1:5), but Obed, her levirate son whom Ruth bore for her, is described as Naomi's *ben* "social son" (Ruth 4:17). In the same way, when the Bible says that Isaac was Abraham's *ben yachid* "only son" (Gen. 22:2, 12, 16; Heb. 11:17), it means his only social son, because Abraham had another biological son, his *yeled* Ishmael, but he had sent Ishmael away with his mother when he divorced her (Gen. 21:14). When the Hebrew Bible talks of people being "sons of God" it uses *ben*, not *yeled*, and *ben* is obviously the suitable word for people who are social sons of God but not his biological sons. When the Greek Bible talks of people being "sons of God" it uses *huios*, the broad word for son, not *gennêma* "offspring." Jesus is described as God's *huios* "son", but with regard to his biological ancestors he is often described as their *sperma* "offspring" (Gal. 3:16, 19; 2 Tim. 2:8; Acts 3:25; 13:23; cf. Gen. 3:15). To his stepfather Joseph he is described, not as Joseph's *sperma* "offspring," but as his *huios* "social son" (John 1:45). Again, in a normal biological family, the fathers and sons are both social and biological at the same time, but in some cases they are not related biologically, and if they have been disowned or abandoned, then they are no longer related socially.² These are shown in Table 2.

There are some additional sonship terms worth noting. The Hebrew relational noun *zera'* means the same as English "offspring" (Gen. 3:15; 4:25), but it can also denote heirs (Ps. 89:29). Hebrew *yachid*, from the word for "one," usually means "only son" and is so translated into English (Gen. 22:2; Prov. 4:3; Jer. 6:26; Amos 8:10). In the Greek Old Testament this was translated as *agapêtos* "beloved one," which as a masculine relational noun means "only son." Sometimes it was translated as *monogenês* "only child" (Judg. 11:34), which is derived from roots meaning "one of a kind." One

Hebrew and Greek have relational nouns that signify a biological son, but they are not used in the Bible to express divine sonship

finds both words in the New Testament with the meaning of an "only son" (Luke 9:38; Heb. 11:17; Mark 12:6). More importantly, however, the Greek New Testament uses both *monogenês* "the One-and-only (Son)" (John 1:14) and *ho êgapêmenos* (= *agapêtos*) "the Beloved (Son)" (Eph. 1:6; cf. Col. 1:13; Matt. 12:18) to signify the unique divine sonship of Jesus. It also signifies the uniqueness of his sonship by using the article of uniqueness: "the Son" (of God).³ This is used alongside *ho agapêtos* "the Beloved" in a number of passages (e.g., Matt. 3:17). Similarly Hebrew *bechôr* and Greek *prôtotokos* "firstborn (son)" are used for a unique filial relationship that often included authority over the father's household. In Psalm 89:27 it signifies the preeminent authority of the Davidic king—and by extension his descendent and heir, the Messiah—over all other kings. In Colossians 1:18 this is made explicit of Christ as the firstborn. All of these terms signify a unique filial relationship without entailing procreative generation. Yet they do not exclude generation, and they are compatible with both eternal and incarnational generation, which a biological term would exclude.

Like many other languages, Hebrew and Greek derive terms of address from familial terms and use them far outside the scope of familial relations. In 2 Samuel 8:22, for example, when Joab wanted Ahimaaz the son of Zadok to hearken to his well-meaning

advice, he addressed him in a friendly way as *bni* "my son." When Jesus addressed the paralytic who had been lowered through the roof, he no doubt used *bni* or *bri*, which Mark translated as *teknon*, ESV "son," RSV "my son," but Luke translated it as *phile*, ESV "friend." There is no evidence of a previous social relationship between the paralytic and Jesus, so the term of address expresses Jesus' compassion for the man. Elisha addresses his mentor Elijah as *âbi* "my father" (2 Kings 2:12). Later, when the king of Israel asks Elisha for guidance, he addresses him as *âbi* "my father" (2 Kings 6:21). Similarly Greek uses *patêr* as a respectful term of address for older men (Luke 16:27; Acts 22:1; translating Hebrew or Aramaic). It expresses politeness rather than a relationship, although a father-son relationship is often the basis of the politeness.

In summary, Hebrew and Greek have relational nouns that signify a biological son, but they are not used in the Bible to express divine sonship. The commonly used filial terms, Hebrew *ben* and Greek *huios*, signify a son, usually social, whether generated by procreation, by marriage, by inheritance, by adoption, by teaching and mentoring, by patronage, or by faith and grace (Gal. 4:19). These are the terms used in the Bible to express divine sonship, along with the terms for an only son and a firstborn son. These are social as well, because they signify an ongoing relationship

Table 2: Categories of filial relations and corresponding Greek and Hebrew terms

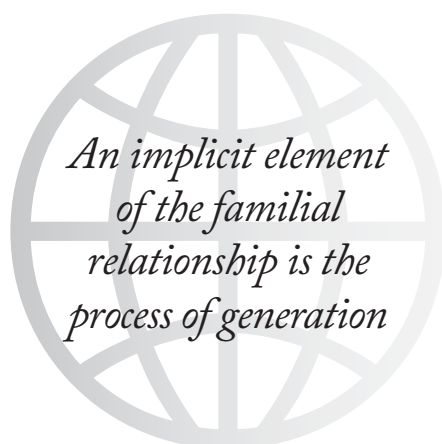
General filial relations (Greek <i>huios</i>)		
Social filial relations (Hebrew <i>ben</i>)		
Biological filial relations (Hebrew <i>môledet</i> , <i>yeled</i> ; Greek <i>gennêma</i>)		
biological, non-social	biological, social	non-biological, social

regardless of its manner of origin. In translation, if the target language has a filial expression for social sonship or general sonship, i.e., one that does not entail procreative generation when used to express divine sonship, then this would be the closest semantic equivalent, whether it consists of one word or a phrase. The use of strictly biological terms to express divine sonship is therefore inaccurate.

Paternal Terms in Hebrew and Greek

Biblical Hebrew has three words for father: (1) The word *yōlēd* (Prov. 17:21; Dan. 11:6) signifies “genitor, biological father” and corresponds to *yeled*, which means “biological son” in relational constructions. (2) The word *hōr* (Gen. 49:26) signifies “procreator, biological parent.” (3) The word *âb* signifies “father” in the general sense, including “paternal figure” (Gen. 45:8), and it is by far the most commonly used of these terms. *Âb* is often used to describe a paternal relation based on procreation (Gen. 20:12), but the term can extend to a grandfather (Gen. 28:13), an ancestor (Gen. 10:21; Deut. 26:5), or a progenitor (Gen. 36:9). So it can extend to biological ancestors with whom there is no active social relation. It can also extend socially to God as the one who created Israel and continues to nurture them (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 64:8).⁴

Biblical Greek has the word *goneus* for “biological parent” (John 9:2), but the commonly used term is *patēr*, which signifies a father in general, whether biological or not. It corresponds to Hebrew *âb* in the Old Testament and has the same scope of



meaning. The paternal relationship can result from marriage rather than procreation, as when Mary calls Joseph the “father” of Jesus (Luke 2:48), meaning his stepfather.⁵

Both the Hebrew *âb* and Greek *patēr* can signify a nurturing father, as opposed to one who merely procreates children, and often it is the paternal nurture itself that is in focus.⁶ When the text says that Esther “had neither father nor mother” (Esther 2:7), it does not mean the young woman had no procreators but that she had no parents taking care of her, since they had died, so she was “raised” by her uncle Mordecai “as his own daughter.” This paternal relationship can extend beyond strictly familial contexts, as when Job says he is a “father to the needy” (Job 29:16), and when Eliakim is appointed by God to be “a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah” (Isa. 22:21). These terms are shown in Table 3.

With regard to Jesus, the Messianic king is said to be an “eternal father” to his people (Isa. 9:6), and indeed Jesus addressed his followers as “my

son” (Matt. 9:2), “my daughter” (Matt. 9:22), and “children” (John 21:5, said to the apostles). God is described in caring terms as “father of the fatherless” (Ps. 68:5) and “father to Israel” (Jer. 31:9), which includes being their protector (Isa. 63:16). He is “father” to his “people,” and they are his “sons and daughters” (2 Cor. 6:16, 18). The nurturing aspect of divine fatherhood is explicit in several passages: “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him” (Ps. 103:13). This nurture includes discipline, for “the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:12).

The social scope of *âb/patēr* “father” extends to mentors and masters, just as the social scope of *ben/huios* “son” extends to their disciples and close subordinates. God made Joseph *âb* “father” to Pharaoh, guiding both his household and his kingdom. The king of Syria appeals to Elisha in filial terms (2 Kings 8:9), treating Elisha as his spiritual father. King Ahaz appeals to his patron the king of Assyria in similar terms (2 Kings 16:7), acknowledging his subordinate dependency. Paul describes himself as “father” to the believers in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:15), and he describes Abraham as “father” to all who believe (Rom. 4:11, 16).

When God appoints a king over his people, God himself is father to the king (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:26), and that king is his son (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7) and first-born (Ps. 89:27). It is clear from all this that God’s fatherhood is both social and non-biological. At the same time God does generate sons non-biologically through creation, namely Adam (Luke 3:38; cf. Gen. 5:1–3) and Israel (Deut. 32:6; Mal. 2:10) and through the spiritual rebirth of adoption (John 3:3–8; Rom. 8:15). God’s eternal Son was generated in eternity, outside of time, as light from light (Heb. 1:3; see next section). The primarily social nature of

Table 3: Categories of paternal relations and corresponding Greek and Hebrew Terms

General paternal relations (Greek <i>patēr</i> ; Hebrew <i>âb</i>)		
Social paternal relations (Greek <i>patēr</i> ; Hebrew <i>âb</i>)		
Biological paternal relations (Hebrew <i>yōlēd</i> , <i>hōr</i> ; Greek <i>goneus</i>)		
biological, non-social	biological, social	non-biological, social

âb/patêr is evident when Jesus says, “And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven” (Matt. 23:9).

In summary, Hebrew and Greek have relational nouns that denoted biological sons or fathers, equivalent to English *biological son* and *biological father*. Hebrew and Greek also have relational nouns, similar in meaning to English *father* and *son*, that denote a range of familial relationships, many of which do not involve a biological generation. So in translating such terms, if the original context excludes procreative generation, then it is inaccurate to use target-language expressions that imply it as part of their meaning.

Terms for Generation in Hebrew and Greek

An implicit element of the familial relationship is the process of generation. Hebrew uses the verb *yâlad* for this. The first instance is found at Genesis 5:3, which says, “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered [*yâlad*] a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.” Although *yâlad* is related to *yeled* in origin, it is not restricted in meaning to procreating offspring but can signify the generation of filial relationships by other means as well. God is said to have fathered the people of Israel (Deut. 32:18), who are therefore his (non-biological) sons and daughters (v. 19). He fathered his anointed king (Ps. 2:7), who is his son, by empowering him to be king, and this verse finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ (cf. Acts 13:33; Heb. 5:5; 1:4-5; Isa. 9:6). The Jews of Jesus’ day were awaiting the time when God would “generate the Messiah” in this sense (Dead Sea Scrolls 1Q28a, using the verb *yâlad*). Going beyond the family, godless men are said to generate trouble (Job 15:35), while no one knows what events a day will generate (Prov. 27:1).

The corresponding Greek term is *gennaô*, and like the Hebrew, it is not restricted in meaning to procreative

Both the Hebrew âb and Greek patêr can signify a nurturing father, as opposed to one who merely procreates children

generation (as in Matt. 1:2). It can signify any form of generation, even the generation of quarrels (2 Tim. 2:23). Jesus described the new world as a “regeneration” (Matt. 19:28). Paul says he fathered [*gennaô*] the Corinthian church through the Gospel, and they are therefore his (non-biological) children (1 Cor. 4:14-15). He speaks similarly to the churches in Galatia (Gal. 4:19). Paul tells Philemon that Onesimus is now his child because he fathered [*gennaô*] him in prison, meaning he led him to faith in Christ. More importantly, those who believe in Christ are “regenerated” (Titus 3:5) and born [*gennaô*] of God and become his children (John 1:12-13; 1 John 5:1; James 1:18). Paul said “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15). So believers become non-biological sons to God.

The Bible reports two additional and unique forms of generation. The first is the eternal generation of God’s Word/Wisdom/Son (Prov. 8:22-26; Mic. 5:2), who is Christ (1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Col. 2:3), through Whom he created all things (Prov. 8:27-31; Ps. 33:6; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2) who is the radiance of God’s glory (Heb. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:6). The second unique form of generation is the incarnation (John 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 2:6-7; Heb. 2:14; 1 Tim. 3:16), which involves a biological generation from Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), without sexual procreation, and without a biological relation to God. Both generations are mentioned in the Nicene Creed, and the fifth ecumenical council (553 AD) ruled that to be orthodox one must “confess that the Word of God has two nativities” (Canon 2).

Conclusion

The Hebrew and Greek terms used in expressions for divine fatherhood and divine sonship signify social familial relations and do not require an interpretation of procreated generation. The challenge for translators is to find expressions in their target languages that have a similar scope of meaning. **UJM**

Endnotes

¹ See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.41.

² Biological sonship was no guarantee of social sonship in the ancient world, nor was non-biological sonship a lesser bond. Under the law of the Roman empire, a biological son could be disowned, but an adopted son could not be disowned. See William M. Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1997) p. 102.

³ When a form like *the* is used to indicate that something is one of a kind, it is called an article of uniqueness, e.g., *the sun* or *the current president of the USA*.

⁴ See the entry for אב in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr, and Bruce K. Waltke (eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980). They write, “*âb* may designate any man who occupies a position or receives recognition similar to that of a father.”

⁵ David addresses his father-in-law Saul as *âbi* “my father” (1 Sam. 24:12), but that is a term of address and might signify politeness to an elder or to a king as well as to a father-in-law.

⁶ See the entry for πατήρ (*patêr*) in Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Harper, 1889), which begins by saying the word is “from the root, πα; literally, nourisher, protector, upholder.” In other words, it originates as a description of a paternal social role rather than a biological begetting role. A striking example of the term’s use for paterfamilias is noted in Moulton, James Hope and Milligan, George, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980) in which a man calls his eldest brother *patêr* because his brother is the head of the family.

