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(Continue on back inside cover)

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THE FAMILIAL LANGUAGE DEBATE IN MUSLIM BIBLE TRANSLATION

The idea for this edition came from Rev. Michael Langford, the director of the Institute for Islamic Studies on the APTS campus in Baguio City, Philippines, who told me that the Familial Language issue in Bible translations for Muslims is the hottest topic among missionaries in Islamic contexts today. Certainly most evangelicals would agree that Bible translation is foundational to any kind of ministry. How that translation is done, however, is a subject of intense debate. In the matter of the Familial Language issue, the theological implications are stupendous.

The participants in the discussion are the Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT) and their partner organization, the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), who contend that removing the biblical title of Jesus as the “Son of God” may be necessary in some cases to avoid misunderstandings among Muslims about what is meant by the term. The Assemblies of God World Missions USA (AGWM) takes the opposing position, insisting that this terminology be retained. In addition to their official position papers presented here, both WBT/SIL and AGWM were given the opportunity to add further reflections. WBT/SIL respectfully declined because their current positions are under revenue. Dr. Mark Hausfeld, the primary author of the AGWM document, has written an editorial further summarizing the AGWM position. I have placed this at the end. I would add that all three organizations have a long track record of commitment to the fidelity and inerrancy of the Bible, which is reflected in their documents.

My purpose here is to allow these organizations to speak for themselves without taking sides. Because these documents were written by the participants themselves, our editorial team made only limited corrections in order to ensure that their voices are fully heard. All participants endorsed these corrections.

Because the AGWM paper is largely reacting to what Wycliffe/SIL have written, the pertinent Wycliffe/SIL documents will be considered first. But before we get into the debate itself, Joe

Cumming's article reminds us that whatever our position may be on the familial language issue, loving, respecting and developing friendships with Muslims is critical to our witness. I might add that the priority of love and respect between Christians who might disagree on the subject at hand is also important for the same reason.

Special thanks to Dr. Jack Chesnut of WBT/SIL and Dr. Russ Turney of the AGWM for providing the documents of their respective organizations. I would also like to thank my old friend Rev. Rick Knoth of the *Enrichment Journal* for permission to use Dr. Cumming's article.

As always, your comments are welcome. You can reach me through our website, www.aps.edu.

I hope you enjoy this edition.

Dave Johnson, D-Miss, Managing Editor

IS JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD? RESPONDING TO THE MUSLIM VIEW OF JESUS

Joseph Cumming

When you talk about matters of faith with your nonbelieving secular neighbors, what Christian belief do they object to most? Is it the biblical concept of Hell? Your views on the uniqueness of Christ, or the inerrancy of Scripture? For many of your Muslim neighbors, these Christian beliefs are not offensive. Indeed, your Muslim neighbor may mostly agree with you on these points. But most Muslims do find deeply offensive another belief that is central to the Christian faith — the assertion that Jesus Christ is the “Son of God.”

In my 15 years living in an Islamic Republic in the Arab world, and my additional 12 years working daily with Muslims around the world, I have found that many Muslims consider this Christian belief to be more offensive than any other. If you are a pastor who encourages your congregation to reach out in love to their Muslim neighbors, you must help them think through how to respond to Muslim concerns about this sacred title of our Savior.

Common Ground?

Before going deeper into this sharp difference between Muslims and Christians, let us remember that Christians do have some important common ground with Muslims regarding the person of Jesus. The *Qur'an* teaches that Jesus was born of a virgin (Sura 19:20); that He is a Prophet (Sura 2:136); that He is among those closest to God (3:45); that He taught a message of kindness and compassion (57:27); that He healed the sick and raised the dead by the power of God (3:49); that He miraculously fed the hungry (5:112ff.); that He is alive now in heaven (3:55); and that He will return at the end of the age (43:61). Remarkably, the *Qur'an* affirms that Jesus is the Messiah and the Word of God (3:45 and 4:171), though most Muslims do not understand these

titles the way Christians do. Muslims revere Jesus. Most will not say His name without immediately adding “Peace be upon Him” — which in Arabic need not imply He is in need of peace, but rather that we hail Him with respect.

At the same time, however, most Muslims feel strongly that Jesus did not die on a cross. They believe He did not rise from the dead or atone for human sin, and that people should not worship Him as God. Muslims generally believe that the One God of Abraham is not triune and has not become incarnate among us. Though they believe the New Testament, Torah, and Psalms are God’s inerrant Word in the original manuscripts, most also believe that people have so thoroughly altered the original text that the Bible we have today is not reliable. They often feel most strongly, however, that it is deeply offensive to refer to Jesus as the Son of God.

These are not marginal issues. If you remove the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Bible from the Christian faith, you have removed virtually all that Christians consider necessary to salvation. In articles elsewhere¹ I have suggested a way forward on some of these other issues. Here I will focus on helping you equip your congregation to respond constructively to Muslims’ objection to the title “Son of God.”

The Importance of Context

Most Muslim-Christian conversations on this topic take place in a polemical context. Search the blogosphere and you will find Muslims and Christians saying nasty things to each other about the doctrine of Christ’s divine Sonship. The problem with this is that it is very possible to win an argument while losing a friend — and alienating that friend from Jesus.

In Matthew 18:15, Jesus reminds us that when we disagree with a friend, the goal of our conversation should be to win “your brother or sister,” not merely to win the argument. If you give your congregation powerful apologetics to prove that Jesus is the divine Son of God, but your congregation does not know how to communicate that message in love, you will have failed to equip your congregation.

We must first reach out in simple, warm friendship to our Muslim neighbors. I am not implying that giving verbal expression to one’s faith is not critically important — only that this expression must take place in a context of friendship, love, and mutual trust and respect. Christians should have no fear if opportunities for conversations about

faith arise. Unlike many secular people, many Muslims are delighted to talk about religious questions with their Christian friends. Of course, for friendship to be genuine, we must see it as valuable in itself, not only as a means to an end.

The most important key to relationships with Muslim friends is giving and receiving hospitality. If a Muslim friend drops in to see you, always remember to offer something to eat or drink. Look for ways to befriend them within your cultural context. In America, for example, you might invite them and their family over for a meal, and accept their invitations for meals. In the Philippines, as another example, you might invite them to a group gathering such as a party for your anniversary celebration or when you celebrate other things with friends. In most Muslim-majority cultures, sharing food together is an important part of building friendships. Make sure to invite Muslims of the same sex as you, or else include spouse(s) or same-sex relatives in the invitation. When you invite them, make sure to not serve pork, ham or bacon. It may help if you reassure Muslim friends in your invitation that you will not serve these things.

In my experience, when I discuss Christ's divine Sonship with a Muslim acquaintance in a context of polemics and mistrust, neither of us progress in helping each other understand what we believe and why it is important to us. But when we build a friendship through breaking bread together, and then talk respectfully about what we believe, suddenly we are able to communicate in a meaningful way.

Not What We Say, But What They Hear

In talking with Muslims about Jesus, we must learn what we call "receptor-oriented communication." We must think not only about what we intend to say, but also about what others are hearing. When Christians use the phrase "Son of God," most Muslims hear something very different from what Christians think they have said and from what the Bible affirms. To understand this more deeply, let us look first at the *Qur'an* and then the Bible to see what they say about the term "Son of God."

Muslims' daily prayers involve reciting short passages from the *Qur'an*. Many Muslims daily recite *Surat al-Ikhlās* (112), one of the shorter chapters in the *Qur'an*: "Say: He is God the One. God the Absolute Eternal. He does not beget, nor is he begotten, nor is there anything like unto Him." This reminds devout Muslims daily that God does not beget, nor is God begotten.

But what does the Arabic verb *walada* (“beget”) mean? Though it is cognate with the Hebrew verb *yalad* (Psalm 2:7), the Arabic word has a narrower range of meaning — generally referring to literal, carnal begetting through the sexual union of male and female. This is, of course, not what the Bible teaches about Jesus, nor what Christians believe.

This meaning of the verb *walada* (and the related noun *walad* — son or child) is clear in other passages in which the *Qur’an* addresses whether God has children. Sura 6:101 is one of many verses that say, “How could God have a son (*walad*) when he does not have a female consort?” Interestingly, when Arab Christians speak about Jesus Christ as the Son of God, they generally use a different Arabic word for Son (*Ibn*) — cognate to the Hebrew word *ben* — which has a broader range of meaning than *walad*.

This is not to say that Arab Christians never use the verb *walada* in a metaphorical or noncarnal sense. The Nicene Creed in Arabic uses it in that way. But when Muslims use this word, they nearly always mean it in a literal, carnal sense. By contrast the *Qur’an* frequently uses the word *ibn* in a metaphorical sense in the expression “son of the road” — the traveler in need of hospitality.

So when a Christian says, “I believe Jesus is the Son of God,” often what the Christian’s Muslim friend hears is: “I believe God had sexual relations with Mary and carnally produced an illegitimate divine-human offspring.” This is repugnant to both Muslims and Christians alike. No wonder Muslims are offended by this title.

So, Change the Translation?

More than 95 percent of the problem over the title “Son of God” is a problem of miscommunication, rather than an objection to Christian doctrine. In other words, Muslim friends are rejecting something other than what Christians are affirming.

Because the literal meaning of “Son of God” communicates to Muslims something so radically different from what the Bible affirms, some people suggest we change the way we translate the New Testament phrase “Son of God” (*huios tou theou*). They suggest we find “dynamic equivalent” expressions that will communicate more accurately what the Bible intends. Although this proposal reflects traditional translation principles, I disagree with it for two reasons.

First, I have yet to see an alternate metaphor that communicates the full range of diverse, complex, and powerful

meanings bound up in the words “Father” and “Son” in the Bible (see below for analysis of those meanings). Second, the term “Son of God” is so central to the Bible and to Christian theological tradition that most Muslims are very much aware that the phrase is supposed to be in the Bible. If we replace it with a dynamic equivalent, we only seem to confirm Muslims’ concern that Christians feel free to alter the biblical text when it suits us. We thereby undermine the credibility of the Bible.

But before dismissing this suggestion too quickly, it is important to understand what a powerful emotional impact the term Son of God has on many Muslims. Linguists tell us that the emotional connotations of certain expressions are so deeply embedded in our neural pathways that even if we try to apply a new meaning to the expression, we cannot separate it from its older emotional associations. Even Muslim-background believers in Christ, who understand what Son of God means and accept that meaning, sometimes struggle with using the phrase. The feelings they associate with the phrase Son of God — developed in early childhood — mean that it inevitably prompts them to think of the idea of illegitimate offspring of a sexual union between God and Mary.

Does the suggestion that Jesus is illegitimate offend you? What about the notion that God had sexual intercourse with Mary? Of course such a concept offends. And it should. But this is precisely how many Muslim friends feel even after their Christian friends have tried to clarify what Christians do and do not mean by the term Son of God.

This is still not sufficient reason to change the way we translate Scripture. But it is sufficient reason to be extremely careful about how we use this term with our Muslim friends. It is better first to establish a warm friendship built on mutual trust and mutual respect than to use the term lightly or carelessly. And most important: Never use the term without immediately explaining what you do and do not mean by it.

What Does “Son of God” Mean in the Bible?

The phrase “Son of God” has different meanings in different contexts in the Bible. The first sense, which most Bible scholars see as its most common meaning in the Gospels, is simply a messianic title — more or less equivalent to “Messiah,” “Son of David,” or “King of Israel.” Matthew 26:63; John 1:49; 11:27; and 20:31 provide examples of this. The origin of this term as a messianic title comes from 2 Samuel 7 and parallel passages in 1 Chronicles 17 and 22. David

wanted to build a temple for the Lord, but the Lord promised to raise up a descendant of David who would build an eternal temple and whose throne God would establish forever. God says of this future messianic ruler: “I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take away my love from him” (1 Chronicles 17:13).

So far, most Muslims would not disagree with this. In these passages the title “Son of God” may not necessarily imply any divine status (but see Psalm 45:6). It simply means the promised messianic ruler who has a special love relationship with God. In no sense does it imply literal, carnal begetting. But in other biblical passages “Son of God” (or the plural “children of God”) has other meanings.

A second sense in which the term is used is in John 1:12,13 — one of many passages in the Bible that refer to believers in Jesus as “children of God.” Clearly this does not refer to literal, carnal begetting; indeed, verse 13 explicitly rejects the idea of any sexual begetting. Rather, this refers to a metaphorical, spiritual relationship of love.

A third sense is in Acts 17:28,29, which says that all human beings are in some sense “God’s offspring” (obviously a different sense from John 1:12). And Luke 3:38 refers to Adam as a “son of God.” Again this is clearly not referring to any kind of literal, carnal begetting.

Though most Muslims would not use the term “children of God” to refer to believers in general or to human beings in general, my experience is that in a nonpolemical context of friendship, most Muslims agree (with qualifications) that they do not find this sense of the term offensive. Indeed, on a few occasions I have heard Muslim leaders and scholars use the term “children of God” in reference to believers in the God of Abraham or to human beings in general. Similarly, most Muslims would not refer to God as our “Father” in this sense, but they do not necessarily find this offensive. On a few occasions, I have heard Muslim leaders and scholars affirm (with qualifications) that God is our Father in the sense of being a loving Provider who cares for us, disciplines us, teaches us, and takes delight in us.

God the Son?

There is a critically important fourth sense in which the Bible uses “Son of God,” notably in several passages in John. Here the term

is more-or-less equivalent to the “Word of God” who is God’s self-expression and the visible manifestation of the invisible God.

John 1 says the Word of God was eternally with God and is God, and that through God’s Word all things were created, and that this Word was manifested in Jesus Christ, and that we have seen His glory. In verse 18 it adds (though the Greek here is open to other translations): “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” John then used the term “Son” in this sense in several passages.

In John 5:18–26, Jesus says that everyone should “honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.” This passage also seems to affirm that by talking about His relationship with God in this way Jesus was “making himself equal [or identical] with God.” In John 10:30, Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” And in John 14:9, Jesus says, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

Biblical texts like these launched a centuries-long process of theological reflection on the relationship of the Word/Son to God the Father, in light of the Bible’s strong assertion that God is One. This led to the articulation of what we now call the doctrine of divine Trinity. Today, many Christians, when they use the term “Son of God,” really mean “God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity.” It is important to remember that the Bible does not use the term in precisely that way. That usage reflects the mature theological formulations of later centuries. But it is equally important to remember that the Bible does use the term in ways that lead inevitably to an understanding of God as triune.

Though the *Qur’an* refers to Jesus as God’s Word, most Muslims do not understand that term in the way the Bible does. But even on this point it is clear that the biblical term “Son” is not referring to literal, carnal begetting. It is describing a unique, eternal, spiritual relationship between Jesus and God. Muslims’ objection here is not to the term “Son” itself, but to the idea that God was manifest in human flesh and that Jesus Christ is that manifestation.

On that question we can have a more constructive conversation if we think about the relationship of God’s Word to God’s own Being. The Islamic theological tradition has a rich heritage of vigorous debate about the relationship of God’s Word to God’s Essence. The *Qur’an*, like the Bible, teaches that all things were created by God’s Word — by God’s speaking to them and saying “Be!”

(e.g. Sura 16:40). The majority Sunni community concluded therefore that God's Word itself is eternal and uncreated. They also concluded that God's Word is not identical with God's Essence, nor is it anything other than God; rather God's Word eternally and uncreatedly subsists in God's Essence. Some Sunni theologians concluded further that since God's Word is manifest in the Holy *Qur'an*, therefore the *Qur'an* is both the eternal, uncreated quality of Speech in God and also the created, temporal expression of that eternal Word.

Some important differences exist between this doctrine and the mainstream Christian understanding of the two natures of Christ — divine (uncreated) and human (created) — and of the relationship of the divine Word/Logos to the Father. I do not propose to minimize or ignore those differences. But there are enough similarities that this can serve as a bridge for understanding, so when Christians explain what they believe, Muslims may understand accurately what their Christian friends intended to say, whether or not they agree.

Unintentional Heresies

Unfortunately, many Christians are ill-informed about their own faith. When they try to explain their faith to a Muslim friend, they unintentionally express views the Church has historically understood as heretical.

For example, the *Qur'an* asserts that Jesus was created like Adam from the dust (e.g. 3:59). In response, some Christians stoutly assert that Jesus is in no sense a created human being. Nonetheless, traditional Christian doctrine holds that Jesus has two natures — divine and human — united in one person. His divine nature (the Word/Logos) is uncreated (John 1:1). But His human nature is like us in every way except sin (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15), created from the dust and temporal just like us. To deny Jesus' fully humanness is conventionally referred to as "the Docetist heresy."

Other Christians, when talking with Muslim friends, fall into what is known as "the Apollinarian heresy" — the belief that Jesus' soul was divine and was clothed in a human body. The problem with this is that if Jesus did not have a fully human soul, then He was not like us in every way — and tempted like us — yet without sin.

Other Christians, seeking to be sensitive to their Muslim friends, emphasize so strongly the separation between human and divine in Christ that they describe Jesus as nothing more than a human

being indwelt by God. This is often called “the Nestorian heresy” (though the historical Nestorius held more nuanced views).

Talking with Muslim friends will very likely put to the test how well your congregation understands their own faith about the person of Christ. The four most common errors into which lay Christians (and some pastors) unintentionally slip are the following: 1) forgetting that Christ in His divine nature as the Logos is fully God, 2) forgetting that in His full human nature Christ is of the very same essence as we are, 3) forgetting that these two natures are indissolubly united in one person, and 4) forgetting that that union does not take away the distinction between the two natures.

Conclusion

As pastor, the more you equip your congregation to understand sound doctrine about the person of Christ, the more you will have equipped them to respond faithfully to questions raised by their Muslim friends. And in the process, you will have also equipped them at a deeper level for the life of faith itself — because our salvation depends on the person of Christ. As many Christian thinkers through the centuries have pointed out: “If Christ were not God, He could not *save* us, because only God can save us. But if Christ were not human, He could not save *us* because only someone who is like us in every way except sin can represent us as our high priest offering himself in atonement for our sins.” The salvation of the human race depends upon the fact Jesus Christ is both fully divine and fully human, and that these two natures are united but distinct in one person — the Son of God.

Notes

1. Yale Center for Faith and Culture. <http://yale.edu/faith/rc/rc-rp.htm>. Accessed 25 October 2011.

Study Questions

1. How do you see the social context in which Muslims and Christians talk about this issue?
2. What beliefs about Jesus do Muslims and Christians have in common?
3. What does “Son of God” mean to Muslims, and how does that make you feel?