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— Miriam Adeney, PhD, Associate professor of World Christian Studies, Seattle Pacific

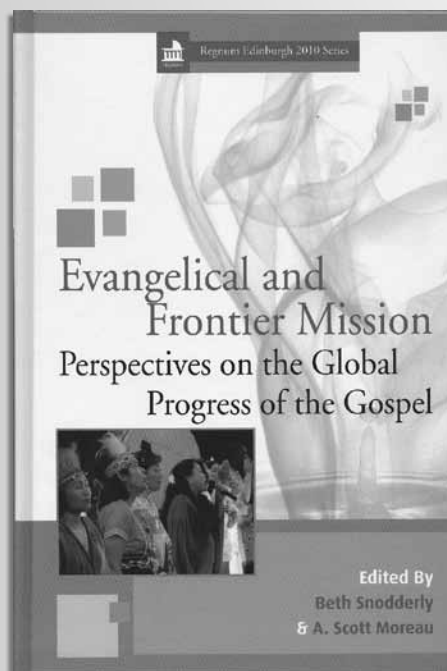
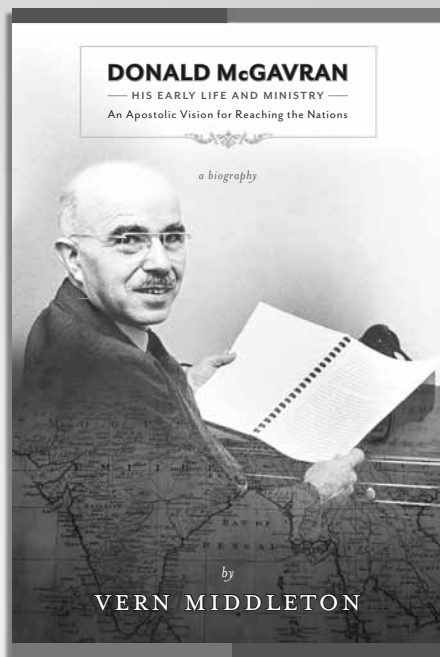
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When “Literal” is Inaccurate: A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Translating Scripture Meaningfully

by Donna Toulmin

Is a literal translation always the most accurate? What is “meaning” and how can translators communicate it accurately? How can translators capture the full meaning of the text?

Throughout this past year a team of Angika language speakers translated the first ever book of the Bible into their mother tongue. As part of the process, they considered *how to translate “key” Biblical terms* which are rich in theological meaning, such as “Messiah”, “Kingdom of God” or “Son of Man”. One day as they met with their translation consultant, the discussion turned to one of these key terms. They suggested a word from their language which might be appropriate, explained the basic dictionary meaning and asked the consultant, “Is it correct?” The consultant’s mind raced through various considerations, and she responded, “There are so many more things we need to think about before we can say whether this is the best term to use here. The dictionary meaning is not all we need to know!”

But what else do we need to know? What are the different dimensions of meaning we should look for when interpreting the Bible’s meaning and translating it into another language? This paper is an attempt to clarify *what we need to consider before we can answer the question “Is the translation correct?”*

What are Key Terms?

Key terms are the words in the Bible which are crucial for understanding the meaning of the whole Bible, such as “sacrifice”, “temple”, “God” and so on. They are very important to translate well. In fact, they’re the type of words that if the meaning is slightly wrong, the whole Bible can be misunderstood. Some people refer to them as the “theological backbone” of a translation.

The meaning of key terms can be very complicated either for theological reasons (e.g. English words like “righteousness”, “God”, “faith” or “atonement”) or for cultural reasons (words like “synagogue”, “mercy”, or “tabernacle”). Terms like

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these are very difficult to translate while still communicating the meaning accurately and completely.

What is Accuracy? ESV vs NLT

I’m sure you’ve noticed that lots of translations claim to be “accurate” translations. Let’s compare two translations, each which claims in their preface to be an accurate translation into English.

From the preface to the <i>English Standard Version</i>	From the preface to the <i>New Living Translation</i> (2nd Ed.)
[In the ESV] faithfulness to the text and vigorous pursuit of accuracy were combined with simplicity, beauty, and dignity of expression.	[NLT is]...a general-purpose translation that is accurate, easy to read, and excellent for study.

But these two translations are very different. Compare their translations of Matthew 3:8.

Matthew 3:8 ESV	Matthew 3:8 NLT
Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.	Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.

Clearly, there are differences in the translations of these two verses. “Can they both be accurate?” Some people would say: “No! The NLT is not accurate here. The ESV has translated the text better.” Others would say “No! The ESV is not accurate here, the NLT has better captured the meaning of the text”.

My answer to this question is “Yes! They might both be accurate, but in different ways. They’re pursuing different types of accuracy, different types of equivalency, and different types of meaning.”

You might be familiar with the continuum of English translation styles in Figure 1.¹ On the left are very literal types of translation, towards the middle more meaning-based styles, and towards the right the translations are freer and are often called “adaptations” or “paraphrases”.

This way of thinking about translation has its place; it’s useful for thinking about how literal or otherwise a translation is. However, when thinking about meaning, it’s not so helpful. This is a one-dimensional diagram, and it’s represented just as a line. But meaning is multidimensional and can’t be fully described with just a line. The fact that meaning is multidimensional is what makes languages rich and beautiful, but it’s also what makes translation difficult.

I have formulated eight dimensions of meaning which I think are helpful for translators to keep in mind. I came up with these dimensions via two avenues. Firstly, I observed talented translators do actual translation work. These dimensions are what they tend to consider when thinking about how to translate something. The other avenue was by reading literature about translation styles and analyzing the reasons why people thought one translation style was superior to another. I observed certain tendencies there.² I have assimilated all that information, and these are the eight dimensions of meaning I came up with.

If you are a translator, or an exegete, or you just have an interest in how God’s word is translated today, I hope these dimensions of meaning can be a helpful tool for you. As I explain each dimension, I’ll show you how each can be applied to a particular example in a particular language. The language is the Angika language,

spoken in Bihar, India. The translators, who are all Angika themselves, want this translation to communicate to the Hindu Angika speakers who know basically nothing about first century Jewish culture or theology.

The example I’d like to use is their attempt to translate the phrase “the Son of Man” in Luke 5:24, the story of the paralyzed man:

“But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home” (Luke 5:24 NIV).

Of course, we’re not translating the English phrase “the Son of Man”, but *rather* the Greek phrase “ho huioi tou anthrwpon” *Yet*, I’ll more often write “the Son of Man”, because that is more familiar to most English speakers. But do keep in mind that we’re not translating the English phrase as we understand it, but the Greek phrase as we believe it was understood by the people who were listening to Jesus, as well as the people for whom Luke was writing his gospel.

Please keep in mind, as well, that my intention in this paper is not to render a full exegesis of the phrase “Son of Man”. I am certainly not an expert in all these dimensions, but I simply want to illustrate the method by which this exegesis can be done. In fact, one of the benefits of this method of exegesis and translation is that it is useful in illuminating the areas in which one’s understanding of the text is lacking.

Dimensions of Meaning

Lexical Meaning

The first dimension is one that people will be most familiar with: lexical meaning. This is the meaning of each

Figure 1: English Translation Styles

Essentially Literal			Dynamic Equivalent			Paraphrase	
NASB	KJV NKJV ESV	NRSV NAB	NIV HCSB TNIV	NLT NJB	CEV	TLB	MSG

word within the phrase. I like to call this “dictionary meaning”, because it’s the meaning you would find in a dictionary. Linguists know this type of meaning as semantic meaning, or denotation. “Literal” translation strives to translate primarily the lexical meaning of phrases (Figure 2).

So we might say that the lexical meaning of this phrase is “the” and “son” and “of” and “man”, or more precisely “*an identified biological male descendent of a human being*”. That is the meaning which we end up with if we consider only the dictionary meaning of each word.³ That works well with sentences like “I walked to the shop.” Add up the meanings of “I” + “walked” + “the” + “shop”, rearrange according to the grammar, and voila—you have your translation!

Is this what the phrase “son of man” is talking about? Is it really a comment on Jesus’ parents? Perhaps. But it’s certainly not the full meaning. Language is often more complicated than just the lexical meaning. Our example, “the Son of Man”, can also be understood as an idiom whose meaning is not the sum of its lexical parts.

Phrasal Meaning—Idiom

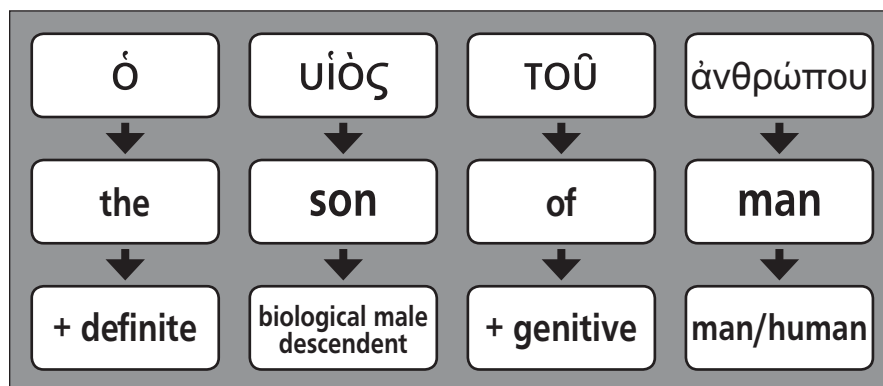
It is also possible to view this not as a set of words, but as a whole phrase which has its own meaning. An idiom is when the meaning of the phrase does not equal the sum of its parts, like in English “to kick the bucket,” (which, in my dialect means “to die.”) A native English speaker would know that it’s an idiom, and know that most of the time that phrase doesn’t have anything to do with buckets. Let’s think about the phrase “the son of man,” is it an idiom? If so, what does it mean?

There are two types of idiom: a frozen, or a productive idiom.

As a frozen idiom

If you translate this phrase literally into Aramaic and Hebrew, it is an idiom which just means something like “human” or “person.” It’s a bit like C. S. Lewis’ “son of Adam” and

Figure 2: A Literal Translation of “Son of Man”



“daughter of Eve” in the Narnia Chronicles. It is less clear whether “the Son of Man” has this meaning in Greek, but it is also possible.⁴ If this is the meaning we decide is primarily being communicated, a good English translation for “the Son of Man” might be “*the Human*”.

As a productive idiom

Productive idioms are slightly different from frozen idioms because they are designed to combine with other things. For example, in the phrase “let alone”, it’s hard to say what the meaning is by itself. But put it in a sentence (like “I’m so weak I couldn’t even pick up this feather *let alone* that book.”)⁵ and a native English speaker knows what it means. In the same way, in Greek “son of”⁶ is a construction meaning something like “one with the characteristics of”. Look at the descriptions of people in Mark 3:17 and Acts 4:36 as “sons of thunder” and “son of encouragement”.⁷ If this is the meaning of “the Son of Man” here, then a good translation might be “*the one like a man/human*” or “*the one with the characteristics of a man/human*”.

Often, the translator will have to choose between either communicating the meaning of the words (lexical meaning) or communicating the meaning of the idiom (phrasal meaning). You’ll note that lexical and phrasal meanings are two dimensions of meaning which deal with the phrase out of context. The rest of the dimen-

sions of meaning which we will examine are pragmatic dimensions, that is, we need to keep in mind the context of Luke 5:24 as we think about these other dimensions.

Information Structure—Discourse Meaning

This refers to the role of the term within the broader context of the sentence and the discourse. We can understand the information structure by asking questions like these: What is the most important part of the sentence? What is emphasized? What is the topic? How are things introduced here? Is it known information or unknown? These questions (and many more) are about how information fits together in the sentence and the discourse context.

Let me note a couple of points about the information structure of Luke 5:24. Firstly, in Greek the phrase “the son of man” and the word “authority” come before the verb. This is not the usual place for them to be in Greek and has meaning attached to it. Steven Runge (following Simon Dik⁸) says that the two elements before the verb here have two different functions. The first element is setting up the “Topical Frame.” That means it is introducing what is being talked about: this person or title which Jesus is calling “The Son of Man”. Secondly, it is introducing what is being said *about* this person, in this case, that he has *authority on earth to forgive sins*. Runge says that the

emphasis is not on the first ("son of man") but on the second ("authority to forgive sins").⁹ So if we were to translate equivalent information structure into English we might say "The Son of man *does* have authority on earth to forgive sins." Note the emphasis which is created by adding "does".

Finally, this sentence is not complete in Greek. The sentence ends when Jesus acts to heal the man. The healing is the way in which those present can know that the son of man does have authority on earth to forgive sins. Any translation would want to make sure that this link with the action is understood.

Meaning Communicated Through Genre

Genre also communicates meaning. The same word in a poem, and in a legal document will mean slightly different things. The way we interpret each word is shaped by the genre in which we find it.

If we translate legal documents as prose, or prose as poetry then we will have changed the meaning a little, we will have changed the way people interpret the words. This dimension is less relevant to "the Son of Man" as mentioned in Luke because the origi-

nal genre is narrative, and the translation is also narrative. But, if it had been a poetic text we were translating, we would have to closely consider the genre when understanding and translating the meaning of the word.¹⁰ For this reason I won't be discussing the genre dimension further in this paper.

Those first four dimensions relate to the term itself and the text surrounding it. First, the *word*, then the *phrase*, then the *information structure* of the sentence, then the *genre* of the passage. These next four dimensions extend outside the text in different ways (see Figure 3). They extend into what I call the "Real world", the "Text world", the "Thought world" and the "Social world".

The "Real World"—The Referent

The question to ask here is who or what is the term referring to? For example, the term "monarch" *means* a person who rules over a kingdom. But in any particular context it might *refer* to Queen Elizabeth II or King George III. The particular King or Queen is the referent.¹¹

In Luke 5:24, most scholars agree that the referent to the phrase "the Son of Man" is Jesus,¹² though scholars debate how clear it was to Jesus' audience. In this case, Jesus uses the third person,

and it's not often that people refer to themselves in the third person. When was the last time you referred to yourself as "the teacher" or "the parent"? Some languages have more trouble doing this than others. If all you wanted to do in translation is communicate the referent, then an accurate translation of "the Son of Man" here would simply be: "I".

The Text World—Intertextual and Intratextual Meaning

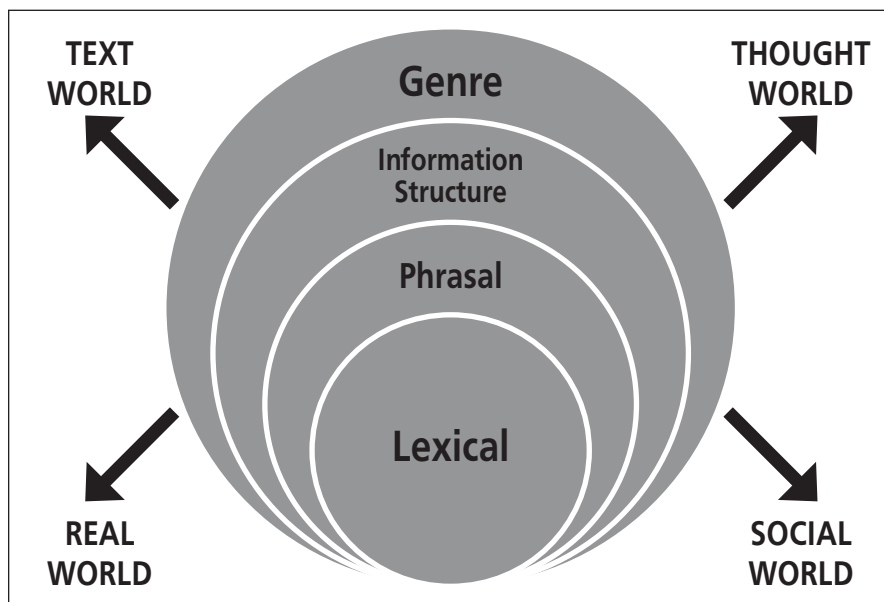
Intertextual meaning

This is one type of meaning which is very important to Bible scholars, theologians, and students of literature. *Intertextual meaning* is the meaning which is implied by a text, because of its similarity or relationship with another text. For example, in Mark 6:50, Jesus is walking on water, in a stormy environment, passing by the disciples and then says "egw eimi" ("I am"). In many ways, this causes an astute Biblical reader to think back to Moses and his encounters with God in the Old Testament (for example, Exodus 3:14 and 33:19). The meaning, which Jesus communicates in an intertextual way here, is that *he* is the one who can miraculously feed thousands of people, he's the one who passes by, and he is the one who is called "I am." Who is that one? Yahweh himself. Without that Old Testament knowledge, this meaning is lost on many readers of the New Testament.

A question for translators is how do we communicate this type of meaning? One strategy is to try to use the same terms in the same places (this is called "lexical concordance"). I notice that the NLT has used the phrase "I am" in Mark 6:50 so the link to the Old Testament might be seen by readers. The problem can sometimes be that the wording becomes unnatural, or in some cases unintelligible. Other translations just indicate the intertextual link in a footnote.

Another strategy is to be explicit about the intertextual meaning. Sally Lloyd-Jones' *Jesus Storybook Bible* is a good example of this.¹³ (Obviously, as a children's Bible this is not a straight

Figure 3: Dimensions of Meaning



translation, but an adaptation, but it does illustrate my point nicely.) In her Daniel story, she adds another paragraph at the end of the story saying:

God would keep on rescuing his people. And the time was coming when God would send another brave Hero, like Daniel, who would love God and do what God said—whatever it cost him, even if it meant he would die. And together they would pull off the greatest rescue the world has ever known.

Is this accurate? No, it's not lexically accurate. But it does convey accurate information about the Bible, it is all "true", so in a sense it is accurate. It is explicit about one aspect of the intertextual meaning. Bible scholars would agree that the Daniel story *does* point to Jesus. Lloyd-Jones has made an element of meaning explicit which would not otherwise be apparent to her intended audience.

For the phrase "son of man" there are many articles and books written on the intertextual meaning.¹⁴ The most obvious link is to Daniel 7:13, where Daniel prophesies about "one like a son of man" presented before God, and God gives him an eternal Kingdom over all people. Is Jesus implying here that he is this one? Translators should remember that this link is very subtle, and it's doubtful that people in Jesus' time would have thought to themselves, "Yes! He's calling himself 'the Son of Man' like in the book of Daniel. Is he claiming to be our King?" Actually, it's more likely they would have thought, "He's saying that there is a human who has authority over sins." (Remember, of course, that they thought that only God had authority to totally forgive a person's sins, i.e., Luke 5:23.)

A further step to understand the implied meaning in "son of man" would be a look for those places that Luke chose to use it. This is what I'm calling the "*intratextual meaning*".

Intratextual meaning

If we look at all the passages in Luke where Jesus used this term, a pattern does emerge. It is often used in contexts of suffering, and in contexts of glory.

Most have to do with questions of authority. This helps us to realize that when Jesus talks about himself as "the son of man" he's talking about the role he has on earth, to suffer and to be glorified, and his role as the one with authority, as God's representative on earth. In short, we can see, through inter- and intra-textual meaning, that Jesus is saying he is God's chosen King, the Messiah. But, when we're translating this term, it's also important to remember that Jesus could have plainly stated that he was the Messiah . . . but he did not. If we translate "son of man" here as "Messiah", it violates the next two dimensions of meaning.

The Thought World— Ideas and Emotions

The thought world refers to the connotations, ideas and emotions which come into people's minds when they hear this term. What meanings did they actually think and feel when they heard this term? Some words have very strong connotations. We know, for example, that terms like "tax collector" and "Samaritan" both had very strong negative connotations for first century Jews. However, "The Son of Man" is unusual in that it doesn't appear to have strong connotations at all. Even the Hebrew and Aramaic literal translations (which certainly did mean "human") don't have strong connotations either way. It's not even clear that this phrase was used much in Greek at all. This is pretty unusual for a key term. Usually people use words so that people do understand them, not because people don't really understand them. I think this explains why the majority of English translations, even very free ones like *The Message*, have used the literal term "Son of Man"—it's not supposed to mean very much the first time you read it; it gains its meaning as you keep reading and see how Jesus (and the Biblical authors) used the term.

So this term "Son of Man", for the original readers, is rather devoid of associated ideas and emotions. This fact paves the way for Jesus to fill the term with the meaning which he intended it to have.¹⁵

The Social World— Interpersonal Meaning

This dimension pulls together much of the exegesis we've already done, and adds an extra interpersonal level of analysis. The Social world dimension asks: what was the speaker (or writer) doing with this term here? Why was this term used here? Interpersonally, how does this term function?

I note a few things which "Son of Man" is communicating in Luke 5. First, it can be understood as a title. There is one person who is "the" Son of Man, and part of his role is that he has authority to forgive sins. Second, we can note that this is new information to Jesus' audience. This is the first time in Luke's gospel that the term "Son of Man" has been used. Third, this is a challenge to Jesus' hearers. Jesus' contemporaries believed that only God can forgive sins, and here Jesus challenged this assumption: he said that there is a human who also has that authority (or at least the authority to declare that God has forgiven someone's sins).

I've listed out eight different types of meaning here (Figure 4), and it might appear that they are all distinct and nicely separated, but they're not. There's always overlap and indistinct boundaries between the different types of meaning. While you may disagree with my exegesis, I do hope that my separating the meaning of this phrase out into these dimensions helps you clarify in exactly which dimension you might disagree. I have also formulated eight questions which the translator or exegete might like to ask of a text as they examine it (Figure 5). These are an aid to help think in terms of the eight dimensions, and I hope they will help you discover more of the meaning of the text.

Translation into Angika

So you can see that the meaning of the Son of Man is very complicated. *How on earth can we possibly translate this?* To complicate things even more, we must add two more reasons why this phrase is even more difficult to translate into

Figure 4: Summary of Dimensions of Meaning of ‘Son of Man’

Lexical Meaning “The son of man/human”	Referent Jesus (though perhaps this is not very obvious)
Phrasal Meaning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frozen idiom “the human” or “the man” Productive idiom “the one like a man/human” or “the one with the characteristics of a man/human” 	Intertextual Links Daniel 7:13 and others; the reader should be able to discover the links, though it should not be obvious.
Information Structure “The son of man” is not emphasised, the “authority to forgive sins” is emphasised.	Thought World Connotations are minimal and certainly not negative.
	Social World The sentence the phrase is in challenges the presuppositions of the people Jesus is speaking to.

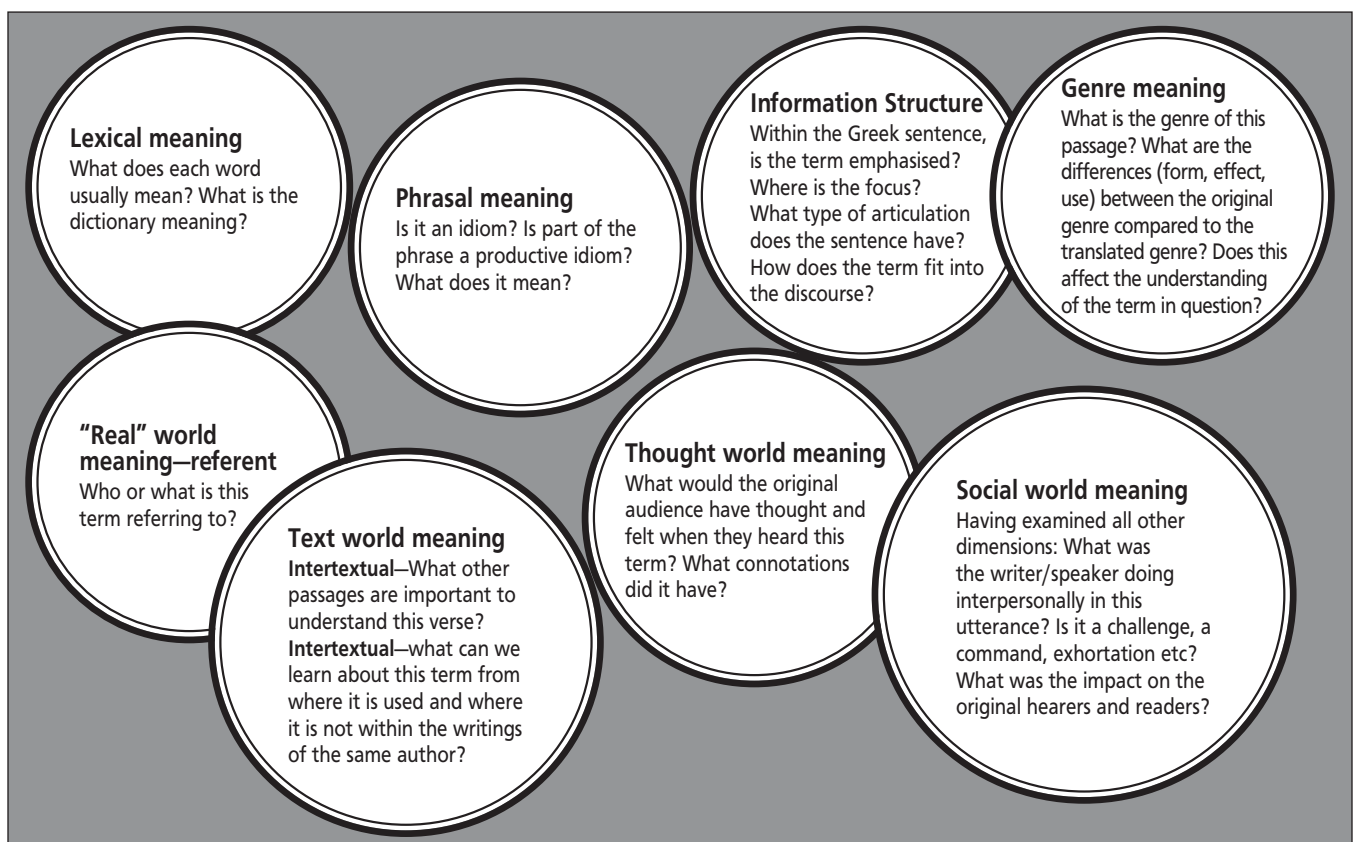
communicate the correct meaning to Angika people. Before a Bible translation is approved for publication it needs to go through a check with a consultant to make sure the translation is accurate. To find out what the translation is communicating, the team and consultant tested the translation with speakers of Angika who are not familiar with the Bible. (I’ll call that native speaker the “Representative Native Speaker” or RNS, because they are representative of the intended audience.) After listening to the translation, the RNS was asked to explain what she or he had understood from the text.

What the consultant is checking for at this point is not whether *the consultant* thinks the meaning of the translation is correct, but whether she thinks that *Angika speakers* understand correct meaning from reading the translation. This is a crucial distinction, as you will see.

Angika. Firstly, their language doesn’t have a definite article . . . they don’t have the word “the”. Neither do they have capital letters, which is an easy way to indicate something is a title. Keep those two points in mind as we look at possible ways to translate “the Son of Man” into the Angika language.

As I noted above, the priority of this translation team was to communicate in a manner that is clear for Angika Hindu people. Because people and people groups have different assumptions and worldviews, what seems accurate to an outsider like me or another consultant, may not

Figure 5: Exegetical Questions for Dimensions of Meaning



Evaluating the Options for “Son of Man”

These are the three options for translation which the team and consultant analysed:

1. ‘son of man’
2. ‘I who am son of man’
3. ‘I’

I’ll be evaluating these translations with respect to multiple dimensions of meaning, with a three level evaluation for each dimension. A tick (✓) indicates that this dimension of meaning is communicated correctly and fully. A circle (●) means that this dimension of meaning is communicated correctly, but some of the meaning is missing. A cross (✗) indicates that some of the meaning is communicating wrongly and will be misunderstood.

Option 1—“Son of Man”

1. **Angika:** ... मनुष्य-पुत्र कऽ धरती पर पाप क्षमा करय केऽ अधिकार छै।
2. **English word-by-word:** son of man’s on earth sin forgiveness doing’s authority is
3. **Free English translation of the Angika:** ... human has authority on earth to forgive sins

Lexical meaning

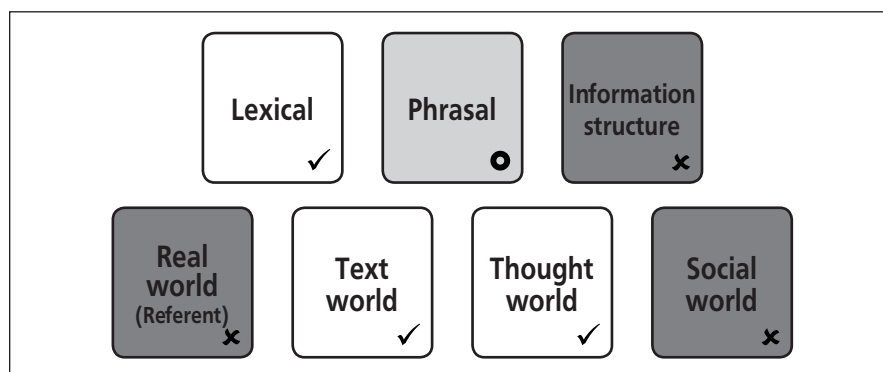
✓ Although option 1 does not include a word meaning “the,” this is still lexically equivalent because the Angika language does not need a definite article to show that something is definite.

Phrasal meaning

✓ In Angika the meaning of “manushya putra” (“son of man”) is simply “human”. This idiomatic meaning is equivalent to the Aramaic, Hebrew and potentially Greek idiomatic meaning of “son of man”.

✗ In Angika the phrase “son of ...” is not a productive idiom and does not mean “one with the characteristics of”, and therefore it is not equivalent to the use of “son of ...” in the New Testament.

Figure 6: Summary of Option 1—“Son of Man”



Information structure

● Perhaps surprisingly, the most literal rendering does not reflect equivalent information structure. The emphasis on the authority here is missing, but since the most important part of the sentence tends to come at the end of the sentence in Angika I will say it is partially equivalent.

Referent

✗ This is the dimension in which this rendering is the most problematic. “Son of Man” (the same term as is in the Hindi Bible), is also a common Angika term which means “human” and by extension “humanity”. So when a native speaker of Angika reads this rendering of Luke 5:24, they understand it to mean “humans have authority on earth to forgive sins”. The referential meaning is not understood when Angika people hear Option 1.

Text world meaning

✓ The average Angika reader is not familiar with the Old Testament, so the intertextual allusions will not be apparent from Option 1. However, if the same term is used in both places, a footnote can help the reader see these connections, so by assuming a cross-reference footnote I’ll give this rendering a tick. Similarly, if the same term is used in all places in Luke’s Gospel, the intra-textual meaning can also be built up.

Thought world meaning

✓ Option 1 has no strong connotations for an Angika person. Contrast this with another language, which also translated this term literally, and it was

also a familiar term to speakers of that language, however they understood it to mean “a person of unknown parentage, probably illegitimate”,¹⁶ a strongly negative term. If that were the case in Angika language, this rendering would not be equivalent in thought world dimension, because that’s not at all how the original hearers would have understood it.