4. What does the Bible mean by “Son of God”?
5. How might you discuss these questions with a Muslim friend?

This article was published in the summer 2012 issue of *Enrichment Journal*, USA and is used with permission.”

WYCLIFFE USA POLICY FOR TRANSLATION OF DIVINE FAMILIAL LANGUAGE

The policy of Wycliffe USA concerning the translation of divine familial language in the Scriptures in projects in which Wycliffe USA human and material resources are involved:

We affirm our belief in one God, who exists eternally in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and we affirm our commitment that translations in which we are involved must give full access to this truth.

In the great majority of language projects, the original Greek terms for Father (*pater*) and Son (*huios*), including its occurrence in the phrase “Son of God,” will be translated using the common receptor language equivalents.

In certain languages, if it has been clearly demonstrated that a translation of “Son of God” using the common equivalent for “son” would communicate wrong meaning, a different expression meaning “son” may be used. This different expression must maintain the concept of “sonship,” indicating the familial “Father–Son” relationship. Decisions on different expressions meaning son must be made in full consultation with all parties involved in the project and with review and approval by translation consultants outside the project. Likewise for the translation of “father.”

Where necessary, translations should include an explanation of the meaning of the phrase “Son of God,” in accord with conservative Biblical scholarship. This may be in an introduction, in one or more footnotes, or as a glossary entry, as seems appropriate to the situation.

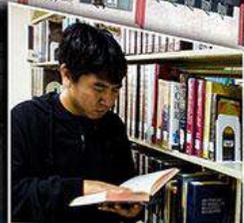
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Wycliffe professes the Word it proclaims. Relying on God and rooted in His Word, Wycliffe seeks to bear fruit among new believers who also become rooted in God's Word. Our goal is to see Bible translation in progress, through partnership, in every language that needs it by the year 2025.

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- The Bible is God's message for people everywhere
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We embrace the following truths, allowing them to guide our words, actions and attitudes:

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- We believe in one God, who exists eternally in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- We believe all people, being created in the image of God, have intrinsic value, but as a result of sin are alienated from God and each other, and therefore in need of reconciliation.
- We believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, is fully God and fully human; He demonstrated God's love for sinners by suffering the penalty of death in their place, rose bodily from the dead and ascended to heaven where He intercedes for His people.

- We believe all who repent and trust in Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Savior are, by the grace of God, declared to be right with Him, receiving forgiveness and eternal life.
- We believe the Lord Jesus Christ will return personally in glory, raise the dead, and judge the world.
- We believe all people will rise from the dead, those who are in Christ to enjoy eternal life with God, and those who are lost to suffer eternal separation from Him.
- We believe in the Holy Spirit who imparts new life to those who believe in Christ; through His indwelling presence and transforming power He gives assurance and equips believers for holy living and effective service.
- We believe the Church is the body of Christ, the fellowship of all believers, and is commissioned to make disciples of all nations.

Wycliffe Bible Translators www.wycliffe.org accessed 10 December 2012

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SIL INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT OF BEST PRACTICES
FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION OF DIVINE FAMILIAL TERMS

with commentary

April 30, 2012

Introduction

The “SIL International Statement of Best Practices for the Translation of Divine Familial Terms” was produced at the Consultation organized by SIL International in Istanbul, Turkey in August of 2011. This Consultation was organized to discuss issues concerning the translation of Divine Familial Terms—with specific focus on the Son of God. The consultation began by considering translation issues, followed by exegetical and hermeneutical considerations, as well as theological and missiological perspectives. This discussion acknowledged the fact that the issues involved in the accurate translation of Father-Son terminology are not merely linguistic in nature. So, even though the Istanbul Statement focuses primarily on best practices for *translation*, it was drafted in the context of this broader discussion.

The Istanbul Consultation was a very significant “coming together of hearts and minds,” as colleagues with divergent perspectives on the issues worked together to draft the statement. There was a genuine spirit of openness to listening to other views and concerns in the interest of addressing the issues at hand and arriving at the best consensus possible. During the days of the Consultation, the participants met in five working groups and then came together to compile the Statement of Best Practices. Istanbul was a very important step in the process of dealing with the issues concerning appropriate ways to translate the Son of God. The phrase “Divine Familial Terms” is used here to refer to the terms or expressions for God *as Father* and Jesus *as the Son of God* and is not intended to suggest anything beyond Father-Son terminology.

Prior to the Istanbul Consultation, it was being debated whether God’s Messiah or Word of God are acceptable as translation

alternatives for Son of God in the text, together with Son of God explained in the paratext. One of the main outcomes of the consultation was that neither God's Messiah nor Word of God adequately conveys the "divine familial" meaning of Son of God. The purpose of the Istanbul Statement is to present a set of guidelines or best practices to ensure that the "divine familial" components of meaning are communicated well in the translated text itself, not just in the paratext. This, however, should not be misunderstood as a claim that this is the only possible meaning in every occurrence of the term Son of God.

The Istanbul Statement was not intended to exhaustively or comprehensively address every issue related to possible translations of Father and Son terminology. Likewise, the document that emerged from the Istanbul Consultation was drafted as a set of principles, not as an exhaustive statement that explicitly discusses the acceptability or non-acceptability of every possible translation variant. The purpose of the Istanbul Statement was not to authorize undue freedom in translation, but rather to provide a process for determining acceptable translations for Father-Son terminology. The hope, then as now, is that this Statement would provide SIL with a process and a set of principles to promote the accurate translation of these terms in challenging situations.

This commentary on the Istanbul Statement is another step in the process of communicating the "spirit" of the in-depth discussions at the Consultation. In order to capture as much as possible of the actual wording of each working group, much of the content of the statement was composed in series of terse bullet points rather than smooth prose. From feedback received since the Consultation, it has come to our attention that there is a degree of ambiguity in some sections of the Statement. It is our hope that this commentary will help clarify the intent of the statements and the practical applications for translation that emerged from the Consultation.

The Istanbul Statement is reproduced in its entirety below, identified by section headings. The commentary is identified in the same way. The only change to the Istanbul Statement is the addition of section numbers to allow easier reference to points within the Statement. For quick reference, the Istanbul Statement is also included in its entirety following the commentary as an appendix.

Istanbul Statement

0.0 Preamble

0.1 Bible Translation is an integral part of the worldwide Church's participation in God's mission.

0.2 Our desire is for Scripture in the language that people understand best.

0.3 Scriptures need to be accurate, clear and natural and in a form that is appropriate in the language community.

0.4 The host community plays a key role in translation decisions, including the translation of key terms.

0.5 While no translation can completely communicate the whole meaning of the original text, the translation must be as accurate as possible, and sufficiently accurate to be accepted by the community as authoritative.

0.6 We affirm the eternal deity of Jesus Christ and require that it be preserved in all translations. Scripture translations should promote understanding of the term "Son of God" in all its richness, including his filial relationship with the Father, while avoiding the implication of sexual activity by God as much as possible.

0.7 Given the richness of meaning in the Scriptures and the diversity of audiences, SIL supports various styles of translation. Translations should be evaluated in light of their intended audience and context.

Definition: Paratext—supportive or explanatory material included along with the translated text in order to aid in understanding. For example: footnotes, side-notes, introductions, glossaries, section headings and illustrations.

Commentary: Preamble

The purpose of the preamble is to establish a frame of reference for reading the statement that follows. Some of the critical points in the preamble are:

A. In SIL, we strongly affirm the eternal deity of Jesus Christ and require that both his deity *and* humanity be clearly communicated in all translations. Scripture translations of the term Son of God must promote an understanding of all its richness, including Jesus'

relationship as Son with God the Father. Without reservation, SIL's Scripture translation practice is to use wording which promotes accurate understanding of the relationship of Father by which God chose to describe Himself in relationship to His Son, Jesus Christ, in the original languages of Scripture.

As stated above, *both* the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ must be clearly communicated in translation. Care must be exercised to avoid any translation strategy that would inaccurately communicate or misrepresent either his deity or humanity. Possible terms must be carefully researched and tested in order to determine which ones will be most effective.

B. Bible translation is an integral part of the global Church's participation in the mission of God in the world. In this mission, SIL is committed to translation that is accurate, clear, and natural in the language that is understood best by the people of the language communities where translation is being done.

C. SIL's commitment, along with the other member agencies of the Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI), is to work in partnership with representatives of language communities and other agencies for the translation of Scripture in the language(s) that people understand best. A Scripture translation needs to be accurate, clear and natural and in a form that is appropriate in the language community.

As expressed in the FOBAI statement, "*Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation*," SIL is committed 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." (FOBAI statement, #1).

Along with this concern for accuracy, we are also committed to translation that communicates as clearly and naturally as possible in the receptor languages. Translation must be done with attention to "the sensitivities and experience of the receptor audience" (FOBAI statement, #11). This involves careful study of and extensive interaction with the worldview and conceptual framework of the receptor audience in order to ensure that the original meaning of the biblical text will be communicated as faithfully and appropriately as possible in its context.

The goal of faithful and appropriate communication requires careful analysis of the specific linguistic, cultural, or religious factors that may cause potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the biblical text. As stated in point #5 of the FOBAI statement, every effort is made to “ensure that no political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agenda is allowed to distort the translation.” Our translation personnel and the translation consultants who advise them are trained to analyze these factors and work with translation teams as they seek to express the meaning of the biblical text in the clearest way possible.

The accurate translation of key theological terms must always be undertaken with special care to avoid theological bias, and to also provide sufficient depth and integrity to allow for theological reflection. While no translation can completely communicate the full meaning of the original text, best practices are established in order to produce translations that are as accurate as possible.

D. The Istanbul statement says that host communities play a key role in translation decisions, including the translation of key terms. The term “host communities” refers to the full range of possible participants, including churches and individual believers from the community. This includes the formal involvement of translators, reviewers, and other members of the translation team as well as the informal involvement of others who provide occasional input to the translation process. This input is critical for the translation team in order to allow them to test that the translation is exegetically accurate and communicates clearly. This is not a matter of adapting the meanings of the Scriptures to the culture and worldview of host communities, but rather a matter of expressing Biblical meaning as accurately and clearly as possible in the host language.

Istanbul Statement

1.0 What are the principles for choosing between different renderings in translation of divine familial terms?

1.1 Comprehension in the target language determines the choice between renderings, and the rendering used must be in conformity with scholarly, exegetical consensus within Christian orthodoxy.

1.2 Avoid theological bias, but have sufficient depth and integrity to allow for theological reflection.

1.3 The form or forms used should make it possible to build up the full range of meaning of this term in the source text by observing their use in the various contexts in Scripture.

1.4 The proposed terms should be carefully researched, tested extensively and evaluated over time as the translation product goes into use.

Commentary: Principles for choosing between different renderings

Translation typically involves choices; there is seldom only one possible rendering for a given term. This requires a principled basis upon which to select the best or most appropriate rendering, especially when translators are dealing with terms of special theological significance, such as the Son of God. The selection process involves careful research of the biblical term and the proposed translation options. The full range of a term's uses in different contexts of Scripture must be analyzed as part of this research.

Translation teams, working closely with consultants, seek to determine that the renderings chosen avoid theological bias and conform to scholarly, exegetical consensus within Christian orthodoxy. The proposed renderings should make it possible to build up the full range of biblical meaning of the term in the source text and should also allow for theological reflection.

Extensive testing and evaluation of critical terms must be carried out with as wide a variety of representatives from the language community as is possible in the specific socio-political situation, to ascertain whether they are being accurately understood. This testing is crucial not only when a new translation is first introduced, but over time as the translation is being used in the community. The purpose of this testing is to determine that the renderings chosen express the intended familial relations better than any other alternative, without introducing unbiblical meanings.

Before the next section, it is important to define *paratext*. It refers to any supportive or explanatory material included along with the translated text in order to aid in understanding. For example: footnotes, side-notes, introductions, glossaries, section headings and illustrations. Also, in this document, "literal" translation refers to the nearest possible word-to-word lexical equivalent of the words in the source text and "non-literal" translation refers to the use of other renderings which

accurately reflect the original intended meaning of the words in the source text.

Istanbul Statement

1.5 There should be a guided process, by the following steps, for working through the rendering options:

- 1.5.1 Consider the literal rendering for the text and add necessary paratext, then test (text + paratext) in the local community, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses.
- 1.5.2 Consider clearly familial, but non-literal options for the text (e.g. “God’s one-and-only” [Son implied]) and find several options. For each of these add the necessary paratext, test with community, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses.
- 1.5.3 Review all options from steps 1&2 and then choose the one with which is most effective in communicating meaning, is most economical, and respects the preference of the intended audience of the translation product.
- 1.5.4 If no possible option has been identified through this process, non-literal options for the text may be considered which conserve as much of the familial meaning as possible, provided that the paratext includes the literal form.

1.6 Throughout the process there should be consultation with other local partners, and the translation consultant needs particular sensitivity not to impose his or her own preferences.

Commentary: Guided Process

First of all, it is important to emphasize that all the points in this “guided process” allow only familial terms. One of the most significant developments of the Istanbul Consultation was the determination that *the phrase Son of God must be translated with phrases that have familial meaning*. The discussion of translation alternatives, leading up to and including the Consultation as stated above, had focused primarily on whether terms like Messiah or Word of God were viable alternatives for Son of God. One of the main outcomes from Istanbul is that neither Messiah nor Word of God adequately convey the necessary relational components of meaning. With specific reference to Messiah, this does not mean that Son of God has no Messianic components of meaning; the point, rather, is that in

many contexts, Messiah does not adequately convey the Father-Son relational meaning. Messiah and other renderings may also prove inadequate because a suitable translation for Son of God must be compatible with the translation of other familial terms such as sons of God and Father. Note also the key role of the paratext in providing supportive information for the renderings chosen for the translated text.

The guided process expressed here is similar to the process used in the selection of any translation options. In some cases, languages have adequately corresponding words that allow translation to proceed without any reason to look further. In many other cases, however, one-to-one correspondence or equivalence in meaning between words is very limited, requiring the translation to convey the meaning through expressions which may not be the direct, lexically-corresponding words. There are many cases where the word-for-word “dictionary equivalents” do not match up to communicate the correct meaning, so other options must be considered. Even translation philosophies which strive to directly reflect the exact words of the original are at times forced to translate with words that communicate the correct meaning. For example, in the ESV, 1 Cor 7:39 says:

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Where the ESV has translated “if her husband dies,” the Greek says *ἐάν δε κοιμηθῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος*, *if the man sleeps*. In order to properly communicate the conditions under which a woman is free to remarry, English versions do not use the lexically-corresponding verb *to sleep* in this verse, but rather they use a verb which expresses the intended meaning. This is an example of what de Waard and Nida discuss in *From One Language to Another*, that changes of “form” or wording should be done in translation when “a literal rendering would give an entirely wrong meaning” (1986, 38).

It is true, of course, that sleeping or dying in 1 Cor 7:39 do not have the same theological weight as Son of God. De Waard and Nida also discuss specific *theological* terms such as Lamb of God, cross, and sacrifice, stating that they “need to be preserved, but often with explanatory marginal notes” (1986, 38). Preserving theological terms is a valid principle, but in some cases it may be in tension with the previous principle that permits a change of form when the “literal rendering would give an entirely wrong meaning” (1986, 38). The sole purpose of the “guided process” in the Istanbul statement is to guide translators in the selection of terms that accurately communicate the

Father-Son relationship in Scripture. The implication of this is that terms that do not clearly communicate the close interpersonal Father-Son relationship between God and Jesus are excluded from consideration as viable translation options.

In the “guided process,” the goal of 1.5.2 is accurate communication of the meaning of son and the avoidance of wrong meanings. 1.5.2 states that translators are to consider “clearly familial, but non-literal options for the text.” In cases where research has determined that a word-for-word translation of Son of God communicates a wrong meaning, this allows the translator to explore options that preserve Father-Son relational meaning, but the renderings chosen may not necessarily be the immediate one-to-one, word-for-word equivalents of “ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.” For example, “God’s one-and-only” would be considered an acceptable non-literal rendering if, in a specific language community, it clearly means a unique son, as it does in Greek, and communicates a close interpersonal relationship without communicating wrong procreative meaning.

When possible renderings and accompanying paratext have been drafted, each option is tested extensively with a variety of speakers in the language community in order to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each text + paratext combination. When the testing is complete, the rendering is chosen that most effectively communicates the accurate meaning, is most economical, and respects the preference of the intended audience of the translation product. A critical guideline in this process is that the literal rendering of Son of God will always be either in the text or in the paratext that accompanies a non-literal rendering. This process is always carried out in consultation with other local partners and translation consultants who are trained to exercise special care to not impose their own preferences.

The translation of Father follows parallel guidelines, namely, that the renderings chosen for *πατήρ* must accurately communicate to the intended audience God’s relationship as Father to His Son, Jesus Christ and his relationship as Father to those who believe in Christ, as revealed in Scripture.

The main goal of the guided process in the Istanbul Statement was to limit translation alternatives to terms which (1) properly convey familial meaning, but (2) are not limited to a procreative relationship. The fourth point of the guided process has unfortunately led to confusion and misunderstanding of its intended purpose. In the interest of avoiding this confusion, the essence of the guided process is restated here:

Based on careful research, translation teams should begin with the likely nearest equivalent for both son and father. If this results in wrong meaning, other renderings for son and father that preserve familial meaning may be considered. For example, “God’s one-and-only” would be considered an acceptable non-literal rendering if, in a specific language community, it refers to a son, without communicating wrong procreative meaning. When the necessary paratext has been drafted for each rendering, each option is tested extensively in the language community in order to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. When the testing is complete, the rendering is chosen that expresses the intended familial relations better than any other alternative, without introducing unbiblical meaning. A critical guideline in this process is that the literal rendering of Son of God will always be either in the text or included and explained in the paratext that accompanies a non-literal rendering.

One of the most challenging aspects of the discussion and evaluation of possible translation options for Son of God is that the *English translation* of proposed alternatives often seems inadequate, whereas the words or phrase in question in the local language may actually convey the meaning well, better than any available alternative. Without a full description of the context in which the translation will be used, it is nearly impossible to determine the adequacy or inadequacy of proposed renderings. It is, therefore, incumbent upon translation teams to document the process of selecting and testing familial terms for Father-Son. For all literal and non-literal renderings, a full description must be made of their uses and meanings in order to effectively build a case for their consideration as viable alternatives. This description must include not only the linguistic and sociocultural factors, but also the exegetical and theological considerations that informed the selection process. This information will be of critical importance to translation consultants who work with these teams.