Social world meaning

✗ It is not clear in Angika that Option 1 is a title for Jesus ... since the term is understood to refer to humans in general.

✗ Option 1 is not a challenge to the worldview of Angika people. They believe that sins can be forgiven in many ways: by performing a ritual, by bathing in the Ganges, or by a Hindu priest. If Jesus says that “humanity” can forgive sins, this does not challenge their understanding in fact it confirms it. The interpersonal meaning of Option 1 in Angika is unlike the intended interpersonal meaning in the original context.

Option 2—“I Who am Son of Man”

1. **Angika:** ... हम्मे, जे मनुष्य-पुत्र छियै, हमरा धरती पर पाप क्षमा करय कऽ भी अधिकार छै।
2. **English word-by-word:** ... I, who son of man is, my earth on sin forgiveness doing’s authority (emphatic) is.
3. **Free English translation of the Angika:** ... I, who is human, I do have authority on earth to forgive sins.

This rendering was suggested by a translator in order to make clear that Jesus was talking about himself. Again we’ll examine it according to multiple dimensions of meaning.

Lexical meaning

● The phrase “son of man” is here, but other words have also been added which are not in the original.

Phrasal meaning

✓ Idiom: the idiom “son of man” meaning “human” is present here.

✗ The construction meaning “one with the characteristics of” is not known.

Information structure

✗✗ This is the dimension where this rendering had major problems. This wording was suggested by a consultant, and the mother tongue translators agreed that it was possible to say in their language. But when the team and consultant later tested this phrase with some native speakers of Angika, it was consistently misunderstood. The Angika people consistently answered that the passage meant “so that you may know that I am the son of man.” But they weren’t able to say what came afterwards. Emphasis should have been on the “authority” clause, but not only was this not emphasised, it wasn’t communicated at all.

The team encountered this problem a number of times in sentences with relative clauses, especially where new information was being introduced. I won’t go into the details of the grammar

which caused this misunderstanding, but it’s clear that this rendering, though it seems accurate, and the translators thought that it was possible to say in their language, it actually communicated wrong meaning.

Usually in languages like Angika, you can communicate the correct information structure with two sentences “I am the son of man. And I have authority on earth to forgive sins”. But in this situation that becomes more complicated because this is not a sentence in itself; it’s the second part of a bigger sentence “But I want you to know that ...” comes before “the Son of Man has authority ...”. Whatever way they render the second part of the sentence, it must also make sense in relation to the first half of the sentence “But I want you to know that ...”.

Referent

✓ The referent was equivalent, and people do understand that it is referring to Jesus.

Intertextual meaning

✓ Intertextually, the links to other passages remain open since the phrase is concordant.

Thought world meaning

✓ There are no obvious strong connotations or overtones which overshadow the meaning here.

Social world meaning

✗ Option 2 was not equivalent in the interpersonal dimension because of

the problems with the information structure. Since the readers did not pay attention to the second clause “has authority ...” they didn’t understand the challenge which Jesus was making in his social context.

In practice, all of these dimensions are not always equal; here the information structure was communicated so inaccurately that this misunderstanding dominated the meaning of the translation.

Option 3—“I”

Undeterred, the team pressed on to find a suitable way of rendering this term in Angika language. Some people have said that “the Son of Man” is simply a circumlocution for “I” (or in other words, that it means “I” and nothing more). I don’t believe that is the case, but given that other renderings miscommunicated the meaning so badly, the team decided to try putting “I” in place of the phrase “son of man”, to make sure, at least, that people understood *Jesus was talking about himself*.

1. **Angika:** हमरा धरती पर पाप क्षमा करय कऽ भी अधिकार छै।
2. **English word-by-word:** my earth on sin forgiveness doing’s authority (emphatic) is
3. **Free English translation of the Angika:** I do have authority on earth to forgive sins

Lexical meaning

✗ The lexical meaning is not equivalent.

Phrasal meaning

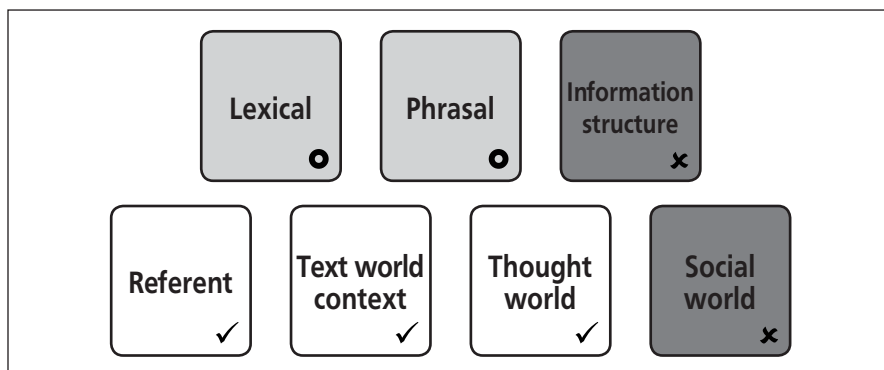
✗ Not equivalent for either the frozen or productive idiom. There is no idiom here meaning “human” nor is there a construction meaning “one with the characteristics of”.

Information structure

✗ The topical frame “son of man” is absent here. People don’t know that Jesus is talking about one person who has a title and a role, and part of his role is to forgive sins.

✓ Here the authority part of the sentence is emphasised with a special

Figure 7: Summary of Option 2—“I who am Son of Man”



emphatic marker, so this element is given a tick.

Referent

✓ or ● The referent here is equivalent, assuming that the exegete decides both that Jesus was referring to himself, and that it should be obvious to his hearers. However, many commentators have decided that, while Jesus was indeed referring to himself, this fact wasn't obvious to his hearers. If we adopt this exegesis, then Option 3 is only partially equivalent in the referential dimension.

Intertextual meaning

● The inter- and intratextual connections here are not apparent, though they can be made more apparent through the use of footnotes, so Option 3 could be partially equivalent.

Thought world meaning

✓ In this language (unlike in some languages) using the first person pronoun doesn't have any positive or negative connotations and therefore Option 3 would be equivalent to the thought world meaning exegeted earlier.

Social world meaning

● The role of "the Son of Man" as a title, which refers to the one with authority to forgive sins, is omitted from Option 3.

✓ The fact that Jesus claims to have authority over sins is, however, clear.

● For Jesus to tell them that "I have authority to forgive sins" does not challenge the Angika Hindu, because they already believe in many methods and means for having one's sins forgiven.

Notice that this option is pretty good, apart from the lexical and phrasal meanings. If necessary the lexical and phrasal meanings could be corrected by a footnote. But still, it's not an ideal translation.

Actually, none of these three options are ideal. All have at least one major flaw. After a number of weeks thinking about this problem, this next rendering was suggested by one of the translators:

Option 4—"Only-one Son of Man"

1. **Angika:** ... एकमात्र मनुष्य-पुत्र केऽ ही धरती पर पाप क्षमा करे केऽ अधिकार छै, आरो ऊ मनुष्य-पुत्र हम्मे छिकयै।
2. **English word-by-word:** ... only-one son of man's (emphatic) authority on earth to do sins forgiveness is, and that son of man, I am.
3. **Free English translation of the Angika:** ... only one human has authority on earth to forgive sins, and I am that human.

Lexical Meaning

● Clearly some words have been added here. Most notably "only-one" and the final sentence "and I am that human". You might think that the word "only-one" adds an element of exclusivity here which is not in the original, and that is somewhat true: the lexical meaning of "only-one" in Angika is not exactly the same as the lexical meaning of /ho/ (definite article) in Greek. However there is some overlap: both identify a specific person, which was not the case in Angika Option 1 "son of man". Because Angika "only-one" is partially equivalent (in the lexical dimension) with Greek /ho/ (definite article), I have decided that this translation is partially equivalent for lexical meaning. The meaning of the extra sentence will be discussed in the "referent" section.

Phrasal Meaning

✓ Option 4 makes natural use of "man's-son" as an Angika idiom meaning "human". This is equivalent to the original languages.

✗ Productive idiom: Again in this translation, like all the other options, Option 4 does not communicate the meaning "one with the character-istics of".

Information Structure

✓ The topical frame is set up in a similar way to the Greek: there is one particular human as the topical frame, and the comment being added about him is that *he has authority*.

● Consider the first part of Option 4: "that only-one human has authority on earth to forgive sins". The emphasis here is equivalent to Greek: it is on the one person who has authority. However Option 4 includes the addition "and I am that human" (which was included to clarify the referent). This further addition may shift the focus subtly from the claim of *authority* itself, toward the *identity* of *Jesus as the one who has the authority*.

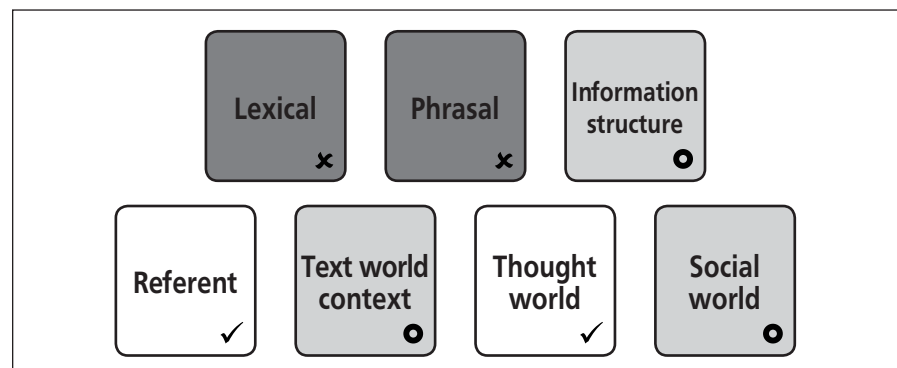
Referent

✓ Here the translators made the exegetical decision that it was clear to Jesus' hearers that he was talking about himself. Therefore, in order to make that point clear, they added in the extra sentence "and I am that human."¹⁹

Text world context

✓ Intertextual meaning and intratextual meaning can both be

Figure 8: Summary of Option 3—"I"



communicated with this rendering because the words “son-of-man” are used.

Thought world context

✓ Here also there is equivalence, since there are no strong negative or positive connotations with the term “son of man”.

Social world context

● Here Jesus is challenging the assumptions of his audience. In this sense it is equivalent. In Greek, he is challenging the Jewish assumptions that *no man has authority to forgive sins*. In Angika he is challenging the assumption that sins can be forgiven in a variety of ways; instead he informs them that *one unique human can forgive sins*.

The Angika reader will not think that the phrase “son of man” is a title, but the phrase “only one human” does show that Jesus is a unique human, which is very close to the idea of a title. This rendering is at least partially equivalent for social world meaning.

Notice there are no crosses in this last translation. There is nothing about this rendering which communicates totally wrong meaning; it may not communicate the full meaning, but it is not leading the reader astray. This is in contrast to the first three options (even option 1) which, though more “literal”, communicated wrong meaning. Those first three renderings would mislead Angika readers to think the passage

meant something vastly different than what it would have meant for first century readers, and different to what Jesus and Luke intended it to mean.

You can see clearly in the summary diagrams that none of these renderings has all ticks. With the translation of complex terms, it is very unusual to be able to communicate the meaning correctly in all dimensions. That is simply a reality of translation.

Which is the Most Important Dimension?

I have been asked, are these ‘dimensions of meaning’ of equal importance? I’d say that depends on two factors: the text and the readers.

It Depends on the Text

There will be some passages of scripture where different types of meaning will be deemed more important to communicate correctly in translation. For example, in the book of Hebrews, there are strong intertextual links; without understanding these, the meaning of the book is not easily understood. So a translator should make sure that these links can be seen, sometimes at the expense of other meanings which also might be legitimately communicated by the text.

It Depends on the Readers (and Translators)

More precisely, it depends on what dimensions of meaning the readers expect to have translated and what the translators have therefore

communicated to the readers. It is possible to translate a whole Bible by consistently giving priority to one or two elements of meaning. I believe that this is the reason for some of the differences in the variety of English Bibles available today. For example, a Bible might have a priority on communicating intertextual links (it will probably have a lot of footnotes, and a high level of concordance in terms). Another Bible might prioritise communicating the thought world of the original readership, and accordingly the translators might add clarifying words to show what the original readers thought about something.²⁰

How Can These Dimensions Be Used?

I hope that this formulation of dimensions of meaning can be helpful to a number of people involved in biblical study.

First, I hope this can be helpful to people doing exegesis on a text. Often we don’t know what questions to ask of a text, and once we have examined one aspect of what a text might mean, we move on to the next section. But if we realize how multidimensional meaning is, we might linger longer on each text, and ask more questions of it, and in doing so, discover the depth and richness of the meaning of God’s word. These questions are suggested above in Figure 5, “Exegetical Questions for Dimensions of Meaning”.

Secondly, it should be helpful to translators and consultants, those involved in actual translation work. I personally have found these dimensions helpful in systematically checking a translation, and making sure that, as much as possible, all the fullness and richness of meaning which was there in the original languages is also there in the translation.

Thirdly, I hope that this framework can be helpful for people discussing different translations and translation styles. Often I feel disappointed when I hear people talking about translations, when

Figure 9: Summary of Option 4—“Only-one Son of Man”

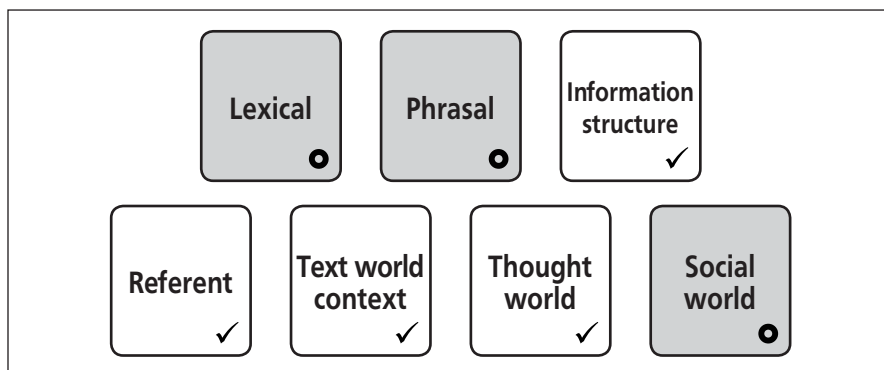


Figure 10: Comparison of translations of "Son of Man"

	Lexical	Phrasal	Information structure	Referent	Intertextual	Connotation	Interpersonal
"son of man"	✓	●	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
"I, son of man"	●	●	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
"I"	✗	✗	●	✓	●	✓	●
"Only one son of man"	●	●	✓	✓	✓	✓	●

they are vociferously advocating one translation over another. Often, they're only considering one dimension of meaning, and ignoring others which might legitimately be communicated by the text.