It is also incumbent upon anyone involved in the evaluation of proposed terms to study all the available documentation in order to avoid either acceptance of or dismissal of possible renderings solely on the basis of an English or other major language translation. The evaluator must develop as complete an understanding as possible of the terms being proposed in order to make the best decision regarding their suitability. If questions remain or if further information is needed, the translation team’s leadership should be contacted to facilitate consultation with the team.

Istanbul Statement

2.0 What are best practices for making exegetical decisions?

2.1 Exegetical decisions should be made by translation teams in dialogue with their communities, partner organizations, and respected ecclesial authorities, on the basis of thorough Biblical-theological understanding of Scripture, which includes use of original texts, versions, credible commentaries, and respected Biblical scholarship, both local and global.

2.2 Translation consultants play an important role in supporting the translation process and are expected to operate according to best practices. SIL will hold its consultants accountable for operating in such a manner.

Commentary: Best Practices for making exegetical decisions

Translation teams are trained to make exegetical decisions using the best scholarly resources available to them. In many cases, members of a translation team who have the most training will assist other team members in the areas of their expertise.

Translation decisions should never be made by one person or one agency acting unilaterally; rather, they should always be made in consultation with all of the partners stated in 2.1 above. SIL is committed to involvement in translation where decisions are made in partnership with others, thereby avoiding the imposition of any decision by any one party.

The importance of 2.2 must be underscored. SIL translation consultants are responsible to act according to the organization's statements of best practices, including the present document. SIL, at the International and Area level will hold its consultants accountable for operating accordingly.

Istanbul Statement

3.0 What are the best practices for establishing concordance with regards to ‘Son of God’ and familial terminology?

3.1 If necessary the introduction may explain terminology used for ‘Son of God’ and related familial terminology or direct the reader to the place where such explanations may be found.

3.2 Recognizable concordance (i.e., similarity of rendering in all passages) for the term ‘Son of God’ and related familial language should normally be maintained in the text but should not be insisted upon at the expense of comprehension.

Commentary: Best Practices for establishing concordance

Concordance refers to the practice of always translating a particular term with the same expression in the new translation. Translation philosophies differ as to the degree of concordance desired, but the principle expressed in the Istanbul Statement is that recognizable concordance should normally be maintained in the text of Scripture where it is contextually appropriate. However, rigid concordance of form should not be insisted upon at the expense of comprehension.

It is important to clarify that in 3.2, “related familial language” refers also to terms for “Father.” The discussion in Istanbul focused on the Son of God and the wording of 3.2 reflects this focus. A revised 3.2 would read as follows:

3.2 Recognizable concordance (i.e., similarity of rendering in all passages) for the terms ‘Son of God’ and ‘Father’ should normally be maintained in the text but should not be insisted upon at the expense of comprehension.

Especially in cases where full concordance is not possible, it is advisable for the introduction to the translation to explain the terminology used for Son of God and related familial terms. The introduction should also direct the reader to other places where such explanations can be found.

Istanbul Statement

4.0 Principles for Paratextual Information

4.1 Assumptions:

4.1.1 A translation of Scripture usually includes a text and paratext. The paratext consists of essential conceptual and background information needed by the readers to understand the translated text. It is produced by the translators with the expectation that the text will not be published without it. Paratextual information may be provided in a variety of ways including glossaries, footnotes, side-notes, mini-articles, section headings, introductions, cross-references, illustrations, and maps. In audio and visual scriptures, necessary paratextual information would be delivered in segment introductions.

Commentary: Principles for paratextual information

As stated above, the paratext is any **supportive** or **explanatory material** included along with the translated text as an *aid for understanding*. During the translation process, research often reveals crucial information that will help readers or hearers better understand the translated text. It is important that the translators themselves capture these insights so that this paratextual information can be published together with translation.

It is important, however, to maintain a clear distinction between the **text** of the translation and the **paratext** that supports it. Even though the paratextual information may be considered essential, the paratext does not have the authoritative status of Scripture itself. This must be kept in focus when deciding what to put in the text versus the supportive information in the paratext. See the following section for best practices or principles that should be considered regarding paratextual information.

Istanbul Statement

4.2 Best practices for the paratext

4.2.1 The primary purpose of the paratext is to help the reader to infer the intended meaning from the text. It also presents more literal translations of phrases used in the text.

4.2.2 The text and paratext should be crafted and tested together to achieve maximum understanding of the biblical meaning.

4.2.3 When a key term is translated in a literal form in the text, the role of the paratext is to clarify its biblical meaning. When a key term is translated less literally in the text, the role of the paratext is to present a literal form of the key term as well as clarify its meaning.

4.2.4 The paratext may also present common understandings for the reader's consideration, but not teach them as doctrines and practices.

Commentary: Best Practices for the paratext

The preceding points, 4.2.1 - 4.2.4, are some of the main considerations that need to be kept in mind for the creation of paratextual information. From these points, it is evident that paratext can be used for different purposes. A translation team's philosophy or style of translation will determine the preferred purpose for various kinds of paratextual information. As much as possible, this philosophy should be implemented consistently. For example, if a translation team chooses a more meaning-based translation style, the paratext will typically be used to present a word-for-word rendering of particular terms in the original text. If a more form-based style is preferred, the paratext will typically be used to clarify the meaning of particular terms in the translation. In the latter case, the importance of 4.2.2 cannot be overstated: it is critical to test the proposed paratext with the text it accompanies in order to ascertain whether it accomplishes its intended purpose.

A comment regarding translation philosophy is in order here. A translation team's philosophy should always be developed in consultation with representatives of the language community and other partners so that decisions about translation style are based on the broadest possible consensus.

The type of paratextual information anticipated in 4.2.4 is of a more general, background nature than the type of note that gives a word-for-word rendering of a specific term. It should also be tested together with the text it accompanies to ensure that it is properly understood as additional information for the reader's consideration. 4.2.4 again highlights the critical distinction that must be maintained between the text of Scripture and the supportive information provided as an aid to the reader.

Paratextual information plays a significant role as an aid in understanding the translated text, but it cannot be expected to solve all potential problems for readers or hearers of the translation. There is still a need for explanation of and teaching from the translation as individuals and communities seek to effectively understand the translated text.

Istanbul Statement

5.0 Principles for different translations for different audiences and purposes

5.1 Where there are two (or more) socio-cultural communities within the same language group, we recognize that multiple translations may be needed.

5.2 The decision should be made on the basis of the widest degree of agreement possible among the stakeholders, ensuring that there is a significant voice from the language community.

5.3 We recognize the concern that multiple translations following different policies may cause confusion among local sub-communities. Therefore, through an appropriate forum, concerned groups should identify and agree on a strategy for adequate Scripture access for all parties concerned.

Commentary: Different translations for different audiences and purposes

In many languages, it is unlikely that there will be more than one translation, at least for the foreseeable future. In some language situations, however, distinct socio-cultural communities have developed which may call for different styles of translations. Certain established ecclesiastical communities may prefer a more form-based translation, whereas the style of a translation being done in a setting where there is no well-established church may be less form-based. The same standards of accuracy apply to whatever style of translation is deemed appropriate.

The decision to work on a new translation where one already exists should not be made without significant representation of the local community and of all the parties involved in the translation project. The ultimate goal is adequate access to Scripture for all, but strategies for

multiple translations need to be developed in ways that minimize the potential for confusion.

Istanbul Statement

6.0 Additional considerations

6.1 For the sake of clarity, transparency and good relationships—any translation that SIL supports needs to be clearly identified as to its nature (literal, transitional, audience specific, etc.).

6.2 When working in complex situations, it is especially important to give careful consideration to many significant parameters when a project is initiated, including project *skopos* (i.e. intended purpose of the translation), organizational relationships and power structures.

Commentary: Additional considerations

The final section of the Istanbul Statement, 6.0 Additional Considerations, captures two important points for all translation projects. First of all, the term *skopos* in 6.2 has to do, as stated, with the purpose of the translation, but it also includes the overall project design and plan. It is important for any project to have clearly defined parameters and goals, but this is of particular importance in projects that involve various partners. All partners need to be involved in making decisions that impact the project, including the type of translation that will be produced as stated in 6.1. Transparency and clarity in all aspects of translation are important factors in establishing and maintaining good relationships with all potential partners.

Afterword

This commentary on the Istanbul Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms is an important step in responding to feedback and addressing concerns that have been raised about SIL's translation principles and practices. This commentary is an invitation for others to engage with us as we continue to define the best practices for translation of these critical terms. In this ongoing process, priority is being given to further research and reflection on the complex

exegetical, hermeneutical, theological, missiological, and ecclesiological considerations that inform these best practices.

SIL INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT OF BEST PRACTICES
FOR BIBLE TRANSLATION OF DIVINE FAMILIAL TERMS

August 2011

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0.7 Given the richness of meaning in the Scriptures and the diversity of audiences, SIL supports various styles of translation. Translations should be evaluated in light of their intended audience and context.

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1.4 The proposed terms should be carefully researched, tested extensively and evaluated over time as the translation product goes into use.

1.5 There should be a guided process, by the following steps, for working through the rendering options:

1.5.1 Consider the literal rendering for the text and add necessary paratext, then test (text + paratext) in the local community, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses.

1.5.2 Consider clearly familial, but non-literal options for the text (e.g. "God's one-and-only" [Son implied]) and find several options. For each of these add the necessary paratext, test with community, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses.

1.5.3 Review all options from steps 1&2 and then choose the one with which is most effective in communicating meaning, is most economical, and respects the preference of the intended audience of the translation product.

1.5.4 If no possible option has been identified through this process, non-literal options for the text may be considered which conserve as much of the familial meaning as possible, provided that the paratext includes the literal form.

1.6 Throughout the process there should be consultation with other local partners, and the translation consultant needs particular sensitivity not to impose his or her own preferences.

2.0 What are best practices for making exegetical decisions?

2.1 Exegetical decisions should be made by translation teams in dialogue with their communities, partner organizations, and respected ecclesial authorities, on the basis of thorough Biblical-theological understanding of Scripture, which includes use of original texts, versions, credible commentaries, and respected Biblical scholarship, both local and global.

2.2 Translation consultants play an important role in supporting the translation process and are expected to operate according to best practices. SIL will hold its consultants accountable for operating in such a manner.

3.0 What are the best practices for establishing concordance with regards to ‘Son of God’ and familial terminology?

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4.2.1 The primary purpose of the paratext is to help the reader to infer the intended meaning from the text. It also presents more literal translations of phrases used in the text.

4.2.2 The text and paratext should be crafted and tested together to achieve maximum understanding of the biblical meaning.

4.2.3 When a key term is translated in a literal form in the text, the role of the paratext is to clarify its biblical meaning. When a key term is translated less literally in the text, the role of the paratext is to present a literal form of the key term as well as clarify its meaning.

4.2.4 The paratext may also present common understandings for the reader’s consideration, but not teach them as doctrines and practices.

5.0 Principles for different translations for different audiences and purposes

5.1 Where there are two (or more) socio-cultural communities within the same language group, we recognize that multiple translations may be needed.

5.2 The decision should be made on the basis of the widest degree of agreement possible among the stakeholders, ensuring that there is a significant voice from the language community.

5.3 We recognize the concern that multiple translations following different policies may cause confusion among local sub-communities. Therefore, through an appropriate forum, concerned groups should identify and agree on a strategy for adequate Scripture access for all parties concerned.

6.0 Additional considerations

6.1 For the sake of clarity, transparency and good relationships—any translation that SIL supports needs to be clearly identified as to its nature (literal, transitional, audience specific, etc.).

6.2 When working in complex situations, it is especially important to give careful consideration to many significant parameters when a project is initiated, including project *skopos* (i.e. intended purpose of the translation), organizational relationships and power structures.

Wycliffe Bible Translators www.wycliffe.org accessed 10 December 2012

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A TRANSLATION CHALLENGE: THE SON OF GOD

Summary of an Ongoing Controversy

The following is not an expression of any new thinking or a new position statement from Wycliffe on the issue of the translation of the divine familial terms. Rather, it is a summary of the controversy intended to help those who are newly interested in the topic.

For almost eighty years, Wycliffe has engaged in the important and challenging ministry of Bible translation, serving millions of minority language speakers around the world. One particular challenge—the translation of the terms used to describe the unique relationship between God the Father and the Son of God in some languages that are spoken in communities dominated by Islam—has gained public attention. As an online petition circulated early in 2012, some began to make claims that Wycliffe is taking the term “Son of God” out of Scripture and making “Muslim-friendly” Bibles that include translation choices designed to appease Muslims. These claims are not true.

Wycliffe remains unashamedly committed to the integrity of Scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We want to assure you that we are not removing terms for “God the Father” and “Son of God” from the Bibles that we are translating into other languages. Instead, we are seeking the most accurate way to translate those terms from the original Greek and Hebrew texts. Good translation does not simply take the words of a text in one language (like English) and find those words in another language, both because of differences in meaning of words influenced by culture and context and because of differences in grammatical structures of language.

Those who hold various positions in this controversy over how best to translate the terms referencing the Son of God and God the Father agree that getting it right is critical. The point being contested (in a

debate that has gone on in various forms for centuries) is whether accuracy of meaning is more important or less important than the exactness of a word.

There are nearly seven thousand living languages in the world. A significant number of them are spoken by communities dominated by Islam, and most of them do have a common word for “son” that conveys accurate meaning. Wycliffe personnel are working in almost fifteen hundred language projects around the world involving communities from many different religious backgrounds. This challenge involves only a handful of those languages that do not have a common word for “son” that conveys accurate meaning. And where it has come up, translation teams have prayerfully searched for a solution that would most accurately and clearly communicate the relationship between God the Father and God the Son as it is presented in the original Greek and Hebrew texts.

Wycliffe is committed to maintaining the integrity of God’s Word. Contrary to what some have suggested, we are not ashamed of the truth of the Gospel and of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God. Motivated by our deep commitment to integrity and by our conviction that we serve as part of the whole Church, we have asked a respected third party—the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA)—to review our practices. We anticipate their response by April 2013. Our dedication to this process includes our commitment to submit to the translation guidelines approved by this panel.

While the WEA is conducting their review, we have put those few projects in question on hold.

Further information, including our **general translation process**, can be found through links on the side panel. Please e-mail **response@wycliffe.org** with any questions.

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Theology in Context:
A CASE STUDY in the
PHILIPPINES

Foreword by Dr. Ross Farney



About the Author

Dave Johnson, D-Miss, has been an Assemblies of God (USA) missionary to the Philippines since 1994 and has conducted extensive research on lowland Filipino culture. He is also the author of *Led by the Spirit: The History of the American Assemblies of God Missionaries in the Philippines* and is the managing editor of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, the theological journal of the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio City, Philippines. He can be contacted at www.aps.edu or through his own website, www.daveanddebbiejohnson.com.

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THE NECESSITY FOR RETAINING FATHER AND SON
TERMINOLOGY IN SCRIPTURE TRANSLATIONS FOR
MUSLIMS

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

The first part of this paper is entitled *The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology in Scripture Translations for Muslims: Missiological Implications* and deals with the missiological implications of changing the divine familial terms of Son and Father. The second part looks at *The Language of Sonship in Intertestamental Literature* with a thorough examination of *The Dead Sea Scrolls* and *Rabbinic Texts* in order to observe the foundations of familial language prior to the birth of the church and the canonical New Testament writings. The third part is *Familial Language and New Testament Christology* which examines the historical background in which canonical New Testament Scriptures were given and provides exegesis of New Testament teaching concerning the divine familial terms of Son and Father. A list of specialized translations for Muslims is presented in Appendix A.

PART I

THE NECESSITY FOR RETAINING FATHER AND SON
TERMINOLOGY IN SCRIPTURE TRANSLATIONS FOR
MUSLIMS: MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Statement of the Problem

The past two decades have witnessed the birth and proliferation of specialized Scripture “translations”¹ for Muslims that remove from the text and/or redefine the divine familial terms Father, Son, and Son of God with the substitution of alternative terms such as “Guardian” for Father and “Caliph of God” or “Beloved of God” for Son.² While this is not the only feature of such “translations” it is the feature to which this paper is confined.³ Of special concern are the consequences this practice sets in motion, especially regarding textual corruption and the promotion of heterodox views regarding the nature of God, the deity of Jesus and the Trinity.

Several organizations have embraced the practice of substituting non-literal terms when translating the words Father, Son and Son of God in specialized Scripture translations.⁴ In 2011 the most prominent Scripture translation organization in the world, Wycliffe Bible Translators, along with its sister organization, Summer Institute of Linguistics, produced and adopted documents entitled *Statement on Doctrinal Beliefs and Translation Standards* and *International Best*

¹Specialized Scripture “translations” for Muslims have been referred to by various names and proponents frequently change the identity of the publications. It is therefore impossible to provide a comprehensive list for them. Some known names for these publications include: Muslim friendly translations; Muslim sensitive translations; Muslim idiom translations (MIT); Religious idiom translations (RIT); meaning-based translations; natural language translations; heart language translations; transformational translations; Muslim-complaint translations.

²“Caliph” is derived from Arabic and commonly refers to the successor of Muhammad. “Beloved of God” is often used by Muslims in referring to Muhammad.

³According to the leading organizational proponent of specialized Scripture “translations” for Muslims the following definition for them is given: “Translations contextualized for [Muslim] people groups in a way which communicates best to them but often not to Western Christians or even traditional churches in the area, using e.g. Arabic style names: Isa al-Masih vs Jesus Christ, Honorifics [i.e. special phrases and titles including prayers for the dead], Allah as the name for God, non-literal rendering of “Son of God”, non-literal rendering of other father-son language in OT and NT, natural syntax (not anglicized, translationese). Exploring Muslim Idiom Translation by Andy Clark, IALPC 2011, slide 5 from Powerpoint file, “MIT Initiative for IALPC Jan 2011”.

⁴Most prominent are Wycliffe Bible Translators and Summer Institute of Linguistics. Personnel from Frontiers, Navigators and other organizations have been direct or indirect participants.

*Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms.*⁵

Both policy statements are similar in content, but one excerpt sums up both positions:

In particular regard to Scripture translations done for Muslim contexts we affirm that in the majority of cases a literal translation of "Son of God" will be the preferred translation.⁶ In certain circumstances, specifically where it has been demonstrated that a literal translation of "Son of God" would communicate wrong meaning, an alternative form with equivalent meaning may be used. The alternative form must maintain the concept of "sonship". All translations for Muslim audiences should include an explanation of the meaning of the phrase "ho huio tou theou" (Son of God) when it refers to Jesus Christ. This may be in a preface, in one or more footnotes, or as a glossary entry, as seems appropriate to the situation.⁷

Recent examples of using alternative terminology for Father and Son are:

Matthew 28:19: *...and baptize them with water in the name of God and His Messiah and the Holy Spirit.*⁸ [New International Version, NIV *...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*].

Matthew 5:16: *...so that they will praise God, your supreme guardian.*⁹ [NIV *...and praise your Father in heaven*].

[For a fuller list of examples, see Appendix D]

While specific numbers are hard to obtain, as of 2011, approximately 26 languages are targeted to use “non-literal Son of

⁵For the full version of *SIL's Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms*, see Appendix C.

⁶This means that in 49 out of 100 languages a literal translation of “Son of God” may not be used.

⁷Wycliffe and SIL personnel confirmed in a meeting on Nov. 18, 2011, that once the term “Son of God” or “Father” is moved to the paratext – it would no longer be a part of the inspired text.

⁸“The Life of Jesus” taken from the series, *Lives of the Prophets* (aka *Stories of the Prophets*), Baghdad version. Produced by Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL. An Audio Panoramic Bible; cf. <http://www.asnwering-islam.org/fileadmin/reviews/lives-of-prophets.pdf>.

⁹“The Correct Meaning of the Gospel of Christ, Mazhar Mallouhi, Dar al-Farabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 2008.

God” terms. By the year 2025 the projected number of targeted languages rises to 60.¹⁰

Commitment to the Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture

The General Council of the Assemblies of God, U.S.A. doctrinal statement and position paper regarding the inspiration and the inerrancy of Scripture are both clear.¹¹

- *The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct (1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:21).*
- *We conceive the Bible to be in actuality the very Word of God. The divine Author prompted the original thought in the mind of the writers (Amos 3:8); He then guided their choice of words to express such thoughts (Exodus 4:12,15); and, lastly, He illumines the mind of the reader of such words in a way that the reader potentially may comprehend the same truth as was originally in the mind of the writer (1 Cor. 2:12; Eph. 1:17,18). Thus, both thought and language are revelatory and inspired.*

God communicates to us through inspired Scripture what He wants us to understand about Himself. This is especially true with regard to the Father and Son terminology which figure so prominently throughout the Bible, especially the New Testament.¹² As Bruce Waltke,¹³ has written:

¹⁰Exploring Muslim Idiom Translation by Andy Clark, IALPC 2011, slide 8 from Powerpoint file, “MIT Initiative for IALPC Jan 2011”.

¹¹See “1. The Scriptures Inspired”. *The Statement of Fundamental Truths*. (http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_full.cfm#1) and, *The Inerrancy of Scripture*, Position Paper, the General Council of the Assemblies of God, 1976. (http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_4175_inerrancy.pdf).

¹²“Father,” in reference to God, appears 260 times, “Son of God,” in reference to Jesus, appears 45 times, and “Son,” in reference to Jesus, appears 79 times. All figures are based on the Nestle-Aland, Novum Testamentum Graece, 27th Revised Edition, edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Marini, and Bruce M. Metzger in cooperation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Munster/Westphalia, Copyright 1993 Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart. The figures for “Father” were exported from Logos Bible Software 4 and the figures for “Son” and “Son of God” were exported from BibleWorks 9.

¹³Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Knox Theological Seminary in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: http://knoxseminary.edu/instructors/instructor_waltke.php.

...[God] identifies himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. Jesus taught his church to address God as 'Father' (Luke 11:2) and to baptize disciples 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 28:19). It is inexcusable hubris and idolatry on the part of mortals to change the images by which the eternal God chooses to identify himself. We cannot change God's name, titles, or metaphors without committing idolatry, for we will have reimagined him in a way other than the metaphors and the incarnation by which he revealed himself. His representations and incarnation are inseparable from his being.¹⁴

By the authority of the Bible, God's Word, we call people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We also, on the basis of our testimony, that is, the work of God the Holy Spirit in us as individuals, in agreement with the witness of the Bible, who have come to understand that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (1 John 2:24-27; 5:10), can only testify to what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20). To remove Father and Son terminology from Scripture is to deny the verbal-plenary inspiration of these terms as well as the testimony of God's salvation in our lives. Verbal-plenary means more than just every word being inspired. It means that every word in context is inspired.

Faith in Jesus as the Son of God is Essential for Salvation

The biblical witness of saving faith in Jesus Christ is inextricably tied to the belief in and confession of Jesus *specifically* being the Son of God:

...but these are written *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31, NIV, emphasis added)

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God (1 John 4:15, English Standard Version, ESV, emphasis added).

This teaching is so important that the denial of the Sonship of Jesus Christ, and its necessary corollary, the Fatherhood of God, is powerfully denounced in the following passages:

The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself;

¹⁴Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, Zondervan, 2007; p. 244.

the one who does not believe God *has made Him a liar*, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; *he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life* (1 John 5:10-12, New American Standard, NAS, emphasis added).

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:22-23, ESV, emphasis added)

We understand from these passages that the witness of the Holy Spirit within the believer, the presence of God in the believer's life, overcoming the world, having genuine belief in Jesus Christ, possessing eternal life and enjoying a relationship with God the Father are all contingent on the belief, acceptance and confession of Jesus Christ *as the Son of God*.

The Foundational Falsehood: Quranic Teaching Regarding “Son of God”

Muslims, due to false teaching from their holy book the Quran,¹⁵ reject Jesus as the “Son of God.”¹⁶

Yet they ascribe to God, as associates, the jinn, though He created them; and they impute to Him sons and daughters without any knowledge. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above what they describe! The Creator of the heavens and the earth—how should He have a son, seeing that He has no consort, and He created all things, and He has knowledge of every thing? (Sura 6:100-101)

The Jews say, 'Ezra is the Son of God'; the Christians say, 'The Messiah is the Son of God.' That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted! (Sura 9:30)

...and to warn those who say, 'God has taken to Himself a son'; they have no knowledge of it, they nor their fathers; a monstrous word it is, issuing out of their mouths; they say nothing but a lie. (Sura 18:4-5)

¹⁵All Quranic quotations and/or references are from *The Koran Interpreted*, A.J. Arberry, Simon and Shuster, 1996.

¹⁶cf. Sura 2:116; 4:171; 9:30; 10:68; 19:88-93; 21:26; 23:91.

Proponents of specialized Scripture “translations” argue that the phrase “Son of God” and the related terms of “Son” and “Father” must not be literally translated in the Bible, since to do so conveys incorrect and inaccurate meaning to Muslim readers. Instead, “meaning-based equivalents” from their “natural or heart language” may be substituted in order to communicate the accurate or properly intended meaning behind this terminology.¹⁷

There are a number of errors with this argument, of which we highlight the following:

- It denies that Father and Son terminology are divinely inspired. This is related to the linguistic fallacy that meaning is not and cannot be communicated by specific words.
- It presupposes that the text of the Bible does not provide sufficient context for a person to understand the meaning of Father and Son terminology within its pages.
- It implies that Muslims are intellectually inferior people who cannot understand language in its context.
- It ignores the role of God the Holy Spirit to give proper understanding of Scripture.
- It makes relative all biblical doctrines drawn from Father

¹⁷See Rick Brown, The "Son of God": Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus, *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 2000, 17(1): 41-52. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/17_1_PDFs/Son_of_God.pdf; Explaining the Biblical Terms 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts, Part I. *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 2005, 22(3): 91-96. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/22_3_PDFs/91-96Brown_SOG.pdf; Translating the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts, Part II. *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 2005, 22(4): 135-145. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/22_4_PDFs/135-145%20Brown_SOG.pdf; "Why Muslims Are Repelled by the Term Son of God." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 43:4 (Oct 2007) 422-29.
Leith Gray (a pseudonym): "The Missing Father: Living and Explaining a Trinitarian Concept of God to Muslims." *Mission Frontiers* (November-December 2008), 19 -22. <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-missing-father>; Brown, Rick, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray. "A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28:3 (Fall 2011), 105-120. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/28_3_PDFs_IJFM_28_3-BrownGrayGray-NewLook.pdf;
Brown, Rick, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray. "A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28:3 (Fall 2011), 121-125. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/28_3_PDFs_IJFM_28_3-BrownGrayGray-BriefAnalysis.pdf

and Son terminology, such as the adoption of believers as sons and children of God.

The Heart of the Issue

At the heart of this issue is whether familial words in the biblical manuscripts are divinely inspired terms, or terms that can be replaced with alternative, non-literal renderings. First, consistency with the verbal inspiration of Scripture requires that the *nouns* “Father” and “Son,” as they are used in the biblical manuscripts, can *only* be accurate when literally translated in order to convey the meaning that God intended.¹⁸ The verbal inspiration of Scripture includes the specific words themselves¹⁹ and we are warned against changing any of God’s Words:

Every word of God is tested; [...] He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar (Prov. 30:5-6, NAS).

Jesus Himself stated: *[...] and the Scripture cannot be broken [...]* (John 10:35, NIV).

When Jesus made this statement He neither acquiesced to a hostile audience, nor hesitated to quote a passage of Scripture from the Old Testament that could be easily misunderstood. Instead, He affirmed the verbal plenary nature of divine revelation (i.e. God’s Word).²⁰

Second, biblical scholars concur that throughout Scripture, God confirms specific truths on the basis of repetition.²¹ In the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, “Father” (*pater*), in reference to God, appears 260 times, “Son of God” (*huios tou theou*), in reference to Jesus, appears 45 times, and “Son” (*huios*), in reference to Jesus,

¹⁸Father, Son, and even “God” are all nouns that can be literally translated into other languages – the only way to accurately convey their meanings as used in the biblical manuscripts. This is due to the fact that fathers and sons exist in all cultures, providing the confirmation of the witness that humanity has been created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27; James 3:9).

¹⁹For example, see “seed” in Galatians 3:16 where Paul quotes from language spoken to Abraham. Understanding this as a prophecy of Jesus is dependent on the grammatical form of the word.

²⁰For a fuller context, see John 10:30-39 and Psalm 82.

²¹Gen. 41:32; Dt. 19:15; 2 Cor. 13:1

appears 79 times.²² Because of the sheer volume and repeated use of the terms “Father”, “Son of God” and “Son”, any alteration to just one of these terms introduces serious change which undermines the integrity of the divine message of salvation found in the Bible.

Third, the argument that the literal translations of Father and Son terminology communicate incorrect, inaccurate, and wrong meaning because they imply biological or sexual connotation, is misleading.

For example, in Arabic “*ibn* Allah” refers to “Son of God.” Since ‘*ibn*’ is the most natural way that any father would refer to his son in Arabic, this is the accurate translation of the Greek, ‘*huios*’ (Son).²³ As in all languages, the context in which ‘*ibn*’ is used determines whether or not it refers to a son that has resulted from a biological relationship. Native Arabic speakers overwhelmingly insist that ‘*ibn*’ is the correct word to use when translating the Greek phrase ‘*huios tou theou*’ (Son of God) and that the context clearly explains that no sexual meaning is implied. Nowhere in Scripture does ‘*ibn*’ imply a physical relationship between God the Father and Mary. For example, Luke 1:34-35²⁴ and Matthew 1:18-25²⁵ make it clear that no sexual relations were involved in the case of Jesus’ conception. In these

²²As noted in footnote 12, these figures are based on the Nestle-Aland, Novem Testamentum Graece, 27th Revised Edition.

²³This is easily confirmed by native Arabic speakers, Arabic dictionaries, and Arabic translations of Scripture from at least the 9th century until the present. The following is a partial list of these translations, all of which use “*ibn*” (son) for “*huios*” whether for human sons, as well as “the Son” and “Son of God” in reference to Jesus Christ: Vatican Arabic MS 13 (c. 9th century), Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151 (c. 9-11th centuries), Roman Catholic (1671), Van Dyck (1865), Jesuit version (1880), Kitab Al-Hayat (1988), Jesuit, revised (1988), Today’s Arabic Version (1992).

²⁴Luke 1:34-35 “‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’”

²⁵Matthew 1:18-25 “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ which means ‘God with us.’ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”

passages, ‘ibn’ is used to describe the son of a virgin (also in Isa. 7:14).

The great American missionary to Muslims, Samuel Zwemer, known as the “Apostle to Islam”, and one of the most astute observers ever of Islam, provides further insight:

Even though we [stop] the confusion concerning this expression (“Son of God”) and we dispel from their understanding the clouds of bias and error, we say to our Muslim neighbor that the Book of God, the New Testament, does not say even once in its description of Jesus as the only Son of God, that God, the strong and glorious, is a [biological] father (Arabic *waalid*) but always uses, to His glory, the word, “Father” (Ar. *ab*) in a general, spiritual sense. There does not appear in the New Testament, regarding Jesus, that He is the [biological offspring] (Ar. *walad Allah*), that is, a [biological] son [physically] begotten from God. What appears, instead, is that He is the “Son” of God (Ar. *ibn Allah*) and the differences between the two expressions are as clear as the [shining] sun to him who has eyes! An adopted son is called, by common convention, “a son” (Ar. *ibn*) [as opposed to] a [biological] son (Ar. *walad*). What is a [biological] son (Ar. *walad*) but one born from a [physical] birth to two parents, from a real, natural birth? The Arabs [also] commonly use the word, “father,” in a spiritual sense, as well as in a general sense. They [often] say, “father of mercy” (*Abu Al-Rahma*), “father of truth” (*Abu Al-Haqq*), “father of encouragement” (*Abu Al-Shujaa’a*), “father of generosity” (*Abu Al-Fadl*), etc.²⁶

Given that in every language the word(s) for “son” or “father” (without any context) normally implies biological relationship (since most sons are a result of such relationships), there is no language where ‘Son’ could be used without *any* possible implication. That is, there would always be the slight chance that some people (in any language) might hear the term “Son of God” before they hear the explanation of what that means from the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke (which clarify that there was no sexual activity) and thus they might think God had a sexual relationship with Mary, especially in societies that have no prior Biblical knowledge or where they have been taught false information about the Bible. Even in English the phrase “Son of God” has the possibility of having this implication. It is better to translate the Bible accurately, using Father-Son terms as the Holy Spirit did, and then teach people the context so that everyone understands God’s message accurately.

²⁶Samuel Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God*, 1906 p.78.

The command to teach is central to the mandate the church has received from Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20). Further, Paul in writing to the Ephesians about Christ giving “individuals” to the church, listed *teachers* as key personnel with great responsibility “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13, NAS). This emphasis on our responsibility to teach in no way nullifies or diminishes our steadfast belief that a full understanding of Jesus only occurs through the work of the Spirit of God (Matt. 16:13-17; John 16:13-15). Myer Pearlman states:

The Holy Spirit is the Interpreter of Jesus Christ. He does not bestow a new or different revelation, but rather opens the minds of men to see deeper meaning of Christ’s life and words. As the Son did not speak of Himself, but spoke what he had received from the Father, so the Spirit will not speak of Himself as from a separate store of knowledge, but will declare what He hears in that inner life of the Godhead.²⁷

A faithful teacher of the Bible requires the tool of translations that include the divine familial terms of Father and Son and a steadfast belief in the Spirit of God to convince men of this truth.

Practical Ramifications

Muslims already believe that Jews and Christians have changed the text of the Bible in order to exclude any belief in Muhammad as “God’s Apostle” and the “Seal of the Prophets.” Compounding the problem is their misunderstanding of and great offense taken to the phrase “Son of God,” *the denial of which is essential to Islam*. When Muslims see that “Son of God” has been removed, it not only gives them “proof” that Christians have changed the Scriptures, but also “proves” that Christians are embarrassed by the phrase and know that it is “wrong.”

The lack of uniformity among specialized Scripture “translations” for Father and Son terminology also poses serious problems for discipling Muslim converts. Consider the different ways

²⁷Myer Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1937; 287-288.

in which “Father” and “Son of God” have been rendered in the following three Arabic versions:

| Term | Arabic version 1 ²⁸ | Arabic version 2 ²⁹ | Arabic version 3 ³⁰ |
|----------------------|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Father | God Lord | Lord | God Lord Guardian |
| Son or Son of God | Messiah Beloved Messiah Messiah of God | Caliph of God | Son of God (beloved of God) |

How are Muslim seekers to understand the identity of Jesus? Will they see Him as a “Caliph” – which for them is the historical representative of Islam entrusted with its promotion and defense by physical force? Or is He simply the “Beloved Messiah”? What does the reader do after coming to conclusions about Jesus’ identity based on the witness of the particular wording in one version when he/she discovers that another version uses different terminology?

In the third translation listed in the table above, while “Son of God” is normally retained within the text, it is redefined by the parenthetical insertion “Beloved of God”. Since “Beloved of God” is used only in the Scripture to refer to people – while in Islam it refers to Muhammad – the idea of Jesus’ deity is thus stripped from the phrase “Son of God”. This is compounded by the fact that “Father” is never once literally translated in this production.

A related problem is the changing opinions of the proponents themselves. One leading proponent strongly argued that “Messiah” was

²⁸“The Life of Jesus” taken from the series, *Lives of the Prophets* (aka *Stories of the Prophets*), Baghdadi version. Produced by Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL. An Audio Panoramic Bible; cf. <http://www.answering-islam.org/fileadmin/reviews/lives-of-prophets.pdf>.

²⁹“The Life of Jesus” taken from the series, *Lives of the Prophets* (aka *Stories of the Prophets*), Urbed version. Produced by Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL. An Audio Panoramic Bible. <http://alanbiya.net/>; cf. <http://www.answering-islam.org/fileadmin/reviews/lives-of-apostles.pdf>; http://www.answering-islam.org/fileadmin/reviews/top-1k1_26-35.pdf

³⁰*The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*, http://al-kalima.com/translation_project.html; <http://www.answering-islam.org/Index/M/mallouhi.html>

a proper “equivalent” for “Son” and “Son of God.”³¹ The same proponent now argues that this was a mistake.³² This change in terminology subjects the reader to the same problem that results from the lack of uniformity in “equivalents” – what does the reader do with his/her earlier conclusions about Jesus’ identity?

The lack of uniformity regarding what constitutes non-literal equivalents that “accurately convey” the meanings of Father and Son terminology is fraught with serious and far-reaching consequences. The greatest consequence is the loss in the actual, intended meanings of Father and Son:

Let us not deceive ourselves; Bible translation is the foundation to all ministry. If these cracked foundations of Muslim-friendly translations are allowed to continue we should not be surprised at the coming crash for everything built upon them.

One such tragedy is the proliferation of Insider thinking among Bible translators. A translation of the Gospels in the Bengali language eliminates all reference to ‘Son of God’ and all other filial language within the Godhead. I was told by Lebu in Dhaka in September 2007, that all the older converts from Islam under his care recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. The younger generation, which is being fed Insider ideology and reads the Insider translation of the Gospels, is no longer clear on the identity of Jesus.