Especially when we are discussing translations into languages we ourselves are not familiar with, we must moderate and dilute our opinions of the translation. At the end of the day, it's not important what the translation communicates to me, the consultant, or to anyone who doesn't speak that language. The important thing is what the translation communicates to the people it is translated for. When they understand the meaning of the text, in all of its dimensions, the translation is an accurate one. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Diagram taken from the Mark D. Taylor and Mark Norton, *NLT Text & Product Preview* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2005), p. 14, though similar diagrams can be found in many books on translation. Abbreviations indicate the Contemporary English Version (CEV), English Standard Version (ESV), Holman Christian Standard Version (HCSB), King James Version (KJV), The Message (MSG), New American Bible /Catholic (NAB), New American Standard Version (NASB), New International Version (NIV), New Jerusalem Bible/Catholic (NJB), New King James Version (NKJV), New Living Translation (NLT), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), The Living Bible (TLB), Today's New International Version (TNIV)

² See for example, Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Crossway Books, 2002) and his stated reasons for his obvious preference for the style of the ESV.

³ Linguists will tell you that there is much more to be said about the lexical meaning of each of these words. None of the translations given in English here mean exactly what the Greek word mean, but it is precise enough for my purposes here.

⁴ It is also possible that Jesus was speaking Aramaic and his words were translated in to Greek by Luke. See for example: Maurice Casey, *Solution to the "Son of Man" Problem* (T&T Clark Int'l, 2007).

⁵ For more reading on the construction "let alone" see Charles Fillmore, Paul Kay, and Mary Catherine O'Connor, "Regularity and Idiomaticity in Grammatical Constructions: the Case of Let Alone," *Language* 64, no. 3 (September 1998): 501-538.

⁶ Or more precisely *huios* followed by a noun in the genitive.

⁷ See Rick Brown, "Issues in Mission. Part II: Translating the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 22, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 136 for a longer list of Biblical examples where the construction "son of" is used productively.

⁸ Steven E. Runge, *Lexham Discourse Greek New Testament* (Logos Bible Software, 2008); Simon B. Dik, *Theory of Functional Grammar, Part 1* (Foris Pubns USA, 1989).

⁹ Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, Bilingual. (Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2010)

¹⁰ See Ernst R. Wendland, *Translating the Literature of Scripture* (SIL International, 2004); and Ernst R. Wendland, *LiFE-Style Translating: A Workbook for Bible Translators, Second Edition* (SIL International, 2011) for more on how to translate the meaning of the genre into the translated text.

¹¹ See Les Bruce, "Sense and Reference in Translation" (presented at the Bible Translation 2009 Conference, Dallas, TX, USA: GIAL and SIL, 2009) for more on this distinction.

¹² See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke (New International Greek Testament Commentary)* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978).

¹³ Sally Lloyd-Jones, *Jesus Storybook Bible Deluxe Edition* (Zonderkidz, 2009).

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, "The Background to the Son of Man sayings," in *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p. 50-70; Darrell L. Bock, "The Son of Man in Luke 5:24," in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 1 (1991): p. 109-121; Maurice Casey, *Solution to the "Son of Man" Problem* (T&T Clark International, 2009); Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); R.K. Harrison, "The Son of Man," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1951): 6-50.

¹⁵ The "thought world" dimension of meaning is related to the intertextual meaning, because much of the worldview of first century Jewish people was formed by their knowledge of the Bible. (Meaning is always inter-connected.) But it is still helpful and productive for the translator and exegete to keep these two dimensions distinct.

¹⁶ Warren Glover, Personal Communication. (October 18th, 2011, Dallas, TX USA)

¹⁷ This is the version published in *The Way to Salvation: The Gospel according to St Luke, Angika Language* (Bible Society of India, Bangalore, 2011).

¹⁸ What is translated into English twice in this sentence as "human" is literally "son of man."

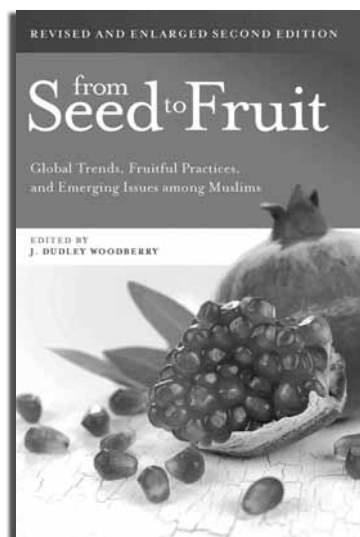
¹⁹ If they had decided instead that Jesus' reference to himself was not so clear, then the extra sentence could be omitted. They would then need to test with a speaker of the language to see what reference is understood.

²⁰ For example, the NLT translation of Luke 10:33 includes the word "despised" to show that Samaritans are not "people who do good" as many people think today, but that they were hated by the Jews.



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Ideological Challenges for Bible Translators

by Roy E. Ciampa

I was able to carry a naïve assumption throughout more than twenty years as a seminary professor of biblical studies. I often see it in my students as well. It probably has surfaced because of fifteen years in Bible translation. It's simply the assumption that the teaching of the Bible will inevitably result in a positive impact on the lives of others. That assumption reflects my own experience of the Bible and the ideological context in which I have operated since first gaining significant knowledge of it through personal reading. Of course the Bible has been experienced by millions of people as liberating, freeing, transforming, saving, and empowering. It provides the key to understanding God's love for us, how that love has been manifested, and how it's to be expressed one to another.

This is true of Bible translators as well. They have experienced the Bible's ability to impact their lives for the better. It has granted them a life-changing understanding of God, of themselves, of salvation, and of their purpose in life. Given such a positive relationship with the Scriptures, and their high regard for its authority and inspiration, they might naturally assume that the Bible's impact on new peoples and cultures will inevitably be positive.

We who translate the Bible are usually aware of the historical role of the Bible in promoting cultural changes that benefit society, including the establishment of orphanages, hospitals, schools and other institutions, and its remarkable role in the fight against slavery, prejudice and other social evils. But as a professor training present and future Christian ministers and workers, I recognize that this same material, so wonderfully transformative in people's lives, has also been taught and used in ways that harm vast numbers of people. My fear is that somehow I and my students would add to those numbers, and so I want to consider in this article one translation practice that might help us prevent an inappropriate use of Scripture.

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The Bible and Ideological Criticism

The abuses I am most concerned with in this essay are those that result from the ideologies we hold and bring to Scripture. These ideologies are often applied and reinforced in our translation and interpretation of the Bible, most often in unconscious and unintended ways. Sandra Schneiders offers a simple definition of ideology, framing it as “that entire generalized theoretical structuring of reality through which one experiences all of life.”¹ But she offers another definition (in passing) that does more to highlight the relationship of ideology to issues of power. Ideology has to do with “a thought world generated by and supportive of a particular power agenda . . . usually only visible to those excluded from the power system.”²

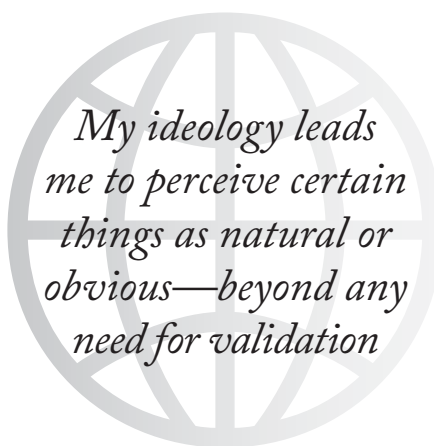
I find both of Schneiders’ definitions very helpful, but would offer the following as my more inclusive definition of ideology for the purposes of this essay:

The complex set of individual and socially-shared conscious and unconscious loyalties (whether philosophical, interpersonal, emotional or whatever) that are influenced and reinforced by my cognitive mapping of my world and which lead me to prefer certain ways of seeing myself, my context and the broader world around me, to perceive some things as problematical and not others (which other people might consider problematical), and to prefer particular ways of addressing the problems which come to my attention.

The reference to “loyalties” in my definition is intended to highlight the relationship between ideology and power agendas as well as the unconscious nature of this relationship for most people. My ideology leads me to perceive certain things as natural or obvious—beyond any need for validation or defense. Because we all tend to be blind to our own ideological commitments,

I need to hear from others to better be able to recognize my real or perceived blind spots and complicities. I need to be receptive to critiques, especially those that alert me to harm or injustice that is established or sustained by my way of perceiving and acting in the world. As an evangelical Bible translator my ideology has tended to make me (and many others like me) assume that the translation (and preaching) of the Bible is obviously and inevitably a positive activity that could hardly do anything but good in the world. Those who do not share my ideology will more readily recognize problematical consequences of my translation (and preaching) of the Bible.

Ideological issues related to Bible translation are innumerable. They



relate to every aspect of Bible translation, including issues like:

- *who* translates the Bible? (people within the receiving community or outsiders or some combination that reflects a particular power structure)
- *what parts* are prioritized? (starting with the Old Testament or the New, whole books or portions, and which books or portions)
- *for whom* are we translating? (for churches, groups of believers, unreached peoples)
- *why* are we translating? (with clear evangelistic/missionary purposes or for

the strengthening of existing churches and/or believers, or for other purposes)

- *how* are we translating? (by whose rules, philosophy, funding, accountability, or technology)
- *who decides* all of these things? (who has the power, and why)

Power is reflected and exerted at every one of these points, and the extent to which people recognize or feel any concern for how power and implicit agendas are at work will depend upon their own ideologies.³ While this applies to Bible translation work in both missionary and in established Christian contexts, these issues are especially sensitive in contexts where missionaries are working to provide Bible translations for those who do not yet have the Bible in their own language.

The Ideological Roots of the English Bible

Certain word choices in the early translation of the English Bible are clear examples of the influence of ideology. When William Tyndale used “congregation” in the place of “church,” “senior” (and later, “elder”) instead of “priest,” “repent” instead of “do penance,” and “love” instead of “charity,” he was understood to be undermining direct ties with traditional church vocabulary and doctrines, and how the Scriptures had been traditionally understood in that context. He was attacked as a heretic trying to pass off his heresies as though they were inscribed in Scripture itself.⁴

English Bible translators were very aware that their word choices would be understood in light of their potential implications for contemporary and future political and religious power structures. The King James Version (of 1611) was prepared after the separation from Rome, in a context where King James I was motivated to reduce the level of conflicts between Anglican bishops and Puritans in his realm. The churches were divided on numerous subjects, and that division was both

reflected in and reinforced by the different Bibles they used. The Geneva Bible (of 1560), which was favored by Puritans, included marginal notes that promoted Calvinistic and antiroyalist views. As Bruce Metzger points out, "One of the reasons that led King James, in 1604, to agree readily to a new translation of the Scriptures was his dislike of the politics preached in the margins of the Geneva Bible."⁵ He invited scholars from both camps to work on the project, to develop a Bible that would be acceptable to both groups. Among the rules to be followed by the translators, however, included the stipulations that the Bishops' Bible (of 1568) was to be followed except when faithfulness to the original would not allow it, that the "Old Ecclesiastical Words" (like "church" and "charity") were to be used rather than recently proposed alternatives (like "congregation" and "love"), and that there were to be no marginal notes except where necessary to explain Greek or Hebrew words (Metzger 2001:71).

The decision to produce a translation based on work by scholars from both camps clearly reflects the (ideological) commitment to promote a more peaceful coexistence (on royal terms). The rules regarding the use of the Bishops' Bible and traditional ecclesiastical terms may be understood to reflect other parts of the king's ideology, and the rule about minimal marginal notes (to eliminate promotion of the views of one side or the other) may also be seen as essential to the goal of having a translation acceptable to both parties (in light of the role such notes played in making the Geneva Bible unacceptable to the king and other Anglican leaders). The King James Version is like all other translations in that it is not merely the result of an objective scientific (or pietistic) process of finding linguistic equivalents, but reflects the impact of ideology in a variety of ways, which would include word choices.

Ideological issues in the translation of the Bible are more serious than with

T*he text of the Bible has been and can be used to promote injustice and oppression, and these reflect a translator's ideology*

the translation of virtually any other piece of literature, due to its status as a sacred text to the vast majority of its readers. Since it carries much greater influence than other writings, whether ancient or modern, it has the potential to do both much greater good and much greater harm than other documents or translations.

The Bible is a Dangerous Book

So, the Bible, amidst all its tremendous good, can be considered a dangerous book. More than two thousand years of Bible translation and Bible usage provide us with innumerable examples of ways in which the Bible has been used to promote or justify oppressive relationships, institutions and customs, including crusades, inquisitions, slavery, anti-Semitism, apartheid, genocide, and the abuse of women, children and minorities. It has been used to empower the powerful at the expense of the powerless. It has also been used in the decimation of native peoples and cultures and the oppression of those who do not submit to its teaching. There are others who willingly submitted to their understanding (or others' understandings) of its teaching, but who found it anything but a liberating experience. A letter signed by Andean Indians and addressed to John Paul II when he visited Peru in 1985 included the following indictment:

We, the Indians of the Andes and of the Americas would like to take this opportunity of John Paul II's visit to give the Bible back to him, because, in five centuries, it has not given us love, nor peace nor justice. Please take back your Bible and hand it over to our oppressors because they need it more than we do. In fact, since Christopher Columbus set foot here, one culture, one language, one religion and values intrinsically European were imposed upon America by force.⁶

There are many different ways in which the text of the Bible has been and can be used to promote injustice and oppression, and these reflect a translator's ideology or his ideological blinders. The task of Bible translation must be done with an awareness of the ideological issues it raises, and translators need to think carefully about what steps can be taken to reduce unintended collateral damage that could result from a lack of attention to ideology (in light of what has actually happened in the history of the use of the Bible). In this paper, therefore, I wish to address one particular way in which Bible translation reflects and shapes people's ideologies. It relates to that intuitive understanding of many translators who value "direct transferability" in their translation.

Ideological Commitments to Direct Transferability and Their Consequences

By "direct transferability" I'm referring to the idea that readers of Bible translations should feel that the Bible (and God, through the Bible) directly addresses them in their particular circumstances. Approaches to Bible translation that, in Schleiermacher's terms, move the biblical writer toward the reader (domestication) rather than forcing the reader to accommodate to the biblical writer ('foreignization'), are most susceptible to the problems I am concerned with here. Domesticating the Bible to the receptors of a Bible translation is often seen in the attempt to create equivalence. Nida and Taber describe "dynamic equivalence" as "a quality of a translation in which the language of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that *the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors*" (emphasis added).⁷ By "response"

they mean “the sum of the reactions of a receptor to a message in terms of understanding (or lack of it), emotional attitude, decision and action”.⁸ It would seem that a primary reason one would respond the same way as the original receptors is because one believes that one’s situation reflects that of the original receptors and, therefore, one has been addressed directly in precisely the same way.

The more a Bible translation speaks in the idioms of my particular language and refers to artifacts or concepts from my cultural environment (e.g., dollars, pounds, kilometers, etc.),⁹ the more predisposed I am to adopt the perspective that it was written with my particular context and culture in view and to speak directly to me and my neighbors. I believe “dynamic equivalent” (and other more domesticating) translations have distinct advantages and benefits and that they will be the best approach in many instances, but we should be aware of potential problems or harm to readers if they are not used wisely.

Harriet Hill points out that “Naïve audiences often consider God to be speaking to them directly through Scripture. (Their perceptions of God, and thus the mutual cognitive environment they access, are often heavily influenced by those who have told them about him, however.) They use naïve interpretation, accessing cultural assumptions from their own cognitive environment to process Scripture as best they are able. This can lead to misunderstanding of the author’s intended meaning.”¹⁰ I am simply pointing out that the naïveté to which she refers is quite common, and often reflected even in statements of Bible translators themselves regarding the power of new Bible translations. It is not uncommon for translators and other Christian leaders to inform their supporters that when people began to hear the Bible being read in their own language for the very first time they responded in dramatic ways, because

for the first time *they heard God speaking to them directly* from the Bible.

Translators, and indeed churches, need to think through whether, or to what extent, leading readers to think the Bible is addressing them directly is an ethically, ideologically or theologically appropriate result, or not. One possible conclusion might be that such a result is more appropriate for some parts of the Bible than others.

Direct transferability is seen as highly desirable (and thanks to the ideology of many, quite natural) to many Bible translators (and readers) but, in my opinion, is also a potential source of much danger and abuse. In case after case, unless the context clearly does not allow for it, readers of the Bible



have shown they expect the function to be the same even if the original and receptor audiences and contexts are in fact significantly different.

Ideological/ethical challenges arise (among other cases) when a translator does not give very careful attention to parts of the translation that refer to source text social or cultural realities that will be interpreted in the translation as references to target audience social or cultural realities. That is, the text is expected to function in the same way in the receiving community as in the community of the original receivers, due in part to lack of awareness of the differences between the two audiences and the implications

for what we might call “*dys*-functional equivalence.” Tremendous power is exerted, in particular, whenever a Bible translation is taken to refer to groups in the target culture. This is what I refer to as the “mapping of identities.”

On Direct Transferability and the Mapping of Identities

By a “mapping of identities” I mean the idea that people or groups in the biblical text are identified with people or groups in the receptor culture and context, with one identity being mapped onto another. This takes place, for instance, when readers of Bible translations directly apply biblical referents (i.e., “priests,” “lawyers,” “tax collectors,” “kings/rulers,” “Jews,” “slaves,” or “wives”) to people they believe fit those labels in their own society. They immediately see the cultural similarity or parallel between the group in the biblical world and their own world. Even when translators recognize that there is no exact parallel between the referents in these two cultures, they may decide to label a biblical category or group with the name of a similar group in the receptor culture. There is a tremendous amount of power being exercised in this choice, since translators are deciding which group(s) should be identified with a positively or negatively referenced people in the original text (e.g., a group that is made to “stand in” for the Samaritans, or for any of the groups mentioned above).

In the following sections I will look at several cases where the mapping of identities between biblical referents and groups within receptor cultures has led to extremely troubling results.

Masters and Slaves

Since the New Testament refers to slaves as a part of the Greco-Roman household, English-speaking readers of the Bible found a basis (and created further bases) for the view that the Bible condoned modern slavery—and even the transatlantic

slave trade—generating interpretations of other biblical texts to support the (now clearly unbiblical) view that people of color were under God’s curse and born to serve white people as slaves.¹¹ The fact that the slavery of the Roman world (a horrible evil in its day) was of a different nature and origin than modern racism and slavery, was deemed inconsequential.¹² It was sufficient that the Bible spoke of slavery without explicit condemnation, and thereby the direct transference condoned a more modern institution of slavery.

Allen Dwight Callahan reminds us that “the abolitionists of the North and the planter class of the South read from the same Bible. Long before Lincoln, [Frederick] Douglass had learned that the Bible was the highest authority of American slavery and the strongest link in the chain of oppression and violence that warranted slavery as the sacred basis for the Christian culture of what would become the Confederacy.”¹³

I understand that one of the reasons some members of the ESV translation committee supported a decision to change the translation of *δοῦλος* in 1 Corinthians 7 from “slave” to “bond-servant” is because the former term could too easily be identified with slavery as it is known by English readers and the second translation was felt more likely to cause readers to hesitate before making such an identification. This changing of terms is one approach to avoiding premature transference based on the assumption that the text addresses the reality we are familiar with. Perhaps a neologism like “bond-slave” would be even better than “bond-servant” (since most people distinguish servants from slaves in terms of ownership/employment).¹⁴ In many cases it may be best to handle this issue by explaining the different nuances of this cultural reality through the use of paratextual material (e.g., a footnote or sidebar).

Translators are deciding which group(s) should be identified with a positively or negatively referenced people in the original text

Husbands and Wives

Since slavery is no longer an acceptable part of Western culture (at least not explicit, legalized slavery), when readers come to biblical texts that mention slaves and masters they realize instantly that the texts, if they are to be applied, cannot be directly transferred. Since husbands and wives are omnipresent across all societies, people without in-depth knowledge of biblical cultures readily assume that the marital relationships being referenced and addressed in the biblical texts closely parallel those with which everyone in their context is familiar. Most Bible readers are not familiar with important aspects of marriage relationships in the Greco-Roman world. In that particular context, marriages were not typically entered into by men and women of similar ages, but by adolescent girls and fully adult men. And, although there are references to well-educated women in the Greco-Roman world, they seem to be exceptions to the rule (and considered noteworthy, literally, by the ancient authors). Normally men and husbands were much better educated and had greater exposure to information and experience outside the household. This is implicit even within one of the most remarkable texts of the New Testament relating to this subject. In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 Paul says women or wives are not allowed to speak in the church meeting (in fact it would be shameful to do so), but should ask their own husbands at home if they have any questions. This latter clause only makes sense in a context where it is safe to assume that a wife’s husband is better informed and therefore capable of answering whatever questions the wife might have. Such was the context of the typical Greco-Roman marriage.¹⁵ All of the New Testament

statements about how wives and husbands should relate to each other are addressed not to wives and husbands who married peers of similar age and life experience as in modern western cultures, but to wives and husbands within the asymmetrical relationship that was the Greco-Roman marriage. Should all that the New Testament authors wrote about husbands and wives be considered directly transferable to husbands and wives who do not reflect the cultural inequities (i.e., unequal ages, levels of maturity, education and life experience) of the Greco-Roman marriage? More to the point of this essay: *how could readers even begin to ask this kind of question if there is nothing in the translation to alert them to the differences between the people addressed in the original context and those who have those same labels (husband/wife) in their own contexts?*

This is, I think, a real challenge. We are certainly not going to translate the Greek terms as “Greco-Roman wives” or “Greco-Roman husbands”! And we can’t translate one of the terms “child-bride” (especially since many of the wives would no longer be adolescents as when they were first married). Again, it may be that the best that can be done is to provide paratextual material (a footnote or sidebar) that gives some indication of the distinctive aspects of the roles and relationships in the original cultural context. Perhaps other solutions will be discerned or developed, but only if translators become aware of the problem and struggle with it.

During the 2009 Nida School of Translation Studies, a missionary Bible translator with more than twenty years of experience told me he had never been aware of the differences between Greco-Roman marriages and marriage as he had known it all his life. This lack of awareness may be a factor in

the terrible track record of the global church. These texts have been used to justify wife abuse in both developed and developing countries. On another occasion a translation consultant told a group of translators (including myself) about a situation where he returned after a seminar break to find one national Bible translator telling another (with regard to one of the passages on submission), "See, this is where the Bible says we can beat our wives." Thankfully he took the opportunity to explain that the Bible says no such thing. We would all reject any suggestion that the Bible supports wife abuse, but many Christians unwittingly teach wives and husbands to relate to each other according to a Christianized version of Greco-Roman standards, without being aware of or contemplating the significance of the differences.

"The Jews": Some or All, Then and Now?

Certainly one of the ugliest ways in which direct transferability has manifested in Christian history has been with respect to references to "Jews" in the New Testament. Statements made about particular Jews or Jewish leaders or groups in the New Testament have been taken to be accurate descriptions of all Jews in different times and places. The fact that the Gospel of John uses οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (usually translated "the Jews") to refer to a prominent group of Jewish opponents of Jesus, intending to focus only on some Jewish religious leaders, hasn't helped things throughout history. So, for example, the ESV renders John 5:16-18 as follows: "And this was why *the Jews* were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. . . . This was why *the Jews* were seeking all the more to kill him . . ." (emphasis added). Modern readers easily forget that *all* of the characters in the story are Jews, as were Jesus, his disciples, the invalids mentioned in v. 3 (including the one Jesus healed), and even the author of the book. What distinguished the people persecut-

ing Jesus was not the fact that they were Jews, but that they were religious leaders openly opposed to Jesus. The author is hardly condemning all "Jews" but has a focus on the particular group that was opposing and would seek the death of Jesus.¹⁶

Martin Luther is the most notorious example of an influential Christian leader whose assumption of direct transferability in this area has been used to justify atrocities against Jews. In his 1543 tract, *On The Jews and Their Lies*, notice how Luther implies that whatever was said about the particular Jews who were addressed by John the Baptist and by Jesus may be directly applied to Jews in general in his own days. (I have italicized "them" and "they" so as to highlight how Luther identifies the two in his context.)



He did not call *them* Abraham's children, but a 'brood of vipers' [Matt. 3:7]. Oh, that was too insulting for the noble blood and race of Israel, and *they* declared, 'He has a demon' [Matt. 11:18]. Our Lord also calls *them* a 'brood of vipers'; furthermore in John 8 [vv. 39, 44] he states: 'If you were Abraham's children ye would do what Abraham did. . . . You are of your father the devil.' It was intolerable to *them* to hear that *they* were not Abraham's but the devil's children, nor can *they* bear to hear this today.¹⁷

Near the end of this same tract he goes on to call on his readers "to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with

dirt whatever will not burn . . . that their houses also be razed and destroyed . . . that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them . . . that their rabbis be forbidden to teach . . . that safe conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews."¹⁸ His bloodcurdling call for pogroms was later used by the Nazis to support their odious agenda. Indeed, Luther was a gifted Bible scholar and university lecturer (and a former Augustinian friar), but his intuitive approach of reading the text as directly transferable, with a mapping of the identity of the ancient opponents of Jesus onto all Jews of all times, was the result of an ideological blinder of cataclysmic proportions.

Because of the misunderstandings that have been caused by passages like this, some translators have proposed renderings that are less likely to mislead. For example the NET translates the key words as "the Jewish leaders". Some other translators have suggested rendering it as "some of the Jews". Still others refer to all first century Jews as "Judeans", an attempt to distinguish those terms that refer to modern ethnic and religious identities from those that refer to the ancient people who predated Rabbinic and modern Judaism. I think an historical awareness of the potential misunderstandings of the traditional translation should lead translators to either adopt one of these translation strategies or make use of paratextual materials to explain the terms. This would minimize the risk that Jewish people today will continue to be profiled as "villains" due to an inappropriate identification with opponents found in texts of the New Testament.

Sexual Identities in the New Testament?

The case of sexual identity is rather different from those addressed above. The traditional translations of "slave," "wife," "husband," and "Jews" have

often undergirded abusive ideologies across a very long history due to an unfortunate intuitive use of direct transferability in translation choices. In contrast, the word “homosexuals” (or “homosexuality”) appeared in English Bible translations for the very first time in the twentieth century, reflecting the fact that the conceptual framing of homosexual and heterosexual orientations or identities took hold in English-speaking contexts within that century.¹⁹ But in light of the tendency towards direct transferability, it’s important to understand that the Bible is not speaking of sexual orientations but of sexual practices, regardless of one’s orientation.

This is not the place to develop a full biblical treatment of ‘homosexuality’, a treatment that would require a more complete integration of different portions of Scripture. I only wish to point out that modern ideological pressures from the homosexual debate can make us evangelicals want to expand Paul’s terminology to include everything we think ought to be included in his choice of terms. This is particularly the case in the listing of the terms for sexual vices in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, where the term ‘homosexual’ has more recently been applied. My view is that Paul uses the term *porneia* (‘sexual immorality’) to prohibit all illicit sexual activity (including all sexual activity outside of the one-flesh union of husband and wife), but that his use of further terms in that listing needs to be understood within the moral landscape of the Roman world. Paul is cutting across the sexual landscape of his time, not ours.²⁰

It’s remarkable that most classical scholars agree that the ancient Romans did not have a concept of sexual identity or orientation (hetero-/homo-/bi-sexual). Rather, they had a concept of gender identity, one that identified maleness with the dominant position in sexual intercourse.²¹ A man’s reputation and social standing as a man was secured not on the basis

Modern ideological pressures from the homosexual debate can make us evangelicals want to expand Paul’s terminology

of whether he primarily had sexual relations with people of the same or the opposite sex, but on the basis of whether he had the dominant position in sexual intercourse. Same-sex behaviors were most often engaged in by married men who practiced procreational sex with their wives but also engaged in recreational sex with male household slaves and/or prostitutes. One of the terrible realities of household slaves in the Roman world (both males and females) was that they were subject to the sexual requirements of their masters. These immoral same-sex practices were endemic throughout the entire Roman world, and more broadly practiced than any modern attempt to isolate a particular demographic of same-sex identity.

A particular modern sexual identity/demographic—one that was never part of the cognitive environment of Paul’s ancient context—came to be explicitly identified as the object of New Testament vice lists by introducing the term “homosexuals” into modern Bible translations. Modern readers, therefore, are led to believe that Paul has “homosexuals” in mind (whether practicing or not) rather than men in his own world who practiced forms of sexual exploitation (mainly of other males) that were familiar to his ancient readers but possibly quite foreign to us.²² In my view, the introduction of the modern socially-constructed concept of a sexual orientation/identity and demographic entails a reverse-mapping *which reflects ideological blinders of recent origin*. This transference ends up “targeting” certain members of a modern demographic that was not part of the social or conceptual landscape in Paul’s world.

None of this is meant to suggest that Paul would condone same-sex relations of any kind. It was

clear to most first century Jews, including Paul, that the only licit sexual relations were sexual relations between heterosexual spouses. But the translation of his terms should be faithful to the behaviors and context to which he referred and beware of mapping sexual behaviors of the Roman world onto people identified with a sexual orientation or identity in our own world.²³ In a society where people are marginalized, bullied and end up committing suicide because they are identified (or identify themselves) as gay or homosexual, Bible translators must be especially circumspect about inscribing that identity into the middle of a New Testament vice list if it is not exactly what Paul had in mind.

Other Historical or Potential Mappings

These four mappings of identity are merely examples, but they strike me as some of the most important examples in the global movement of the church. One can easily see the historical and the potential consequences. Other potentially harmful mappings in the use of direct transferability would include the translation of Hebrew and Greek terms for “king” or “ruler” (potentially translated “chief” in some contexts), for “tax collectors,” “lawyers,” or “judges”.

Wittingly or unwittingly, certain power structures and ideological agendas are both reflected in, and established by, the use of translations. They can encourage readers to reflexively associate references to people or roles in their own social contexts (including social identities or structures never contemplated by the ancient authors) to ones that referred to particular groups, social structures

or roles in the original biblical contexts. Of course Christians need to apply ancient texts to their own contemporary contexts, but I have attempted to address some of the problems that arise when Christians understand their translations to be speaking directly to their own social context. So a key question confronts Bible translators: to what extent should readers of a new translation be informed that the text does not address them directly, and that serious consequences might ensue if they apply the text as though it did.