This is the exact sentiment quoted earlier from the concerned missionary serving in the Middle East over his objections to...[the] removal of *Father and Son [of God]* ...I am convinced that the most

³¹Rick Brown, The "Son of God": Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus, *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 2000, 17(1): 41-52. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/17_1_PDFs/Son_of_God.pdf;

Explaining the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts, Part I. *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 2005, 22(3): 91-96. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/22_3_PDFs/91-96Brown_SOG.pdf;

Translating the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts, Part II. *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 2005, 22(4): 135-145. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/22_4_PDFs/135-145%20Brown_SOG.pdf

³²Brown & Gray: Brown, Rick, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray. “A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms.” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28:3 (Fall 2011), 105-120. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/28_3_PDFs/IJFM_28_3-BrownGrayGray-NewLook.pdf; “A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible.” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28:3 (Fall 2011), 121-125. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs/IJFM/28_3_PDFs/IJFM_28_3-BrownGrayGray-BriefAnalysis.pdf

serious consequence will be amongst those who come out of Islam using these "new" materials but whose Christology never moves from heterodoxy to orthodoxy - leading them to water but never enabling them to drink from it.³³

In each of the "equivalent" versions mentioned in the table on page 11, *Father* is never literally translated - making it impossible to recognize the unique relationship between Himself and Jesus. The non-use of *Father* also makes it impossible to recognize how God desires to relate to believers as their Heavenly Father. By being the Son and revealing the Father, there is an intimacy with God in Jesus that no other religion could repeat, emulate or duplicate. Additionally, none of the "equivalents" for *Son* indicate Jesus' deity and His unique relationship with God as His Son. These "equivalents" are indicative of a deficient theological understanding regarding *Father* and *Son* terminology as found in the original biblical manuscript languages. It is shortsighted to translate such integral terms as Son of God and Father by draining them of their meaning and disconnecting them from their revelatory world. To do so is to be guilty of breaking linguistic, exegetical and theological rules.

Practical ramifications as a result of producing and using specialized Scripture translations that remove Father and Son terminology include:

- Exposing Christians to the charge of being deceitful.
- Damaging the reputation of Christians for having corrupted the Word of God.
- Bringing confusion on numerous levels to both Christians and non-Christians.
- Confirming the mistaken views that Muslims have about "Son of God."
- Strengthening the Islamic view that Christianity (i.e. the message of the Bible) is false, that Christians cannot be trusted, and that Islam is true.

Thus, specialized Scripture translations that remove Father and Son terminology ultimately hinder evangelism among Muslims.

Why Has This Happened? Two Contributing Factors

³³Adam Simnowitz. "How Insider Movements Affect Ministry: Personal Reflections" Garden Grove, CA: i2 Ministries, 2011; pp. 220-221.

A number of contributing factors can be identified, but two stand out. The first factor has to do with the influence of postmodern literary hermeneutical biases. In the last 50 years a subtle but significant shift has happened among postmodern literary theorists about the methodology of establishing the meaning of a written text. Addressing this point, Joshua Lingel states:

Despite the obvious etymological relation of *authority* and *author*, there seems to be a distinct trend toward shifting the authority for determining the meaning of a text from the author to the *reader*. Is this trend affecting Bible translations? While it may be difficult to establish, it seems this is exactly the premise underlying some of the apologetic offer by Insider Movement advocates. In other words, the sensitivities of Muslim readers of Scripture are considered a major factor for the removal of Son of God, replacing it with terms much more acceptable to Muslims. We are seeing Messiah or Word of God (Quranic-equivalent terms acceptable to Muslims) replace Son of God in Muslim-compliant translations.³⁴

God calls a people of His own out of their cultures and many times out of their families, into His household.³⁵ God's pattern is to reveal truth. He does not "dialogue" with cultures so truth can emerge or evolve through their religious beliefs.³⁶ His Word may stand in contrast to what they believe. Throughout history He confronts people with the truth of His holiness and of human depravity, and then shows us that He has provided Himself as a living sacrifice, the only way to

³⁴Joshua Lingel, *Islamizing the Bible: Insider Movements and Scripture Translations* (Chrislam, i2 Ministries Publishing Company, 2011).

³⁵Joshua 24:2-3 "Joshua said to all the people, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants . . .,'" Ephesians 2:19 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. . .,'" Colossians 1:13-14 "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

³⁶Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992. Lingenfelter cites the following verses: Isaiah 55:7-9 "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."; I Peter 1:18 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers."

life. There is no other name by which man can be saved.³⁷ That is the gospel, and it is always offensive. His path and way is narrow, not inclusive.

In the long history of Muslim-Christian relations, dating back as early as the 8th century,³⁸ there has been no precedent for specialized Scripture “translations” for Muslims that remove and/or redefine Father and Son terminology. In contrast to this consistent historical witness of literally translating Father and Son terminology in all Scripture translations, in 1959, Eugene A. Nida, the father of “dynamic equivalency,” argued in his seminal article for the elimination of Father and Son terminology in Scripture “translations” for Muslims.³⁹ In the mid-1970s, missionary and anthropologist, Charles Kraft, referencing Nida’s article, challenged Christian missionaries to Muslims to discard Father and Son terminology in evangelistic witness to Muslims.⁴⁰ In 1977, Bible translators, Ariel de Kuiper and Barclay M. Newman, Jr. co-wrote an article proposing non-literal, alternative renderings for Son of God in Scripture translations for Muslims.⁴¹ These proposals coupled with the previously mentioned phenomenon of postmodern thinking thus set the stage for specialized Scripture translations. Stephen Clark comments on the thinking behind these suggestions:

Meaning is tied very closely to authorial intent. In recent years deconstructionists have challenged this whole approach and have argued that meaning, like beauty, is very much in the eye of the beholder. This has been part of a wider movement of thought which, denying the subject/object distinction which lay at the heart of western Enlightenment thinking, has come to regard the world as a ‘text’ which may be read by different people in different ways. This leads on to the idea that claims to possess the ‘true’ or ‘real’ meaning

³⁷ Acts 4:12 “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

³⁸J.M. Gaudeul. *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History, I & II*. Roma: P.I.S.A.I. 2000; Robert G. Hoyland. *Seeing Islam As Others Saw It A Survey And Evaluation Of Christian, Jewish And Zoroastrian Writings On Early Islam*. Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, Inc. 1997; N.A. Newman, ed. *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*. Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute. 1993.

³⁹Eugene A. Nida. "Are We Really Monotheists?" *Practical Anthropology*, 6:49-54 (1959); Reprinted in Readings in Missionary Anthropology, edited by William A. Smalley. Ann Arbor, MI: Cushing-Malloy, Inc., 1967; 223-228.

⁴⁰Charles H. Kraft. "Distinctive Religious Barriers to Outside Penetration." *Conference on Media in Islamic Culture Report*, edited by C. Richard Shumaker. Marseilles: Evangelical Literature Overseas, 1974.

⁴¹Ariel D. De Kuiper and Barclay Newman, Jr. 1977. "Jesus, Son of God—a Translation Problem." *The Bible Translator*. 28(4): 432-38.

of a text, whether that text be of a literary nature or otherwise, are, in reality, exercises or abuses of power.⁴²

The second contributing factor has to do with syncretistic accommodation in Muslim evangelization. In Islamic contexts where Insider Movements were first developed and are most prevalent, Muslims who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah are often encouraged to continue to identify themselves as Muslims. Some consider the Quran as authoritative, and practice the five pillars of Islam, including affirming the confession that “There is no deity except Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.” These initiatives are also popularly known as “C5” and are often referred to as “natural communities.”⁴³

Translation consultation committees in “natural language” communities may consist of Christians and non-Christians, including Muslims.⁴⁴ Translators may acquiesce to “natural language” word choices that are provided by non-Christians. In keeping with this practice, “natural language” communities have replaced “Son” with “Messiah” in Arabic translations of the New Testament. In Bangladesh, “natural language” translations have done the same in their translation of the Gospels. For example, the key phrase in Mark 1:11, “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased’” (ESV) was changed to read, “You are my beloved Messiah...” Translation consultants, upon being queried, replied that Muslims would only understand the term “Son” as biological offspring, thus creating an obstacle for Muslims. This obstacle, in principle, is no different from that facing the Jews in John 5:17-18⁴⁵ and John 10:29-33.⁴⁶ Jesus knew that by using familial language to describe his relationship with God, the Jews would understand He was claiming to be divine. Yet despite the offense it caused the Jews, who even tried to kill Him for it, Jesus affirmed His sonship.

⁴²Stephen Clark. “The Use of the Bible in the Church.” *Foundations* 60 (Spring):57.

⁴³“Natural communities” is commonly used to refer to Insider Movement people groups.

⁴⁴This point was affirmed by Wycliffe Bible Translators leadership in a November 2011 meeting.

⁴⁵John 5:17-18 “Jesus said to them, ‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.’ For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

⁴⁶John 10:29-33 “‘My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.’ Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, ‘I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?’ ‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ replied the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.’”

We see, then, that there are clear parallels between Muslim objections and New Testament Judaism's objections to the claim that Jesus was and is the Son of God. But neither Jesus nor the apostles attempted to redefine the term before the high priest and/or Sanhedrin (e.g. Luke 22:70;⁴⁷ Acts 9:20;⁴⁸ 13:32-33⁴⁹). Since Jesus was willing to die on the basis of His testimony as the Son of God we have no right to change this terminology to accommodate any belief system, whether Muslim or otherwise.

Listening to the Voice of the Church in Muslim Areas and Former Muslims

An increasing number of national constituencies and Bible Societies have expressed alarm about the proliferation of specialized Scripture "translations" for Muslims in their countries. Many national churches see this trend as being driven by "Westerners." Given our privilege to partner with national churches around the world, it is our belief that their position on this issue should be honored.⁵⁰

Converts from Muslim backgrounds are vigorously opposed to using non-familial language translations. Abdu Murray says:

I offer this perspective as a former Muslim, myself. If the Bible is inspired by God, and He chose to specifically describe Himself and His tri-unity in terms of "Father", "Son", and "Son of God," far be it from us to change them to make the Gospel more palatable to Muslims. Such terms were equally offensive and problematic for Jews in the 1st Century were they not? And yet Jesus used them anyway and God inspired His apostles to do so. And still there was explosive church growth amidst the Jews in the 1st Century. Why should Muslims of today be any different? Indeed, the very fact that God is Jesus' Father, Jesus is God the Son, and God can be called our Father is what is so attractive about the Gospel. To even flirt with changing, let alone removing, such language does violence to the text and will have precisely the opposite effect than what is intended.

⁴⁷Luke 22:70 And they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am."

⁴⁸Acts 9:20 "At once he [the Apostle Paul] began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God."

⁴⁹Acts 13:32-33 "We tell you the good news: What God has promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'"

⁵⁰"Unheralded". <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzPK93pl65I>; Emily Belz. "The battle for accurate Bible translation in Asia." *World Magazine*. February 25, 2012. <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/19184>

Muslims will not see the beauty of the Godhead and they will be reinforced in their long-standing, but incorrect belief that Christians are at liberty to tamper with God's revelation to suit their needs. God forbid that it should ever be so.⁵¹

Conclusion

Assemblies of God World Missions and Assemblies of God U.S. Missions reaffirm our belief in and adherence to the positions outlined in The General Council of the Assemblies of God, U.S.A. statement of fundamental truths regarding *The Scriptures Inspired* and The General Council Assemblies of God, U.S.A. position paper on *The Inerrancy of Scripture*.

Assemblies of God World Missions and Assemblies of God U.S. Missions further affirm that the practice of replacing “familial” terms such as “Father” for God or “Son” for Jesus is unfaithful to God’s revealed Word. Father and Son terminology must be literally translated in order to accurately express their revelatory truths. Father and Son are not mere metaphors borrowed from human experience, but divinely-inspired terms regarding God’s nature. There are no non-literal renderings that can accurately convey the meanings of this divinely-inspired language. Specialized Scripture “translations” that remove Father and Son terminology alter the major biblical doctrines of the triune nature of God, His Fatherhood, Jesus’ Sonship, Jesus’ deity and the adoption of believers as sons and children of God and their relating to God as the Heavenly Father, while providing the basis for textual corruption. Consequently, we will not endorse any “translations” that do not literally translate Father and Son and believe them to be unfaithful to the Biblical manuscripts in their original languages.

Our Fellowship is unrelentingly committed to the authority and infallibility of Scripture.⁵² While we appreciate the challenges missionaries and translators face in intercultural communication, we will neither compromise nor dilute God’s eternal truth, nor change its intended plain meaning. We, therefore, urge all believers to reject these and any other Scripture translations, whether for Muslim or non-Muslim audiences, for both public and personal use, that do not literally translate Father and Son terminology.

⁵¹Abdu Murray, www.biblicalmissiology.com, 2011.

⁵²Randy Hurst, author of an article in the *Pentecostal Evangel* entitled “Essential Scriptural Integrity”, Mar. 4, 2012, quoting Dr. George Wood, the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, U.S.A.

We are indebted to and grateful for ministries that have faithfully and sacrificially translated the Holy Scripture. We affirm that we will gratefully use accurately translated Scripture that contains literal translations of Father and Son terminology in agreement with Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek biblical manuscripts.

With the issues now clearly staked out, we will move to the second part of this paper which looks at *The Language of Sonship in Intertestamental Literature* with a thorough examination of *The Dead Sea Scrolls* and *Rabbinic Texts* in order to observe the foundations of familial language prior to the birth of the church and the canonical New Testament writings.

PART II

THE LANGUAGE OF SONSHIP IN INTERTESTAMENTAL LITERATURE⁵³

Section 1: The Texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Data Containing the Language of “Sonship”

The purpose of this section is to survey the texts of the Qumran corpus that have clear bearing or that may have bearing on the use and meaning of filial language as it pertains to the Messiah. The materials chosen for inclusion in this section either enjoy a scholarly consensus with respect to their contents reflecting messianic sonship or enjoy a large percentage of scholarly opinion slanted in that direction. Texts that have no obvious connection to this study and texts that have attracted a consensus of scholarship against any possible connection to the current study have not been included in the following list.

1Q28a Rule of the Congregation 2.11-15

¹¹ At [a session] of the men of renown, [those summoned to] the gathering of the community council, when [God] begets ¹² the Messiah with them: [the] chief [priest] of all the congregation of Israel shall enter [. . .] ¹³ [. . .] and they shall sit [before him, each one] according to his dignity. After, [the Messiah] of Israel shall [enter] and before him shall sit the heads of the ¹⁵ [thousands of Israel, each] one

⁵³All texts cited are second-to-first century BCE documents.

according to his dignity [. . .] (translation taken from F.G. Martinez and E.J.C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*. Leiden: Brill/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, 1:103, henceforth referred to as *DSSSE*).

The key word in this text is “begets” (Hebrew, יוליד), which would intimate some sort of father-son relationship between the Messiah and God. It is categorized as one of the Dead Sea texts that “may connect the idea of Son of God to the messiah” by Bauer (D.R. Bauer, “Son of God” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, J.B. Green, S. McKnight, and I.H. Marshall, eds. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992, p. 770), who is summarizing the consensus position (cf. the bibliographical survey in F.G. Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” *The Studia Philonica Annual* 19[2007]8-9 note 38). Despite the fact that some scholars have suggested that the word should be read “leads” (Hebrew, יוליך), Martinez/Tigchelaar have adopted the consensus reading which is based on the most recent enhanced image of the text.

Regarding this text, Martinez argues that “...the language of sonship is applied directly to the expected Messiah, who is ‘begotten’ or ‘fathered’ by God... יוליד... represents the best reading and in view of the use of ילדתך in Ps 2, it is quite normal” (Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” pp. 8 -9). Having summarized all the other options that have been put forward, he concludes, “All these readings seem to me very difficult paleographically, and clearly inferior to the original reading of the first editor” (*Ibid.*, p. 9 note 38, end).

4Q174 Florilegium 1.21.2.7, 10-13

⁷ And as for what he said to David [. . .] ¹⁰ [. . .] “I will raise up your seed after you and establish the throne of his kingdom ¹¹ [forever]. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me” [2 *Sam* 7:12-14]. This refers to the “branch of David,” who will arise . . . who ¹² [will rise up] in Zion [in] the [last] days, as it is written: “I will raise up the hut of David which has fallen,” [*Amos* 9:11] This (refers to) “the hut of ¹³ David which has fallen,” [which] he will raise up to [*sic*] save Israel (*DSSSE* 1:353).

Here Bauer notes that the Qumranic author identifies the descendent of David both as God’s “son” (by way of the quote from 2

Sam. 7:12-14) and as the Messiah (Bauer, p. 770). Further, that this Davidic descendent is the eschatological Messiah is evident by the fact that he arises “in the last days” (line 12; cf. C.A. Evans, “[4Q174] is indisputably messianic,” in “Messiahs” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, L.H. Schiffman and J.C. VanderKam, eds. Oxford: Oxford University, 2000, 1:541). Martinez notes the value of this text to our overall understanding of the development of messianic speculation, “[In] 4Q174...the biblical text [2 Sam. 7:11-14] is applied not to an existent king but to the king expected at the end of times...[which] prove[s] that the mythological language of the royal Psalms and the dynastic oracle of Nathan have provided the textual basis for the development of the messianic idea also at Qumran, and have contributed definitely to the formulation of the expectation ‘at the end of times’ of a royal Messiah, ‘Son of God’” (Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” p. 8).

4Q246 Aramaic Apocalypse 1.7 – 2.1, 5-8

Col. I ⁷ [. . .] and he will be great over the earth ⁸ [. . .] they [will do], and all will serve ⁹ [. . . great] will he be called and he will be designated by his name. Col. II ¹ He will be called son of God, and they will call him son of the Most High. . . . ⁵ His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom, and all his paths in truth. He will [judge] ⁶ the earth in truth and all will make peace. The sword will cease from the earth, ⁷ and all the provinces will pay him homage. The great God is his strength, ⁸ he will wage war for him; he will place the peoples in his hand and ⁹ cast them all away before him. His rule will be an eternal rule. . . (*DSSSE* 1:493, 495).

A. and J. Collins immediately draws our attention to the New Testament parallels with this text,

“By far the closest parallel to the titles in question [in this text] is explicitly messianic. In Luke 1:32 the angel Gabriel tells Mary that her child will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom, there will be no end. In Luke 1:35 he adds: “he will be called the Son of God.” The Greek titles “son of the Most High” and “son of God” correspond exactly to the Aramaic fragment from Qumran. Both texts refer to an everlasting kingdom.” (Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, p. 70; cf. also Evans, “Messiahs”, 1.541).

Bauer emphasizes that the titles “Son of God” and “Son of the Most High” in this text are clearly identified with a messianic figure who will usher in an eternal age of justice and peace (Bauer, p. 770). Hengel points to the fact that 4Q246 weaves themes from 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 2 together, which in turn yokes together the concepts of Son of God and Messiah in the pre-Christian period (M. Hengel, “Christological Titles in Early Christianity” in J.H. Charlesworth,

The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992, p. 438; cf. also A. and J. Collins, *King and Messiah*, p. 71; J. Collins, “Pre-Christian Jewish Messianism: An Overview” in Magnus Zetterholm, ed. *The Messiah in Early Judaism and Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007, p. 14; A.B. Perrin, “From Qumran to Nazareth: Reflections on Jesus’ Identity as Messiah in Light of Pre-Christian Messianic Texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls.” *Religious Studies and Theology* 27.2(2008)218-219; F.G. Martinez, “Two Messianic Figures in the Qumran Texts” in F.G. Martinez, *Qumranica Minora II*, ed. E.J.C. Tigchelaar. Leiden: Brill, 2007, p. 24; Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” p. 10).

In terms of the contribution of 4Q246 to the larger picture, Perrin notes that “[4Q246] establishes that the concept of a messianic Son of God figure was in fact in the air prior to the turn of the era. . . [In light of 4Q246,] within pre-Christian Palestinian Jewish thought there existed a conceptual frame of reference in which a messianic Son of God figure could comfortably fit” (Perrin, p. 220). Similarly, Martinez opines, “Together with the other texts quoted, 4Q246 offers us the proof not only that the sonship terminology of the king as ‘Son of God’ was transferred to the future Messiah at Qumran, but that the title ‘Son of God’ could be applied to the Messiah without the need to specify its character as ‘anointed’” (Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” p. 10).

4Q369 Prayer of Enosh (?) 1.2.5-11

⁵ and your good judgments you explained to him to [. . .] ⁶ in eternal light, and you made him for you a [first-born] son [. . .] ⁷ like him, to (be) a prince and ruler in all /your/ inhabited world [. . .] ⁸ the [crown] of the heavens, and the glory of the clouds you have placed [on him. . .] ⁹ [. . .] and the angel of your peace in his congregation and [. . .] ¹⁰ [. . .] for him (?) righteous rules, as a father to [his] son [. . .] ¹¹ [. . .]

] his love, your soul cleaves to [. . .] (*DSSSE* 2:731)

Evans suggests that the frame of reference of this text “may be messianic” (Evans, “Messiahs”, 1:541). His hesitancy is explained by Martinez, who defines the problem with this text as follows, “(4Q369) is unproblematic in terms of uncertain readings, but its fragmentary character leaves us uncertain as to whom the language of sonship. . . is being applied” (Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” p. 9). Later, however, he observes that “[the] strongest argument with respect to the individual and messianic interpretation is the influence of Ps 89:27-28, where we find three of the elements appearing in the text applied to *the king*: God will make him ‘first-born’ (בכור), he will establish him as the most exalted king on earth, and the king will call God ‘father’” (Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” p. 10, emphasis added). In addition to these observations is the reality that the person being described has been given special instruction in God’s laws (cf. Deut. 17:19; 1 Sam. 10:25), is referred to as *sar* (“prince”) and *moshel* (“ruler”), and is given an *atarat shamayim* (“a heavenly crown”). Therefore, in light of the textual data, an awareness of the general trajectory of Qumranic eschatological speculation, and possibly by process of elimination, Martinez concludes that “...the balance ultimately inclines us towards the individual and messianic interpretation [of 4Q369]” (*Ibid.*).

4Q458 (4QNarrative A)

Because this fragment preserves no specific “Son of God” language, its text will not be reproduced. Attention should be paid, however, to the virtually synonymous term “the beloved” (which actually appears twice, once in line 1 and once in line 2) along with the descriptive phrase expression “anointed with the oil of kingship” (Frag. 2, 2.6).

In light of the appearance of these phrases, Martinez states that the text “clearly refers to the royal Messiah, because, as the editor notes, ‘the establishment of his kingdom is apparently connected with both the destruction of the uncircumcised referred to in line 4 and the establishment of righteousness among the chosen people of God.’” For this reason he concludes, “In spite of the uncertainties brought about by poor preservation, therefore, these texts also show that the language of sonship was applied to the royal Messiah as an extension of the sonship

language originally applied to the king” (Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” p. 10; cf. esp. note 45).

4Q521 Messianic Apocalypse 2.2.1, 7-9, 11-13; 7+5. 2.3.2. 2.6

Col. I ¹ [for the heavens] and the earth will listen to his anointed one[. . .] ⁷ For he will honor the pious upon the throne of an eternal kingdom, ⁸ freeing prisoners, giving sight to the blind, straightening out the [twisted]. ⁹ And [forever] shall I cling [to those who hope], and in his mercy [. . .] ¹¹ And the Lord will perform marvelous acts such as have not existed, just as he [said,] ¹² [for] he will heal the badly wounded and will make the dead alive, he will proclaim good news to the poor ¹³ and [. . .] he will lead the [. . .] and enrich the hungry. Col. III ² [. . .] The fathers will return towards the sons. [. . .] 7+5 Col. II ⁶ [. . .] he who gives life to the dead of his people [. . .] ⁸ [. . .] and opens [. . .] (*DSSSE* 2:1045, 1047).

Like 4Q458 above, 4Q521 contains no explicit “sonship” language. Nevertheless, it does describe “His anointed one” (משיחו, line 1) so vividly, and with such clear parallels to the actions of the “Son of God” of the Gospels, that it has been included here to facilitate integration of its data into the larger picture of “sonship” emerging from the Qumran material.

4Q534 Noah ar (4QElect of God or 4QMess ar) Col. I.7-11

⁷ [. . .] Counsel and prudence will [be] with him ⁸ [and] he will know the secrets of man. And his wisdom will reach all the peoples. And he will know the secrets of all living things. ⁹ [And all] their plans against him will come to nothing, although the opposition of all living things will be great. ¹⁰ [. . .] his [plans]. Because he is the elect of God, his birth and the spirit of his breath ¹¹ [. . .] his [plans] shall be forever (*DSSSE* 2:1071).

G. Vermes has noted that J. Starcky, the original editor of this text, understood this text to refer to “the final Prince of the Congregation, or Royal Messiah,” although he reminds us that the text may actually refer to the miraculous birth of Noah (G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. New York: Penguin, 1997, p. 357).

11Q13Melchizedek 2:4-25

⁴ [Its interpretation] for the last days refers to the captives, who [. . .] and whose ⁵ teachers have been hidden and kept secret, and from the inheritance of Melchizedek, [for . . .] and they are the [inheritance of Melchizedek,] who ⁶ will make them return. And liberty will be proclaimed for them, to free them from [the debt of] all their iniquities [. . .] ⁸ [. . .] atonement shall be made for all the sons of [light and] for the men [of] the lot of [Melchizedek] [. . .] for ⁹ it is the time of the “year of grace” of Melchizedek, and of [his] armies, [the nation] of the holy ones of God, of the rule of judgment, as is written ¹⁰ about him in the songs of David, who said: “Elohim will [stand] in the [assembly of God,] in the midst of the gods he judges” [Ps 82:1]. And about him he said: “[And] above [it,] ¹¹ to the heights, return: God will judge the peoples” [Ps 7:8-9]. As for what he said: “[How long will you] judge unjustly and show [partiality] to the wicked? [*Selah*] ” [Ps 82:2]. ¹² Its interpretation concerns Belial and the spirits of his lot, who [. . .] turning [aside] from the commandments of God to [commit evil.] ¹³ But, Melchizedek will carry out the vengeance of [God’s] judgments, [and on that day he will free] [them from the hand of] Belial and from the hand of all the [spirits of his lot.] ¹⁴ To his aid (shall come) all “the gods of justice”; [and he] is the one who [. . .] all the sons of God, and [. . .] ¹⁵ This [. . .] is the day of [peace about which] he said [. . .] through] Isaiah the prophet, who said: “[How] beautiful ¹⁶ upon the mountains are the feet [of] the messenger [who] announces peace, of the messenger [of good who announces salvation,] [saying] to Zion: your God reigns” [Isa 52:7]. ¹⁷ Its interpretation: The mountains [are] the prophets [. . .] ¹⁸ And the messenger [is] the anointed of the [spirit] about whom [Daniel] said about him: “Until an anointed, a prince, it is seven weeks.” And the messenger [of] ¹⁹ good who announces [salvation] is the one about whom it is written that [. . .] ²⁰ “To [comfort] the [afflicted,] its interpretation: to instruct them in all the ages of the world [. . .] ²³ [. . .] as it is written about him: “[Saying to Zion]: your God rules” [Isa. 52:7]. “[Zion]” [is] ²⁴ [the congregation of all the sons of justice, those] who establish the covenant, those who avoid walking [on the path] of the people. And “your God” is ²⁵ [. . .] Melchizedek, who will] [free them from the hand] of Belial” (*DSSSE* 2:1207, 1209).

Here we see a demonstrably heavenly figure who appears in

the last days, proclaims and brings liberty to captives, brings judgment to the wicked and vindication to the righteous, announces the “year of God’s grace,” commands legions of angels and saints (“the holy ones of God”), and defeats Satan and his forces. As such, it is necessary to identify Him as some kind of messianic figure, the “anointed of the Spirit” and the “anointed one” of Daniel 9:25 (line 18).

In addition, this heavenly messianic figure receives the obedience of the peoples, as is indicated by the term “inheritance” (twice in line 6), a theme that also appears in the messianically charged Psalm 2. As has been demonstrated above, the one who receives the inheritance of the nations (v. 8) is earlier (v. 7) and again later (v. 12) identified as God’s “son”. Further, Melchizedek is here identified as a fulfiller of Psalm 82 (line 10), a psalm which itself identifies its addressees as “sons of the Most High” (v. 6). As “Son of the Most High” (4Q246 II.1), he would be the most appropriate leader of the forces of God’s vengeance, “all the gods of justice”/“all the sons of God” (line 14).

Lastly, this heavenly Melchizedek figure is declared divine three times in this text. Lines 9 and 10 read, “Melchizedek. . .as is written¹⁰ about him in the songs of David, who said: “Elohim will [stand] in the assembly [of God,] in the midst of the gods he judges” (Psa. 82:1). Further, in lines 10 and 11 the author continues, “And about him he said: [‘And] above [it,]¹¹ to the heights, return: God will judge the peoples”” (Psa. 7:8 -9). Lastly, the interpretation offered for Isa. 52:7 in lines 23 and 25 reads as follows, “[. . .] it is written about him: [‘Saying to Zion]: your God rules’ [. . .] And ‘your God’ is²⁵ [. . .] Melchizedek, who will] [free them from the hand] of Belial.”

Therefore, by title and by action, he appears as a messiah-figure; by the biblical passages used to describe him, he is further described as son and as divine (as Martinez noted above, the authors of the sectarian writings from Qumran do not always feel it necessary to delineate every point of reference explicitly, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” p. 10). Thus, through the same subtle handling of biblical texts that has been demonstrated in the aforementioned passages, the author of this text has combined the elements of “son”, “messiah”, and deity in one heavenly, eschatological figure. Of course it goes without saying that other texts share some or all of these same elements in addition to adding some of their own (Testament of Levi 18:3; Heb. 6:20-8:6, etc.).

Observations: Reflecting on the Data from the Dead Sea Scrolls

In the survey of relevant texts above, it became evident that Qumran represents a developmental stage of messianic speculation and expectation that had advanced far beyond that of the Hebrew Bible. Consequently, Martinez says that to the biblical categories of 1.) angels as “Sons of God” (Gen. 6:2, etc.), 2.) Israel as “Son of God” (Hosea 11:1, etc.), and 3.) the king as “Son of God” (Ps. 2:7, etc.), “I have added a fourth [category] that is not found in the Hebrew Bible, but which appears in some Qumranic texts: 4.) the Messiah, ‘son of God.’” (Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” p. 1).

Chilton concurs, noting that the material from Qumran forces us to recognize that “[contrary] to a popular fallacy, the language of divine sonship is by no means a Christian invention. The term ‘son’ is frequently used in the Old Testament for the special relationship between God and others.” He concludes, “All these are expressions not of a biological relationship but of the direct revelation which God extends to favored people” (Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography*. New York: Doubleday, 2002, p. 58, note 3). Within this developmental stage, then, the term “Son of God” became a designation for individuals who enjoyed a special relationship with God.

Martinez states that this development is so distinct that there is complete disjunction between the developmental stage of the Hebrew Bible and the developmental stage represented by the Scrolls. He writes, “The analysis of the Qumran texts on divine sonship shows that it is applied to selected individuals... it is not used of historical kings but applied to the expected eschatological king and that it has become one of the characteristics of the expected King Messiah” (Martinez, “Divine Sonship at Qumran and in Philo,” p. 11).

As impressive as the evidence from Qumran is, it should be observed that this development was *not* restricted to Qumran, whether it began there or not. Rather, the same usage is evident in intertestamental texts such as Wisdom of Solomon 2:18 and 5:5, Ben Sira 4:10, and Psalms of Solomon 13:9 and 18:4. It is also evident in other corpora such as Philo, the New Testament, and in Rabbinic Literature, which is discussed below.

It is also evident that this new developmental stage, at least as far as Qumran is concerned, is predicated upon the interpretation of specific passages from the Hebrew Bible. For example, Evans observes, “The tradition of Israel’s monarch as a divine son (Ps. 2:7; 2 Sm. [sic] 7:14) gave rise to a variety of ‘son’ epithets” (Evans,

“Messiahs”, 1:541). Bauer has observed that “...messianic hope in the period was almost always linked to an ideal Davidic king (who in the OT is described as Son of God)” (Bauer, p. 770) and this is nowhere more evident than in the exegetical foundations of sonship as expressed in the sectarian documents from Qumran.

Another consequence of the material from the Scrolls, as Chilton notes, is that it becomes clear that the concept of divine sonship of the Messiah predates Christianity (Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus*, p. 58, note 3). In fact, Shanks declares, “. . .that divine sonship is present in the Dead Sea Scrolls before Jesus is declared the Son of God should not be surprising” (H. Shanks, *The Mystery & Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. NY: Random House, 1988, p. 69). Shanks continues, “By Jesus’ time...the concept of the *mashiach* had developed beyond that of an earthly messiah who would restore the glory of the Kingdom of David. It also came to mean a divinely sent figure who would return as God’s agent and usher in the world to come. The Dead Sea Scrolls reflect this development. . .thus. . .the Messiah was already freighted with eschatological content” (Shanks, pp. 68-9).

A final observation is offered by Bauer, who notes that the concept of “the Messiah as Son of God was not totally foreign to Palestinian Judaism [. . .] It is thus preferable to look to the OT and Palestinian Judaism for the religious background to the divine sonship of Jesus” (Bauer, p. 770). By default, then, the “understanding of the [pagan Hellenistic] origin of the title [Son of God] in Christology is today generally rejected” (*Ibid.*). This last observation will be treated in greater detail in the “CONCLUSIONS” below.

Section 2: The Texts of Rabbinic Literature: Data Containing the Language of “Sonship”

Midrash Tehillim (Psalms) 2:9-10

*I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, “You are my Son” (Ps. 2:7)...In the decree of the Writings it is written[...]*The Lord said unto my lord: “Sit thou at My right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Ps.110:1, King James Version, KJV), and it is also written I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the Ancient of days, and he was brought near before Him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him**

(Dan. 7:13, 14, American Standard Version, ASV) [...] the verse is read “*I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.* (Ps. 2:7, 8, NAS). R. Yudan said: All these goodly promises are in the decree of the King, the King of kings, who will fulfill them for the lord Messiah. [. . .] Another comment on *Thou art My son*: God does not say “I have a son,” but “Thou art like a son to Me,” [. . .] *This day have I begotten thee (ibid.)*. R. Huna said [...] When the time comes, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say: “I must create the Messiah – a new creation.” As Scripture says, *This day have I begotten thee*—that is, on the very day of redemption, God will create the Messiah [...]10. *Ask of Me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession* (Ps. 2:8). God, speaking to the Messiah [...]” (translation taken from W.G. Braude. *The Midrash on Psalms*. New Haven: Yale University, 1959, 1:40-41).

Commenting on this text, Buchanan has observed, “This means that the rabbis considered the Messiah to be a king, Son of God, and Son of man [*sic*]” (G.W. Buchanan, *To The Hebrews (Anchor Bible vol. 36)*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1972, pp. 13-14). Unfortunately, it must be admitted that this is the only surviving text from Rabbinic Literature that clearly describes the coming messianic king as the “Son of God.” The tendency within rabbinic circles appears to be to steer away from such a close connection to the deity himself and consequently away from current Christological interpretations. This tendency can even be detected in the *davar acher* immediately following the interpretation of Rabbi Yudan: “Another comment on “Thou art My son”: God does not say ‘I have a son,’ but ‘Thou art like a son to Me.’”

Despite this tendency, we do have this text, and along with it, some astounding parallels with texts in other corpora. For example, the picture of the coming messianic figure is grounded in specific texts from the Hebrew Bible. Further, the biblical texts cited are the same texts that appear in other literatures of the period, such as the sectarian materials from Qumran, the New Testament and various pseudepigraphical texts. In addition, the language of sonship reflects similar context and nuances as have been detected elsewhere: the Messiah is Davidic, is of heavenly origin, is futuristic/eschatological in nature, brings redemption and a worldwide kingdom, and enjoys a

special relationship and status with God. This last element is the focus of the next four texts. These four passages have been chosen as representatives of a larger corpus of similar texts, all of which reflect the tendency to ascribe “sonship” language to a group of individuals who enjoy an especially intimate relationship with God, and who consequently play a special role in God’s redemptive activities in the world.

BT *Berachot* 17b

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: Every day a divine voice goes forth from Mount Horeb and proclaims: The whole world is sustained for the sake of My son Hanina, and Hanina My son has to subsist on a kab of carobs from one week end to the next.

BT *Ta’anit* 24b

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: Every day a Heavenly Voice is heard declaring, The whole world draws its sustenance because [of the merit] of Hanina my son, and Hanina my son suffices himself with a kab of carobs from one Sabbath eve to another.

BT *Shabbat* 14b = *Eruvin* 21b

For Raba Judah said in Samuel’s name, When Solomon instituted *erubin* and the washing of the hands, a Heavenly Echo came forth and declared, “My son, if thine heart be wise; My heart shall be glad, even mine” [Prov. 23:15, KJV]; and “My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, That I may answer him that reproacheth me” [Prov. 27:11, KJV].