Translators' Responsibility for Guiding Product Usage

Producers and distributors of commercial products with potential dangers or side effects often provide consumers with warning labels or exhortations to refrain from improper usage. Advertisements for medications are accompanied by remarkable disclaimers that point out all the dangers that may be associated with the drug. The medications are still recommended and prescribed by doctors, but with an awareness of the potential complications and damage.

Like these producers and distributors, I believe Bible translators should recognize their responsibility to take steps to minimize the possibility that their products will be used in ways that are abusive or harmful. I'm speaking of the impact of ideologies that end up being improperly underwritten by the translation. Translators need to be fully conscious of the ways in which biblical texts have been used to support unjust and oppressive power structures in societies that have historically embraced them. They must consider what preventative measures might be taken in their work.

Undoubtedly, there are numerous strategies that might be adopted. One would be to consider, where feasible, potentially 'foreignizing' the translations of terms that might be likely candidates for improper

applications of direct transferability. Another strategy would be to incorporate guidance into a preface or introductory materials, suggesting both appropriate ways of reading the texts as well as some of the unfortunate and inappropriate ways in which they have been read in the past. (This could include the tendency to take references to certain people or kinds of people in the text as ciphers referring directly to a particular type of person or people in the context of those receiving the translation.) They might also be encouraged to hold themselves and other readers accountable for making sure the Bible is only used in ways that promote the proper love of God and others. The translation should not reflect the



interests of powerful people or groups at the expense of the powerless.

It should be clear that I am most concerned about terms that relate to social groups or roles, and whose translation may have implications for how social relations are configured or reinforced within the receiving culture. This happens especially when readers are not given any reason to think twice about it. For this reason, translators might reconsider the kinds of issues that get addressed in footnotes or sidebars. The tendency has been to use footnotes to address textual issues, alternative translations, or references to what are considered culturally unusual elements in the original texts.

But perhaps translators could be more intentional about footnoting those terms that seem to automatically map identities, items in the text which carry cultural distinctions that may not be otherwise obvious to readers.

Conclusion

We who love the Bible cannot afford to be naïve about its impact. While it has brought great good to people's lives throughout the world, it has also been used to promote or justify oppressive relationships, institutions or cultural customs. It has been used to empower the powerful at the expense of the powerless.

Those of us involved in the work of Bible translation and interpretation need to work with a more profound awareness of the darkness of the human heart, including our own hearts. We need a profound suspicion of the uses and relations of power, including ways in which "love" has been co-opted by the powerful to justify the asymmetrical power relations in society (so clear in the argument that the enslavement of Africans reflected love and benevolence in "civilizing" and "Christianizing" them).

While we may believe in human depravity, have we fully thought through the implications of this depravity in what people might do with their Bible translations? In my view it is a responsibility of the translator to sensitize readers to issues of power and moral responsibility with respect to the vulnerable, and to suspect the infinite human capacity to rationalize unjust structures, institutions and behaviors. When their products are well received, Bible translators end up becoming crucial shapers of the cultures that receive their translations, whether they recognize it or not. They must think through issues of ideology and how Bible translations impact or justify certain power relations in the receiving community, and do what they can to minimize unhealthy consequences wherever possible. **IJFM**

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Endnotes

¹ Sandra Marie Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament As Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 170.

² Ibid., p. 120.

³ I am using "ideology" where some missiologists might prefer the term "worldview". But worldviews reflect ideas about reality, understandings of origins, of what exists and doesn't exist, of how the world is constructed, and how that world works (materialism, spiritism, Christian, etc). The questions of our ingrained loyalties and our taken-for-granted relationships to power structures are not usually part of what we have in mind when we think of a worldview. Tyndale and Luther, to whom I refer in this article, thought they were simply expressing a biblical worldview, one more accurate and biblical than that of Roman Catholics. The vast majority of Bible translators that I know would probably say they are also simply seeking to express their biblical worldview. It is usually only with some significant hindsight and cultural distance that we can recognize the extent to which work was carried out in a way which reflected unconscious loyalty to particular power structures. This loyalty simply went unrecognized at the time. People like me, and indeed many Bible translators, tend to remain unaware of the extent to which all thinking is tied up with, and can end up supporting, an ideology that lives within worldviews as do germs in even healthy human bodies. Ideology is a better term for incorporating this dimension of power.

⁴ See Paul Ellingworth, "Translation Techniques in Modern Bible Translations", in Philip A. Noss (ed.) *A History of Bible Translation* (Rome: Edizioni de storia e letteratura, 2007), p. 319.

⁵ See Bruce Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 65.

⁶ Edesio Sánchez-Cetina, "Word of God, Word of the People: Translating the Bible in Post-Missionary Times", in Philip A. Noss (ed.) *A History of Bible Translation* (Rome: Edizioni de storia e letteratura, 2007), pp. 391-392.

⁷ Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 200.

⁸ Ibid., p. 206.

⁹ The new Common English Bible uses the expression "God's DNA" at 1 John 3:9, a fine example of the sort of thing I have in mind.

¹⁰ See Harriet Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: From Translation to Communication*. (Manchester, UK; St. Jerome Publications, 2006), pp. 30-31.

¹¹ See Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹² See Byron 2004, Glancy 2006, Harrill 2006.

¹³ See Callahan, *ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁴ This usage or invention of a term reflects what the KJV and other English translations have done with transliterations like 'deacon', 'apostle', 'baptize', etc. These were not (originally) translations but transliterations of Greek words, and can be used to cue readers that we are introducing a different reality.

¹⁵ See Treggiari 1993, Evans Grubbs 2002, Lefkowitz and Fant 1992, Cohick 2009, Witherington 1988.

¹⁶ The usage is not that dissimilar to the reference to "the Romans" in John 11:48, where Roman soldiers are meant (sent by the Emperor), and not Romans in general.

¹⁷ Martin Luther, "On the Jews and Their Lies", in In J. J. Pelikan, Hilton C.

Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (eds.), *Luther's Works, Vol. 47: The Christian in Society IV* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 141.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 268-270.

¹⁹ As far as I can tell, the earliest appearance of any of the related terms in a Bible translation was in the Amplified Bible of 1958, which translated the final two verses in 1 Cor. 6:9 as "those who participate in homosexuality." In 1961 the New English Bible translated the key words, "homosexual perversion." Those words were paraphrased simply as "homosexuals" in the *Living Bible* (originally in 1962 in *Living Letters*). Since then, translations have regularly referred to "homosexuals" (NASB, NKJ) "practicing homosexuals" (NAB, NET), "homosexual offenders" (NIV 1984), "homosexual perverts" (TEV), or, most broadly (and in direct conflict with the point being made here), "any kind of homosexual" (HCSB, changed in later printings of the same edition to "anyone practicing homosexuality"). Most Bible readers today understand their Bibles to refer directly to those in our own societies known as "homosexuals." Before the twentieth century the various translations tended to be vague or use euphemisms for same-sex behavior. For empirical evidence on the usage of the language of "homosexuals" (and "heterosexuals") see: http://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=homosexuals%2Cheterosexuals%2Chomosexuality&year_start=1600&year_end=2000&corpus=0&smoothing=3. For discussion of the historical development of the concepts see, e.g., Dreger 2000:127; Davidson 1990; Katz 2007; Paris 2011.

²⁰ See my fuller treatment of this in "Flee Sexual Immorality": Sex and the City of Corinth", in Brian S. Rosner (ed.), *The Wisdom of the Cross: Exploring 1 Corinthians*

(Nottingham, England: Apollos/InterVarsity, 2011), pp. 111-118.

²¹ On same-sex behavior in the Roman world and the background to what Paul addresses in 1 Cor. 6:9, see Hallett and Skinner 1993, Richlin 2003, Skinner 2005, Williams 2010, Paris 2011, Ciampa 2011. To be absolutely clear, by "dominant position" we have in mind the Roman distinction between those who sexually penetrate others and those who are sexually penetrated. In Roman thinking, true masculine gender was understood to be established by maintaining the former role and absolute avoidance of the latter role.

²² The Greek terms Paul uses are *μαλακοί* and *ἀρσενικοῖται*. One possible way of translating them would be to refer to "men who don't respect sexual boundaries (or men who actively disregard standards of sexual behavior) or who sexually exploit boys or men." For more on the background to Paul's language, see Williams 2010:164-165 and Ciampa, 2011:111-118. To avoid any inappropriate application of direct transferability it may be important, where possible or acceptable, for Bible translations to include footnotes that clarify the Roman background and how it may differ from the sexual landscape of the receiving culture.

²³ The 2011 revision of the NIV translation has dropped the word "homosexuals" and now translates the key terms as "men who have sex with men." That is a significant improvement, as it describes a particular behavior rather than people of a particular sexual orientation (or even the behaviors of people with a particular sexual orientation or identity). Of course, without any further information twenty-first century readers will still take that descriptive translation to be another way of simply referring to "homosexuals."

The Terms of Translation

Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation

Forum of Bible Agencies International (www.forum-intl.net)

Original statement approved: April 21, 1999; Revised statement approved: October 2006

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The following statement on “Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation” is subscribed to by all member organizations of the Forum of Bible Agencies International. While the Forum agencies recognize that, depending upon the particular translation situation, these principles and procedures are often applied in different ways, this statement serves as the common set of principles and procedures under which member agencies carry out their translation activities.

As member organizations of the Forum of Bible Agencies International, we affirm the inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures and commit ourselves to the following goals.

Concerning translation principles, we endeavor insofar as possible:

1. To translate the Scriptures accurately, without loss, change, distortion or embellishment of the meaning of the original text. Accuracy in Bible translation is the faithful communication, as exactly as possible, of that meaning, determined according to sound principles of exegesis.
2. To communicate not only the informational content, but also the feelings and attitudes of the original text. The flavor and impact of the original should be re-expressed in forms that are consistent with normal usage in the receptor language.
3. To preserve the variety of the original. The literary forms employed in the original text, such as poetry, prophecy, narrative and exhortation, should be represented by corresponding forms with the similar communicative functions in the receptor language. The impact, interest, and mnemonic value of the original should be retained to the greatest extent possible.
4. To represent faithfully the original historical and cultural context. Historical facts and events should be expressed without distortion. Due to differences of situation and culture, in some passages 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.
5. To make every effort to ensure that no political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agenda is allowed to distort the translation.
6. To recognize that it is often necessary to restructure the form of a text in order to achieve accuracy and maximal comprehension. Since grammatical categories and syntactic structures often do not correspond between different languages, it is often impossible or misleading to maintain the same form as the source text. Changes of form will also often be neces-

sary when translating figurative language. A translation will employ as many or as few terms as are required to communicate the original meaning as accurately as possible.

7. To use the original language Scripture texts as the basis for translation, recognizing that these are always the primary authority. However, reliable Bible translations in other languages may be used as intermediary source texts.

Concerning translation procedures:

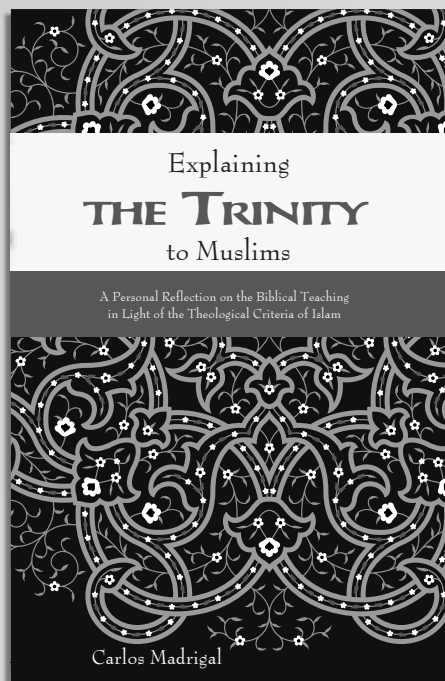
8. To determine, after careful linguistic and sociolinguistic research, the specific target audience for the translation and the kind of translation appropriate to that audience. It is recognized that different kinds of translation into a given language may be valid, depending on the local situation, including, for example, both more formal translations and common language translations.
9. To recognize that the transfer into the receptor language should be done by trained and competent translators who are translating into their mother tongue. Where this is not possible, mother-tongue speakers should be involved to the greatest extent possible in the translation process.
10. To give high priority to training mother-tongue speakers of the receptor language in translation principles and practice and to providing appropriate professional support.
11. To test the translation as extensively as possible in the receptor community to ensure that it communicates accurately, clearly and naturally, keeping in mind the sensitivities and experience of the receptor audience.
12. To choose the media for the translation that are most appropriate for the specific target audience, whether audio, visual, electronic, print, or a combination of these. This may involve making adjustments of form that are appropriate to the medium and to the cultural setting, while ensuring that the translated message remains faithful to the original message.
13. To encourage the periodic review of translations to ascertain when revision or a new translation is needed.

Concerning partnership and cooperation:

14. To organize translation projects in a way that promotes and facilitates the active participation of the Christian and wider community, commensurate with local circumstances. Where there are existing churches, we will encourage these churches to be involved in the translation and to carry as much responsibility for the translation project as is feasible.
15. To partner and cooperate with others who are committed to the same goals.

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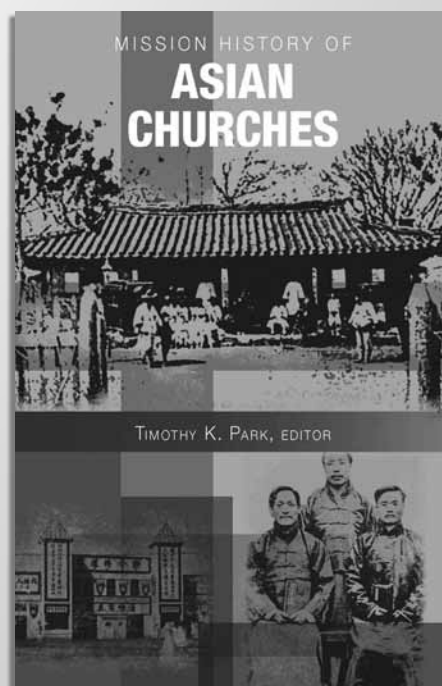
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Book Reviews

Get Real: On Evangelism in the Late Modern World,
by Ed Rommen (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2010)

—reviewed by Brad Gill



Our late modern world has generated a strange yeast. It expands ever-so-quietly, shaping and predisposing our modern sense of ‘self’ towards any gospel proclamation. This same yeast is fermenting within every cultural setting we would consider a frontier for the gospel, creating late modern ‘selves’ amidst even the most traditional of populations. It

seems we would do well to find some new lenses on ourselves if, indeed, our world drifts in this direction.