As seen in the Dead Sea texts, the tendency to ground unique sonship in passages from the Hebrew Bible is in full view. Here, it is evident that the rabbis are employing the ancient hermeneutical principle of *gezera shaveh*: two texts are cited, one after another in support of a common point, because they share common language (“My son,” “My heart,” “be wise,” and “be glad”). It is equally evident that the points of reference have been reassigned: in the biblical contexts, the teacher of wisdom is speaking to his disciple, whereas in the Talmud, God is speaking to his “son.”

M. Ta'anit 3:8 = BT *Berachot* 19b; *Ta'anit* 19a, 23a

What is the case of one behaving familiarly with heaven? — As we have learnt: Simeon b. Shetah sent to Honi ha-Me'aggel: You deserve to be excommunicated, and were you not Honi, I would pronounce excommunication against you. But what can I do seeing that you ingratiate yourself with the Omnipresent and He performs your desires, and you are like a son who ingratiates himself with his father and he performs his desires; and to you applies the verse: “Let thy father and thy mother be glad, and let her that bore thee rejoice” [Prov. 23:25, ASV].

The reputation of Honi the Circle-Drawer is well-known, even outside communities of observant Jews. He has actually become the focus of a recent Christian book on prayer (Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles around your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011)! The point of this text is that Honi achieved in his time the coveted status of “son of God” applied to others elsewhere in this article. From his sketchy biography recorded elsewhere in Rabbinic Literature, it is also evident that this status was well-deserved, as he was uniquely involved in God’s redemptive work on the earth. Simeon ben Shetah, the head of the Sanhedrin at the time, is even able to find yet another biblical verse containing parental and filial language, and reassign the points of reference to Honi (the son) and God (the parent)! Further, the specific activities in which Honi was engaged more often than not were miraculous in nature, as is also evidenced in “son of God” contexts within the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Pseudepigrapha, and the New Testament.

JT *Ta'anit* 2:1

Said R. Abbahu, “If a man should tell you, ‘I am God,’ he is lying.

If he says, ‘I am the son of man,’ in the end he will regret it.”

This last text of the section is introduced to represent the other side of the “Son of God” tension evidenced in Rabbinic Literature, which is the tendency to mute such use. Therefore, whether the purpose is to avoid another catastrophic confrontation with Rome or to distance itself from the early Christian church, Rabbinic Literature demonstrates a very consistent aversion to the kind of messianic speculation on full

display in *Midrash Tehilim* reproduced at the beginning of this section. Even there, immediately following the (what is for Rabbinic Literature) unusual interpretation of Rabbi Yudan, interpretations are given that actually serve as a corrective and, we would argue, represent the “majority opinion,” since the *davar acher* appears without attribution to a specific sage or sages.

The text cited above has been formatted with the intent to show the obvious poetic parallelism intended by the original speaker. Irrespective of the negative original intent, the synonymous nature of the claims “I am God” and “I am the Son of Man” is self-evident. Evidently the rabbis were aware that there were those who had made exactly such claims, and statements such as this were intended to curb the negative effects that resulted, whether *chorban* (“destruction”) or *minut* (“apostasy”).

Observations: Reflecting on the Data from Rabbinic Literature

At least in *Midrash Tehilim*, according to Collins, “The picture of the messiah in these [Rabbinic] sources is in line with what we see in the Dead Sea Scrolls” (J. Collins, “Pre-Christian Jewish Messianism: An Overview,” p. 20). We should not be surprised to find such a text in Rabbinic Literature, since as noted above, neither the Hebrew Scriptures nor development toward a divine messianic son-figure was the unique possession of the Qumran community. When it is found, the points of commonality with other corpora from the period are consistent: grounding in specific biblical texts, eschatological orientation, connection with the miraculous, and application to those who enjoy special intimacy and status with the deity. In at least one text, the divine nature of the coming son-Messiah is at least implied. Additionally, this same text equates the “Son of God” figure with the “Son of Man” figure known from other texts (Daniel, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and the New Testament).

Nevertheless, the question remains: if such speculation was as widespread as the various literatures of the period suggest, why is evidence for it so scanty within the rabbinic corpus? Why is messianic treatment of texts such as 2 Samuel 7:11-16 entirely absent from Rabbinic Literature? S. Levey has suggested that this lacuna is due to familiarity with “Christian exegesis on this passage, and, by implication, [it] tries to counteract it” (S.H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation; The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum*. New York: Hebrew Union College, 1974, p. 37).

The *Targumim*, which are comparatively more messianically-oriented than the remainder of the corpus (and especially the *Mishnah*) actually move in the opposite direction, “soften[ing] the anthropomorphism” (*ibid.*) of 2 Samuel 7, Psalms 2, 82, and 110, Daniel 7, and the like. On this Levey has observed, “The general tone of the Targumic rendering. . . is not the usually strong Messianic tone [of the *Targumim*]” (Levey, p. 105), which he sees as “a reflection of rabbinic messianism” in general (Levey, p. 143).

Historically, scholarship has tended to focus more on the political/military reasons for the suppression of the messianic urge (more recent examples can be seen in Karin Hedner-Zetterholm, “Elijah and the Messiah as Spokesmen of Rabbinic Ideology” in Zetterholm, *The Messiah*, pp. 59-60; and J. Collins, “Pre-Christian Jewish Messianism: An Overview,” p. 20). In light of the widely dispersed use among other Jewish groups, and indeed, the frequent messianic speculation evidenced within the rabbinic corpus such as certain collections of *midrash*, the two *Talmudim*, and the *Targumim*, the likelihood is that rabbinic suppression is much more nuanced.

More than three decades ago, H.–J. Steichele noted the tendency in rabbinic sources to avoid the title “Son of God” (*Der leidende Sohn Gottes: Eine Untersuchung einiger alttestamentlicher Motive in der Christologie des Markusevangeliums*. Biblische Untersuchungen 14. Regensburg: Pustet, 1980, pp. 139-147). Therefore, in reaction to pressure from Jewish Christianity and possibly other elements within the Palestinian Jewish community, rabbinic authorities deliberately steered away, not from messianism in general, but from specific aspects of messianic speculation that they viewed as threatening.

A similar tendency (albeit not complete elimination, as demonstrated above) is the tendency to avoid language which would ascribe deity to the messianic figure. We would argue from the evidence already presented that the dual messianic characteristics of sonship and divinity were so often intertwined in the Intertestamental Period that to preclude one necessarily precluded the other. Conversely, not only in the Dead Sea and pseudepigraphical materials, but even more overtly in the New Testament, inclusion of one of these characteristics necessarily included the other element! We conclude this section with a methodological warning: that “Son of God” is poorly attested within the Rabbinic corpora should not be understood as mitigating against its popularity at the time of the New Testament any more than the complete absence of the title “Son of David” at Qumran

(cf. Evans, “Messiahs”, 1:541) should be taken as an indication that it was not a popular title in the period. That this title was indeed popular is evident, not only by its appearance in the New Testament, but also by its use in Rabbinic Literature.

Conclusions

It is no longer (if it ever was) appropriate to attempt to interpret Jesus or the writings of the New Testament in isolation from the cauldron of religious foment into which He was born and out of which sprung the writings of the New Testament. Nor can we access the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament alone in search of the background needed to fully appreciate Him or the writings of His earliest followers. The period of more than half a millennium between the Testaments saw unparalleled economic, political, and cultural development in the eastern Mediterranean basin, and the areas of theology and religious development were not immune. Ideas like deliverance/salvation, angelology/demonology, holiness, messiah, and sonship underwent thoroughgoing development and revision, and more often than not, their New Testament corollaries look more like those of their immediate next-door neighbor, the Intertestamental Period than those of the more distant Old Testament Period.

Further, the influences that produced such an intense period of development tended to be more eastern than western. Neufeld observes,

Labels such as “Son of God” and “Son of Man” cannot be removed from Jewish messianism and relegated to later, Hellenistic Christianity. The title “Son of God” is not the product of a church that arbitrarily changed “Son of God” from designating a messianic king to denoting a figure of heavenly origin...A heavenly, transcendent Messiah was not a unique invention of the Christian community but the outgrowth of reflection that had its roots in Judaism (Dietmar Neufeld, “And When That One Comes: Aspects of Johannine Messianism” in *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* by Craig A. Evans and Peter Flint. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, p. 140).

Consequently, the construct championed by W. Bousset and popularized by Rudolf Bultmann, that Jesus’ divine sonship derives from pagan notions of sons of gods (R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*. NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951, 1:128 -29; cf. the critique offered almost fifty years ago by Nock, “. . .attempts which have been made to explain [Jesus’ divine sonship in early Christianity]

from the larger Hellenistic world fail," A.D. Nock, *Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background*. New York: Harper and Row, 1964, p. 45) must be abandoned in favor of sources ideologically, linguistically, and geographically closer to Jesus and the movement He spawned.

Specifically with respect to the issue of divine sonship and the light shed on it by intertestamental Palestinian Jewish sources, almost a century ago J. Klausner opined:

[. . .] the messiah [. . .] became a truly pre-eminent man [. . .] of a pre-eminent man like this it is possible to say, "Thou hast made him a little lower than God." For from a pre-eminent man like this to God is but a step, but this step Judaism did *not* take (Joseph Klausner, "The Source and Beginnings of the Messianic Idea" in Leo Landman,

Messianism in the Talmudic Era. New York: Ktav, 1979, p. 36).

With all due respect to Klausner's contribution to the study of the period, he wrote at a time that did not have the advantage of the richness provided by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Nor was he able to benefit from the subsequent advances in the study of the other relevant corpora that were made possible by their discovery. A more accurate picture reflecting these developments comes from L. Hurtado:

In view of recently published texts from Qumran, it now seems more likely than earlier thought by some scholars that divine sonship was also a part of the royal - messianic rhetoric of pre-Christian Judaism. . . . So the category of divine sonship lay close to hand in the Jewish matrix of earliest Christianity, and can even be said to have been more prominent there than in the pagan religious environment (L.W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, p. 103).

We would argue that such information should be available to pastors, teachers, scholars, and translators who have shouldered the responsibility of communicating the message of the Scriptures. Attempts to paraphrase, contemporize, and "simplify" concepts that have deep roots in the revelation of the Hebrew Bible and in complex intertestamental development contain the inherent danger of depriving their readers and hearers of the historical, cultural, linguistic and theological nuances that are critical to achieve the depth of understanding intended by the original divine and human authors of the New Testament. Because its message has eternal significance, all involved in its communication should strive to reflect the richness of

authorial intent with all due deference to its original backgrounds, literary context, and choice of language.

With the intertestamental period writings in mind, we can now move to the third part of this paper which deals with the *Familial Language and New Testament Christology* and examines the historical background in which canonical New Testament Scriptures were given and provides exegesis of New Testament teaching concerning the divine familial terms of Son and Father.

PART III

FAMILIAL LANGUAGE AND NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY

We are addressing the issue of how to translate the Bible's use of familial language, particularly when it is applied to the relationship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to God, the Father. Our focus here is on the witness of the canonical New Testament writings and what they teach concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

Apparently, from the standpoint of the Christian mission, the goal of removing offensive language from the biblical witness is a long-standing issue of considerable importance. However, could not innumerable occasions be cited where members of the ancient receptor culture (religious, social, civil, etc.) found the gospel offensive?

1. For example, the Romans of Jesus and Paul's day were involved in the worship of Caesar. To declare "Caesar is Lord" was an act of civil loyalty to Rome. The Christian declaration of faith that "Jesus is Lord" flew in the face of Rome's Emperor Cult worship. Moreover, Christian commitment to *one* God was an offense to the polytheistic Romans who regarded them as virtual atheists, according to Pliny the Younger.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Christians did not budge from their Trinitarian monotheism, even though a tri-theism would have been much more palatable to the

⁵⁴ Pliny the Younger in Ep. 10.96. The charge of atheism is confirmed by Athenagorus who listed it among the three most common charges against Christians. It meant that Christians did not pay homage to the state gods of Rome, nor the pagan gods, in *Plea* 3. Cited by E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 558-59.

- prevailing religious culture.
2. Again, there is no evidence that the Christian church made accommodations to remove that offense (Gk. *skandalon*) of the cross to Judaism or Greco-Roman paganism. In fact, Paul exalts such teaching as the “wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1: 21-24).
 3. More to the issue at hand, it is patently clear that Christianity was at odds with Judaism’s monotheistic claims when they proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, Son of God, yet they did not remove this offense. We know that it was indeed an offense, because on at least one occasion the Jews sought to kill Jesus for saying “I am the Son of God.” (John 10:32-36; See also 19:7). One would think that the Apostle John, knowing the hostility of the Jews toward this proclamation, would have mitigated the controversy by avoiding the phrase. Instead the phrase appears more often in his Gospel than any other.⁵⁵ Again, you might think that John, a Jew, would have understood the scandal of Jesus’ divinity before a Jewish audience and sought to lessen the offense if he thought it was necessary to build a bridge to the Jews. Nowhere, in John’s Gospel, or any other of his writings, is there evidence that the evangelist avoids calling or identifying Jesus as the Son of God.
 4. One can only wonder why the Church has only now seen it necessary to accommodate Muslim sensitivities and has ignored very similar ones within Judaism, and done so for two millennia! Will we now begin to create translations that remove the offense to sects within Judaism. Or, should we now create translations to accommodate, in addition to Islam, select groups within Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Lamaism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, etc., not to mention the innumerable current folk religions?
And if this strategy removes obstacles to evangelizing these religions, one can only marvel at the Church’s ignorance and/or dullness in not using it long before now. Formal Bible translation has been going on almost as long

⁵⁵John – 9 times is compared with Matthew – 7 times, Mark—3 times, and Luke—6 times.

as the Church has been in existence, at least from the time of Origen (185-254 A.D.).

5. What is being proposed is *not* simply a matter of producing a better contextualized translation for use within a global language or ethnic group. It is the removal of familial language from the biblical text – language that is not only relevant but essential to the biblical witness concerning Jesus Christ and His relationship to God, His Father. This analysis and critique is organized around two fundamental questions: *Can the “gospel of Jesus Christ” be properly understood apart from the use of familial language?* and *Was Jesus’ identity as the Messiah intrinsically bound to His filial relationship as a Son to God, His Father?*

Introduction

New Testament scholars all agree that Christology lies at the center of “the gospel.” We might even say, “Jesus *is* the gospel” as far as the New Testament authors are concerned. Mark makes that clear in the opening verse of his Gospel, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” That is, Jesus Christ is the subject of the gospel, the object of what is preached and proclaimed as good news. It is *this* gospel that Paul preaches without shame, for it is accompanied by the power of God that leads to salvation (Rom. 1:16). It is *this* gospel on which the eternal destiny of humanity hinges, in that it reveals the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:17) which is now available to everyone, Jew and Gentile, who believes in Christ who is the end of law for righteousness (Rom. 10:3-4, 8-13).

We return to the controversial question at hand: *Can the “gospel of Jesus Christ” be properly understood without the use of familial language?* More precisely, can we preach the gospel without declaring Jesus to be “the Son of God,” and God to be His “Father”? Is the familial language an item judged to be incidental or essential to the gospel? It is our studied opinion that the “truth of the gospel” (Eph. 1:13) is at stake. Keep in mind that this gospel lies at the core of the “faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), the integrity of which Paul warned against violating in the strongest of terms (Gal. 1:6-9). It is with the same sense of urgent concern that we present our study. We begin in canonical fashion with the Synoptic Gospels.

The Witness of the Synoptic Gospels

Introduction

Some modern scholars are willing to concede that John's Christology presents the deity of Christ. This is usually because they view the authorship of his Gospel as late (early to mid-2nd century), reflecting the evolving theological convictions of the Church toward a "high Christology" which ascribed deity to the person of Jesus, the Messiah. They contend, however, that this was certainly not reflective of the apostolic church, or Jesus himself. The corollary to this perspective is that the Synoptic Gospels represent a more accurate picture of what the early church believed and Jesus taught. Nevertheless, some contend that there is no evidence that Jesus ever claimed to be the Messiah or deity. That theological contention can be challenged and needs to be considered along with our current debate. *Is familial language a necessary component of New Testament Christology?* While this is the primary question related to our investigation, there is one of greater theological importance: *Was Jesus convinced that He was the Son of God?* This query focuses on Jesus' self-identity. Modern scholars belonging to the *Jesus Seminar* have attacked the credibility of the Gospels and answered with an emphatic, "no." Ironically Scripture translations for Muslims that remove from the text and/or redefine the divine familial terms Father, Son, and Son of God accomplish through translation what the *Jesus Seminar* does through historical reconstruction and skepticism regarding the witness of Scripture – the denial of the deity of Jesus. But does the evidence given in the Synoptic Gospels support this denial? A survey of the evidence points to the opposite conclusion.

The Gospel of Mark

The text of Mark bears witness to what is a literary *inclusio*. The Gospel opens and closes with a declaration that Jesus is the Son of God⁵⁶ (1:1, and 15:39).⁵⁷ This strongly suggests that Mark is

⁵⁶Despite the absence of the title in some ancient manuscripts, there are literary reasons for accepting its authenticity. Mark records that at His baptism the heavens opened and a heavenly declaration is heard: "Thou art my beloved son, in Thee I am well-pleased" (1:11, King James Version). At His crucifixion a Roman centurion declares, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." This two-fold declaration brackets the Gospel as a literary inclusion, revealing that Mark has Jesus' identity as the Messiah – Son of God very much as the theological emphasis of his Gospel. If the title in Mark 1:1 be allowed then at the

concerned to stress that “Son of God” is essential to true identity of Jesus, the Messiah.

Mark has, in fact, underscored this emphasis in a dramatic way. Mark records that once, at the beginning of Jesus’ messianic ministry, and again, just prior to His death (at the Mount of Transfiguration), God declares His relationship to Jesus. Both events involve the language of theophany and heavenly revelation. In Mark 1:11 God speaks out of heaven, “Thou art my Beloved son, in thee I am well pleased” (KJV).⁵⁸ Again, after Peter confesses His true identity as the Christ, Mark takes us to the Mount of Transfiguration where out of a cloud God speaks (9:7, ESV), “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!” Both of these divine pronouncements by the Father take place after human statements or confessions of Jesus’ true identity (1:1, 8:29). One wonders why the pattern is broken with regard to the centurion’s confession in 15:39, or was it? Even if the longer ending of Mark is disallowed, the implied resurrection (from the empty tomb) of Jesus is the third heavenly witness to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. The Apostle Paul would confirm this interpretation. In the opening of Romans, he writes that he was called to preach what was “promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who *was declared the Son of God* with power *by the resurrection from the dead...*” (1:3-4, NAS).