Ed Rommen has taken up the challenge in *Get Real: On Evangelism in the Late Modern World*. He has explored our contemporary context and the way it shapes our modern sense of reality, bending us as persons away from any receptivity to traditional evangelism. But to get modern readers outside themselves, able to see the currents that shape them, currents usually so taken-for-granted, demands an exercise in abstraction. So, beware, this is no easy read. The author demands a philosophical dexterity most of us don’t use in our daily lives. He’s canvassed modern social theory and synthesized how scholarship tries to capture the realities of our contemporary context. This synthesis is valuable in itself, but he also pushes beyond. He offers an assessment for evangelism from his experience as both an evangelical and Orthodox minister, the latter tempering the theological shape of his assessment.

In part one he identifies the historical values that underlay our late modern world. Again, his Orthodox theological orientation sensitizes him to certain aspects of the Enlightenment. He offers a new recipe of rather normal ingredients: the impact of secularism on belief; ‘the disengagement of religious institutions from society’; moral erosion; and the autonomy of human reason. It’s not a typical summary, but more what he calls “a moral imaginary”. It allows the reader from any part of the globe, involved in ministry to any and every people of the world, to sense aspects of late modern life that permeate their traditional setting.

In part two Rommen’s analysis steps from history to what he calls ‘the trajectory of the late modern self’. Here lies the crux of his argument. He believes we have lost a real sense of ourselves in this age, and that part of evangelism is to “get real”, to help reinstate that ‘real’ sense of who God has designed us

to be in His image. He explores, therefore, this modern mode of ‘being’, ‘identity’ and ‘self awareness’ (Chapters 3 and 4) in an effort to make sense of so much evidence in modern life: the deterioration or redirection of personal trust; the depersonalizing of institutions; the fragmentation and pluralization of our lives; the fixation with our bodies and appearance; and the increasing simulation in our lifestyles. Rommen suggests that these modern realities reflect a deeper predicament, one that forces the late modern person to question their own intrinsic value. The introspective tendencies of the late modern self can only find an answer self-reflexively, in either self-referencing, self-defining, self-actualizing, self-monitoring, or in self-authenticating. Rommen responds theologically to this bleak assessment in each chapter, offering a perspective from the Church, or what his Orthodox theologians call ‘ecclesial being’. He reinforces again and again that “the Church’s teaching on the creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God represents the only solid basis on which the value of human being can be established” (p. 113).

So, the author believes evangelism has to back up a few steps, or go a few leagues deeper, if it is going to capture the right predisposition in communicating the gospel. He claims an increasing ineffectiveness to our more traditional approach of “Gospel-as-Information”, and that our late modern world pleads for a “Gospel-as-Person”. But, quite ironically, the hunger of the modern self is resistant to this personal gospel. Rommen explains that, indeed, moderns want to resolve their ‘ontological insecurity’ and ‘anxious being’, but that the endemic individualism of modern consciousness has jettisoned the relational basis of being. He faces the consequences in part three, “Social Discourse in the Late Modern Context”, where he tackles this relational predicament in a study of ‘belonging’ and ‘diversity’ across the ‘socoscape’ of contemporary life (chapter 5). His conviction is that any sense of belonging is a lot tougher in this late modern world, due mostly to the fragmentation that results from increasing diversity and multiculturalism. Rommen explores the range of belonging in our world, and from a palette of types (i.e., ascription, achievement, voluntary) paints how moderns go about belonging. It’s a haunting x-ray into a mode of being desperate to integrate ‘identity fragments’ around an empty core of being. This modern core, unhinged from the ‘image of God’, and so self-oriented, warps “the strength of affiliation, the view of membership, and the sense of belongingness” (p. 124). Our modern ‘absolutizing of inwardness’ has transformed how we go about belonging.

Rommen spends a whole chapter examining how all of this impacts us religiously, and specifically how modern social discourse can vanquish traditional religious institutions (ch. 6). Some of the tidbits in this chapter are valuable beyond the pale, for those who minister within major non-Christian religious worlds. He sets the stage in earlier

chapters, gradually deconstructing our usual understanding of religion. He's framed religion within a broader 'moral orientation' (as defined by Charles Taylor), an orientation that helps us answer the question of "where I stand" (p. 71):

My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.

I found that Rommen provides a fresh way of thinking through Muslim or Hindu religious orientation. In our post-9/11 era of religious jihad, we can so easily profile or reduce what the 'other' religion comprises. Or, in opposite fashion, we carry that simplistic sense that traditional religion is eroding under the impact of modernity. By introducing new terms, Rommen helps us transcend these reductionist tendencies when it comes to religion. But he proceeds beyond his analysis, and grounds his theory of modern religious transformation in a study of the Orthodox ethnic communities of America. He shows how religious identity (the church) became the glue for 'belonging' in these sub-cultures (p. 128f), and by so doing provides at least one clear example of late modern religious change.

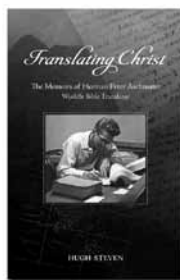
In chapter six he reviews the more typical post-modern skepticism of all metanarratives, and the futility modern man feels in referencing any religious discourse. He discusses the paradoxical rise of spiritual interest and accounts for it by this same self-reflexive tendency in late modern life. His prognosis for any traditional religious practice is quite threatening:

The reason that religious institutions have fallen out of favor has to do with the ways in which social discourse and its attendant institutions have been transformed by the absolutizing of inwardness. Inwardness seems to have left us with no one and nothing to trust but ourselves. Yet the complexity of late modern life requires some form of trust. Traditionally, that has been developed and expressed within the context of a network of stable and persistent relationships. But under the influence of social complexity and extreme inwardness many have opted for transitory commitments in which what is important is the utility of some shared interest, choosing and managing select associations only as need requires. This leads to a transformation of the institutions involved, including religious institutions (pp. 161-162).

I'm suggesting that what Rommen carefully observes within the modern American context has broad application to the cultural contexts of Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim across the world. Any religious context is fermenting with this late modern yeast. Rommen is actually alerting the mission movement to the modern encroachment on communication and reception of the gospel across the globe. And he calls readers to consider the new theological resources we must call on in helping a late modern world to 'get real' and come to terms with the gospel.

Translating Christ: The Memoirs of Herman Peter Aschmann, Wycliffe Bible Translator, by Hugh Steven (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2011)

—reviewed by Brad Gill



Hugh Steven has rendered a vivid picture of the traditional translation task of the 20th century through the memoirs of Herman Peter Aschmann. A newer generation in mission might count it antique, especially with the absence of any familiar global technology and communication, but it's a very accurate and genuine piece of history. From that

core of students at 'Camp Wycliffe' in the 1930s, which hosted future translation luminaries like Kenneth Pike and Eugene Nida, emerged lesser celebrated translators such as Aschmann. He seemed an ordinary missionary, and in many ways he was just that. He would cut his linguistic teeth in the highlands of Mexico where Wycliffe began to find its training wheels. He caught the itch early and threw away a normal collegiate career, accruing what he needed intellectually and professionally over the years from the growing institutional acumen of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Not a bad model in a day when collegiate costs have sky rocketed.

Steven has collated journals, first person accounts and collegial testimony to sketch for us Aschmann's combination of intellectual, physical and spiritual energy that extended over half a century. It was an apostolic combination that centered on the focused task of one people having the chance to read the Bible in their own language. There is a great sum of tenacity in this man, as was true of many of his ilk, but it didn't dispel his quiet, gentlemanly regard for all those he came in touch with. He translated Christ with his life as much as with his fixation on words.

The new world of linguistic discovery would be for Herman, as for many a Bible translator, a journey "of deep observation and a slow accretion of details." Eugene Nida claims this "journey into the secret realms of a people's language introduces one to the soul of a nation and makes it possible to lay the foundation for teaching the Truth as it is found in the revelation of God through the [translated] Scriptures" (p. 40). Steven captures this well in Aschmann's story, a "lifelong, incandescent, joyous journey into the very heart, soul and mind of the Totonac people" (p. 48). Through mishap and circumstance Steven maps a journey into the misty horizons of a tribal mind and the discovery of another distant reality. The key was to crack the code of language.

The nature of motivation in a typical run-of-the-mill translator is one who really loves language, who in pre-cybernetic times was "born with ink in his veins." My wife and I spent a summer

Instead of submitting one possible rendering of a biblical expression, (Aschmann) usually had a half dozen different ways of representing the meaning of the Greek text

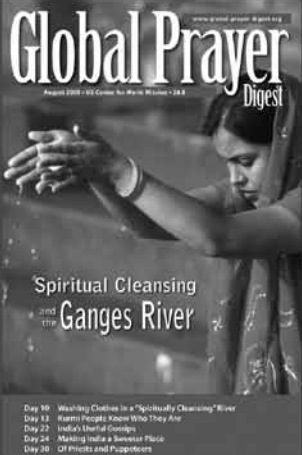
at SIL in 1976, and worked alongside translators for seven years in the mountains of Africa, and we witnessed just how integral this gift is to the mission movement. Steven has chosen the genre of biography to capture this drive and orientation. In 1938 the linguistic tools were crude and required much from the instinct and intuition of the translator, and Steven is at his best in illustrating this capacity in Aschmann. The science of tabulating and identifying language families and dialects was in its infancy, and most surveys required weeks of trekking across treacherous terrain. Reports were usually filled with multiple hair-raising incidents, but Aschmann reported hardly any. It's only in Steven's biography that one catches the soul-tearing loss of Aschmann's five-year-old son to a freak accident while this man was incommunicado on one of these extended trips.

Steven has given us an honest story of an honest man. It weaves along the margins of other more significant events, like the formation of Wycliffe and the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Mexico City in 1942. There's humility in and around Aschmann, whether it be his hospitable manner in working with national colleagues, or he and wife's initial reactions to the 'christopaganism' of Totonac life. Theirs was a landscape won by the monks just after the arrival of Cortez, the rise of stone churches, the survival of animistic

notions and taboos, and of endemic alcoholism. (It was that syncretistic Catholic turf that failed to be included in the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference). Aschmann faced the demanding need for discernment in all these challenges with an open, progressive and teachable spirit. In 1983, after almost a half century of linguistic work, he displays a "willingness to admit he had a lot to learn about producing an idiomatic translation ... about translating meaningfully and dynamically into another language." This humility won his way into that indigenous world.

But Steven also frames Aschmann's ability to transfer a wonderful creativity to his national workers. Eugene Nida, one of the past century's foremost linguistic consultants, saw something exceptional in Aschmann: "instead of submitting one possible rendering of a biblical expression, he usually had a half dozen different ways of representing the meaning of the Greek text ... [and] he inspired local people to imitate his skill in discovering more and more meaningful ways of communicating a message into an entirely different language and culture."

Tenacity, humility, creativity. These are apostolic qualities to be emulated in every generation, and one certainly catches their scent in these pages. **IJFM**



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In Others' Words

The Shadow of Eugene Nida

The recent passing of Eugene Nida at the age of 96, one of the most prominent Bible translation experts of the 20th century, has gone almost unnoticed. His revolutionary impact on translation has much to do with the advocacy of “dynamic equivalence” translation, a ‘meaning-based’ approach that focuses on translating “thought-to-thought” versus “word-to-word”. For the long and distinguished career of this ‘premier linguist and translation consultant’, see Morgan Feddes’ article at www.christianitytoday.com/ct/help/info.html#permission. Also, in a very informative interview with Nida in 2002 (www.christianitytoday.com/ct/help/info.html#permission), David Neff asked what Nida believes to be his most important contribution to Bible translation, to which he replies, “To help people be willing to say what the text means—not what the words are, but what the text means.” When Neff asks this scholar of biblical languages whether it was difficult in practice to communicate the meaning and message of Scripture, and not just repeat the words, Nida responded:

“When we bring together a group of folks who want to be translators, it takes a month to get them willing to make sense intellectually. It takes another two weeks to make them willing to do it emotionally. They can accept it intellectually but not emotionally because they’ve grown up worshipping words more than worshipping God.”

The 400th Anniversary of the King James Bible

Mark Noll, the preeminent historian of American religion, has written a review of a representative number of books published this year in commemoration of the King James Bible (“Long Live the King”, in *Books and Culture*, Nov./Dec. 2011, pp. 11-14). He handles four questions in relation to these new perspectives on the KJB, which provide a fascinating backdrop for considering the ‘terms of translation’. In his first question, as to the circumstances in which the KJB was created, Noll’s review embellishes Roy Ciampa’s reference to ideology in the origins of the KJB (see p. 140 in this issue). But it’s Noll’s third question, “What kind of translation is the KJB, and why should we care?”, that provides another slant on the use of terms in translation. He cites Leland Ryken’s emphasis on the virtues of the “essentially literal” KJB, with its verbal equivalence and its incomparable “grandeur” and “eloquence”, which Ryken believes makes the KJB more accurate than modern dynamic equivalence translations. But on the latter question of “why care?”, Noll refers to the 1611 “note to the reader” made by the theologian Myles Smith. He claims “the very meanest translation of the Bible in *English* ... containeth the word of God, yea, is the word of

God.” This theologian presses us beyond linguistics, reckoning “that version is best through which the Spirit works most directly to communicate life in Christ.” This especially seems the question when a society treats the Bible as a “monument of English prose”, but fails to consider the Bible, in the words of Myles Smith, as “a fountain of most pure water springing up unto everlasting life”.

Race, Ethnicity and the Church

The second volume of the *Great Commission Research Journal* raises the issue of multi-ethnic congregations, a subject relevant to any and every urban context of the world (*GCRJ*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Winter 2011). The editors are willing to face the social complexities which complicate the original thesis of ‘homogenous unit’ thinking. This is significant since this very periodical carries at least part of Donald McGavran’s legacy (formerly *The Journal for the American Society for American Church Growth*). The editors clearly respect the power of ethnic identity, and do not just uncritically affirm some kind of popular multiculturalism. They seem to resist any simple meltdown of cultures, yet also engage the contextual realities of urban life.

But, maybe even more importantly, they take on the hypersensitive mix of race, reconciliation and ethnic legitimacy in certain of the articles. Especially note worthy is the article by Dirke Johnson, “Multicultural and Racial Reconciliation Efforts Fail to Attract Many in the Black Church”. (*GCRJ*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Winter 2011, pp. 221-234; journals.biola.edu/gcr/volumes/2/issues/2/articles/221) Underneath the resistance of some Black churches to any effort at racial reconciliation and multiculturalism in their churches is the sense that ‘most multiracial groups are monoculturally white’, and that ‘confusing race and culture provides the seedbed for the dominant culture of the group to subordinate other participating cultures’ (p. 225). The bottom line is that racial reconciliation ‘unintentionally promotes subordination’, and ‘(blacks) don’t want non-black culture changing what is a core value to them’ (p. 224). This is a bold assessment, one that fundamentally challenges an superficial emphasis on multiculturalism, and halts any minimalist view of cultural identity in our inter-racial cities. **IJFM**



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Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

	Lesson 7: Eras of Mission History (H)	Lesson 9: The Task Remaining (H)	Lesson 10: How Shall They Hear? (C)	Lesson 14: Pioneer Church Planting (S)
A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray (pp. 105-120)		X	X	X
A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray (pp. 121-125)			X	
When "Literal" is Inaccurate: A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Translating Scripture Meaningfully Donna Toulmin (pp. 127-137)		X	X	X
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