Admittedly, Mark uses the phrase “Son of God” sparingly, preferring instead Jesus’ own self-designation as the “Son of Man.” But before leaving Mark’s gospel, we must point out that the phrase is

beginning and ending of his Gospel, Mark supplies a statement of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God followed by a transcendent heavenly sign – voice out of heaven and the resurrection. Even if the last 12 verses of Mark were absent the resurrection is the clear inference from the empty tomb (16:6). Both signs confirm that identity.

⁵⁷It is possible to interpret the words of the Roman centurion as something less than an acknowledgement of Jesus’ deity, but such recognition of the divine-like character of men was certainly nothing new for the Romans. Usually, divinity was seen as an expression of extraordinary *arête* (virtue) on display in feats of greatness. Ironically, Mark records the centurion’s recognition when he witnessed how Jesus died. Keep in mind that if we allow the Matthean tradition to speak, Peter’s confession of Jesus as “the Christ” is augmented by the words, “the Son of the living God.” Thus, there would then be three declarations of Jesus’ identity as the Son of God: 1) At the beginning Jesus’ messianic ministry, 2) Prior to God’s divine disclosure on the Mt. of Transfiguration, and 3) At his death on the cross.

⁵⁸It is noteworthy that all three Synoptic Gospels record this event where God’s voice declares this identity using words reminiscent of God’s description of the Messiah’s relationship to God as a Son (Psalms 2:7) and as the elect chosen Servant of the Lord (*Ebed Yahweh*) in whom God delights (Isa 42:1).

interpreted by some simply as a messianic phrase without any reference to the deity of Jesus. But as any interpreter of Scripture understands, the meaning of “Son of God” must be understood within the context of how Mark and the other Evangelists used the phrase. Most New Testament theologians agree that the primary focus of Jesus was the kingdom of God. Moreover, most will affirm that the kingdom of God is the dynamic rule of God offered in the preaching of the gospel. In other words, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, God calls us to belong to and participate in the reign or rule of God. That rule can easily be equated with the Lordship of Jesus Christ, which if one confesses, he/she appropriates God’s salvation (Rom. 10:9-10; Cf. Col. 1:13). However, Mark’s portrayal of Jesus in relationship to the kingdom of God makes it patently clear that Jesus not only comes preaching the kingdom of God, but He *brings* the kingdom through His presence and demonstrates its divine power and authority. Note that the announcement that the kingdom of God is at hand (1:15) is immediately followed by the public ministry of Jesus. The people at once recognize and are amazed at the divine authority of His teaching (1:24). On the heels of that recognition, Jesus demonstrated the authority of God over Satan’s domain of darkness by casting out an unclean spirit. The people recognize (1:27) that this authority was now confirmed by the power of God. What is most significant is that the demonic spirit also recognizes Jesus’ divine authority and power over them: “I know who you are – the Holy One of God.” To be sure, this title has messianic overtones,⁵⁹ but it cannot be understood apart from the context. Jesus speaks and acts with the authority of God in an unprecedented way. In His words and deeds the kingdom of God is present. The authority and power of God are integral to His person as the Son of God.

For certain, the phrase “Son of God” carries messianic overtones, especially as it finds linkage to the promise of an eternal kingdom through the greater son of David (2 Sam. 7:8-13). Yet the language there presents a picture of someone unique and climatic, someone that could never be understood solely in terms of physical descent. Jesus took advantage of what was no doubt an enigma to Jews for centuries. “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They said to Him, ‘The son of David.’ He said to them, ‘Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying, ‘The Lord said to my LORD, ‘Sit at My right hand, until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy

⁵⁹See Isaiah’s use of the title, “The Holy One of Israel.”

feet'?" (Matt. 22:42-44, ESV). Divine sonship is an integral part of the Messiah's identity. Even when Jesus refers to himself as the "Son of Man," the filial relationship is present. Jesus refers apocalyptically to the *Parousia* (i.e. his second coming) as "when he comes in the glory of *his Father* with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38, ESV).

The Gospel of Matthew

In Matthew's Gospel, the initial support for the implied deity of the "Son of God" phrase comes from words spoken by the devil himself. After His inauguration into messianic ministry Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where He is tempted/tested for forty days. Note that the devil's first two temptations (4:3, 6; Cf. Luke 4:3, 9) in Matthew are prefaced by conditional statements that assume Jesus' true identity - "If you be the Son of God." The Greek syntax indicates that the devil is granting or assuming this identity as true. Interestingly, the devil understands the importance of familial language to the messianic identity of Jesus. In case one is "tempted" to interpret the devil's words solely as a reference to Jesus' identity as the Messiah, consider the nature of the challenge. The devil tempts Him to use His *creative* power to do *what only God can do* – to turn stones into bread, then to defy sure and sudden death by throwing Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, commanding the divine protection of God's angels.⁶⁰

Similarly, the demons who possessed the demoniac of Gadara cry out, "What have we to do with you, *Son of God*? Have you come to destroy before the appointed time?" (8:29). The prerogative of eschatological judgment, particularly of the devil and his angels, is a *divine* one (25:41; cf. 2 Pet. 2:4), which Matthew tells us is exercised by the Son of Man at His glorious coming with the angels of God and then sits on His glorious throne (25:31). Conversely, the rewards of eschatological judgment are dispensed by the Son of Man who defines His relationship to God in familial terms: "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of *My Father*, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" (25:34, ESV). It is not difficult to see that Jesus' messianic identity is inextricably tied to His identity as "the Son of God" Did Jesus acknowledge His identity as the divine "Son of God"? Matthew's trial

⁶⁰The quote from Psalms 91:11-12 is not explicitly messianic, but a general promise that *Yahweh*, the Almighty (*El Shaddai*) and the Most High (*El Elyon*) will be a protector for those who dwell in His shelter (vv. 1-2, 9).

and crucifixion narrative clearly leads to that conclusion, not only through His own words, but those of His detractors and enemies (See 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54). Did Jews in Jesus' day think of the Messiah in divine terms? Our study of Luke and John will deal with that question more directly, but at least one significant event in Jesus' life points in that direction. Consider the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem in Matthew 21. The crowds pay Him the homage and shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (v.9, ESV). Scholars readily acknowledge that the crowds are proclaiming Him their messianic king, after the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7.⁶¹ However, the use of the expression "Hosanna" (Heb. "Lord, save (us)") affixed to the quote to Ps. 118: 25 is noteworthy, as the quote was originally addressed to Yahweh, and here in Matthew the crowd directs praise to Jesus that would normally only be found on the worshipper of God.

The Gospel of Luke

One of the most intriguing uses of familial language in Luke's Gospel indicating divine sonship is found in the so-called "infancy narrative," specifically in the announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary by the angel Gabriel (1:26-38). The angel says, 'He will be great and will be called the *Son of the Most High*. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the *Son of God*.'" (Luke 1:32-35, ESV). Scholars of Old Testament and Judaica have long recognized the connection of the phrase "Son of God" to the Jewish expectation of a Davidic redeemer – Messiah. However, Karl Kuhn has pointed out that only in the *Aramaic Apocalypse* of Qumran (4Q246) and in Luke 1:32b and 35 do these two phrases appear together – in no other canonical, apocryphal, or Jewish intertestamental writing.⁶² Why is this significant? Kuhn's careful analysis of Hebrew texts of 4Q246 and Daniel 7 show that the terminological and conceptual parallels are too extensive to conclude anything other than dependence. Secondly, he demonstrates that

⁶¹See Eduard Lohse in the TDNT, 9:682-84.

⁶²Karl A. Kuhn, "The One like a Son of Man" Becomes the 'Son of God,'" CBQ 69 (2007): 22-42.

Daniel's "son of man" is clearly elevated by 4Q246 to a divine status. The Qumran writing has combined the phrases above and Luke's Gospel is the only other place where these two phrases are juxtaposed. Conclusion: This long-awaited redeemer "is to be seen not merely as the adopted son of YHWH as the other kings before him, but as the unique and transcendent divine Son, through whom God's salvation is finally to achieve victory among God's people."⁶³ Kuhn's research contradicts the position that views this "high Christology" as a late ecclesiastical development on the grounds that no first century Jew would have ever conceived of a divine Messiah.

Regarding the temptation narrative, Luke follows Matthew and Mark. However, we find a summary statement of Jesus' ministry in 4:37-41. There, highlighting His ministry of deliverance we read, "And demons also were coming out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Son of God!" And rebuking them, He would not allow them to speak, because they knew Him to be the Christ" (4:41, NAS). Here again, the phrase "Son of God" is united to Jesus' identity as the Messiah.

At His trial, Luke records the words of Jesus' response to a direct question concerning His identity: "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. "But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." (Luke 22:67-70, ESV).

Keep in mind that the divinity or deity of "Christ" is certainly conveyed by the allusion to Daniel 7:13f and words cited from Psa 110:1, "seated at the right hand of God." Thus, Jesus is not claiming to be simply a mortal messiah, but the cosmic ruler of Daniel 7:13f.⁶⁴ This description of the Messiah as Co-Regent with God is unmistakable.

Discussion of familial language in Luke's Gospel would be incomplete without reference to his use of the term "Father," especially as it is employed to define God's relationship to Jesus, the Messiah. The Son of Man or Messiah is headed for glorification at His coming (*Parousia*) (Luke 9:26, ESV). But note how Luke describes it: "when he comes in His glory **and (the glory) of the Father** and of his angels." Whether the repetition of *kai* ("and") is an example of parataxis, or an example of an exegetical *kai*,⁶⁵ the syntax of Luke closely identifies

⁶³Ibid, p. 31.

⁶⁴Craig Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, p. 252

⁶⁵The sentence would then be read, "when he comes in His glory, **even (or "that is")** the

the glory of Jesus, the Son of Man with divine glory. It is the same glory and the glory that belongs only to God.

Moreover, Jesus in His prayers to the Father refers repeatedly to His unique role as the Son.⁶⁶ Luke does not fail to draw attention to that relationship; “At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, ‘I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for thus this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him’ (Luke 10:21-22; cf. 24:49, NAS). This relationship is especially apparent in Luke’s description of Jesus’ passion prayers (22:42; 23:34, 46), both in Gethsemane and on the cross.

Luke in Acts

We find the phrase “Son of God” only twice in Acts (8:37; 9:20) but they are both weighty theologically speaking. Both are the first Christological confessions of new converts who profess Christ as “the Son of God.” The latter will be dealt with later under the Pauline corpus, but the first is found on the lips of Philip in his invitation to Ethiopian eunuch who has asked to be baptized. The numerous variants of 8:37 testify to the Church’s attempt to make explicit what was universally understood. To preach Jesus (v. 35) was to preach Jesus as the Christ *and* as the Son of God.

The Witness of the Johannine Corpus

The Gospel of John

In the Johannine Corpus, is Jesus’ identity as the Messiah fundamentally tied to his filial relationship to God, the Father as His Son? From merely a terminological perspective, the answer has to be an unequivocal yes. John’s writings are replete with familial language

glory of the Father and His angels.”

⁶⁶Jesus’ sonship with the Father is unique. He alone addressed God as “My Father” (10:22; 22:29; 24:49). Nevertheless, it is a relationship that He shares with His believers who enter God’s kingdom. Believers are invited to know God as their heavenly Father (11:13; 12:30, 32) and to address Him in prayer as “Father” (11:2) They are even called to imitate the mercy of God, their Father (6:36).

in very strategic places. Consider some of the more insightful passages among many that could be cited:

1. The forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist, declares at Jesus' baptism, "And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34, ESV).
2. The first human testimony to Jesus' identity by Nathaniel is "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel" (John 1:49, NIV).
3. The golden text of John (3:16) has Jesus' own self-designation as "the only begotten (better – "unique"-monogenes) son" (NAS).
4. The dead will one day hear from the grave the voice of the Son of God and come forth (John 5:25). Why?
 - a. Because as the Father has life in Himself, He has given to the Son to have life in Himself (5:26).
 - b. In fact, the familial language of John 5 is so intertwined with what Jesus teaches, that to remove it would eviscerate its messianic teaching about the divine unity between the Father and the Son.
 - i. The Father loves the Son (5:20) and shows Him all His works.
 - ii. The Son sees the works of the Father and does whatever He sees the Father doing (5:19).
 - iii. There is not only a unity of action, but one of authority to exercise judgment on humanity (5:22, 24-29), an equal and shared honor (5:23), and a unity of will and purpose (5:30).
 - iv. There is a three-fold witness that supports Jesus' messianic identity: the Father (v. 32) and the works the Father has given and sent Jesus to do (v36), John the Baptist (v. 33) and the Scriptures (v. 39).
5. The witness of John's Gospel to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, his Father, is corroborated and expounded by the Apostle in his epistles with such clarity that the indispensability of familial language is beyond question as he portrays the deity of the Messiah in relational and familial terms:
 - a. To have fellowship with the Father is to have fellowship with "His Son, Jesus Christ" (1John 1:3).

- b. Sin is real, but God's provision is "the blood of Jesus, His Son" which cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1:7).
- c. Moreover, our confession of sin is effective because we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous (2:1).
- d. John warns of the coming deception of the antichrist. He is recognized by those he inspires to deny that Jesus in the Christ. Such a denial is a denial of both the Father and Son (2:22). In fact those who deny the Son do not have the Father. To confess the Son is to have the Father (2:23). To abide in the Son is equated with abiding in the Father and results in eternal life (2:24-25).
- e. John (2 John 1:9) warns that those who fail to abide in the teaching of Christ, "do not have God," but the one who abides in the teaching "has both the Father and the Son."
- f. The believer is called to obey and keep God's commandments. Foremost among them is to "believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ" (3:22-23).
- g. The Spirit has been given to believers to assure us of our relationship with God the Father (4:13), and His Spirit facilitates our witness that the Father has sent the Son to be Savior of the World (4:14).
- h. To confess that Jesus is the Son of God is to ensure that God abides in us and we in Him (4:15).
- i. Because the Father loves the Son, whoever loves the Father loves the One begotten of Father (5:1-2).
- j. John can now use "God" instead of the familial term "Father" because he has amply demonstrated the equation: God = God, the Father.
- k. God's testimony or witness is concerning His Son:
 - i. The one who believes in the Son of God has the internal witness of his relationship with God, the Father (5:10).
 - ii. God's witness concerning his Son is that it is through or in the Son that we have eternal life. To have the Son is to have life; not to have the Son of God is not to have that life (5:11-13).
- l. The divine equality of status and dignity of the Son is

indicated by John when he identifies the source of redemptive grace, mercy and peace as “from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father...” (2 John 1:3).

But the ubiquity of familial language in the Johannine writings is not the whole picture, as Johannine scholar, Ben Aker, points out,

Looking only at filial language regarding the Son of God phrase, and etc., and making such major translational decisions based upon such limited methodology is not quite valid. It falls on its face if the meaning/significance of such terminology is to be determined. One cannot legitimately consider this term and its components in such isolated ways and draw valid translational conclusions. Filial language of Son/Father and Son of God has to be considered in the context of the New Testament and in concert with other names and titles of God and Jesus.⁶⁷ Scholars in the last half of the 20th century reached the conclusion about studying Christology, that an analysis of his names by themselves is an insufficient way to know him. It takes much more than that. The various names and titles that NT writers use to write about him have too much overlap and deep co-involvement. Though much discussion and some disagreement exist, it is not too much to say that His divinity and humanity are certainly affirmed, e.g., both with Son of God and Son of Man.⁶⁸

What Aker suggests is that terminological studies be augmented by a thorough -going literary analysis of the NT writings which is responsive to the theological redaction of the inspired authors, and which is their unique theological contribution.

Aker’s exegetical-theological analysis approach makes one thing patently clear. It is impossible to understand John’s presentation of the deity of Jesus without the familial terms of Father and Son and John’s exposition of the divine Father-Son relationship.

John’s Apocalypse (Revelation)

John’s use of familial language in the Apocalypse is sparse but nonetheless significant. Twice, in referring to Jesus’ relationship to God, he uses the expression “His Father.” Jesus has made us a kingdom

⁶⁷See for example Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008).

⁶⁸Quoted from Dr. Aker’s unpublished document, *Foundational Issues*, April 1, 2012.

of priests to “His God and Father” (1:6) to whom belongs glory and dominion forever. The one hundred forty-four thousand servants of God are sealed on their foreheads with the name of the Lamb and “the name of His Father” (14:1). Twice Jesus refers to God as “My Father.” Both times He declares the divine authority delegated to Him as the judge who will rule over the nations with an iron rod (2:27), and as the One who “sat down with My Father” on His throne (3:21).

It is noteworthy that both of these references occur after Jesus is identified by the angel of the church of Thyatira, as “the Son of God,” emphasizing the unique filial relationship between the Father and the Son⁶⁹ “who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze.” This is the only place in Revelation where this phrase occurs and the judgment imagery is unmistakable. Only God is Lord and universal Judge, and yet God has delegated that role and task to His Son, that all may honor both the Father and the Son (John 5:22-23). Thus, in Revelation we find the authority of Jesus highlighted and underscored by the authority that He possesses not only because of divine tasks delegated to Him, but by His unique identity as the Son of God and the filial relationship to God, His Father.

The Witness of the Pauline Corpus

We now turn to the writings of Paul. Is familial language important to the Apostle Paul in his understanding of Jesus, the Christ? It is not only important, but essential to his Christology and to his understanding of the gospel itself.

How is Familial Language Essential to Paul’s Understanding of Jesus as the Messiah?

Luke chronicles the fantastic and incredible story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. Paul, having received authority from the Jewish Sanhedrin to stamp out the pernicious sect called “The Way” (believers in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah), is determined to do exactly that. His plans are interrupted by a divine encounter. Luke reports, “As he was traveling, it happened that

⁶⁹Osborne suggests that the reason for this identification may have to do with John’s address to the church of Thyatira. This Greco-Roman city was known for its devotion to Apollo, son of Zeus. Thus, the angel is declaring that Jesus, not Apollo is the true Son of God. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 153.

he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.’” (Acts 9:3-6, NAS).

The reader notes the theophanic language of verse 3. When Paul heard the heavenly voice, he asks a somewhat befuddling question, “Who are you, Lord?” Certainly Paul does not think he is talking to another mortal traveler on the way to Damascus. He is knocked to the ground by a blinding (literally) light and addresses the voice as “Lord”. The word *kurios* is the word most chosen in the Septuagint to translate Yahweh. It seems likely that Saul believed that he was being accosted by God, yet he asks for the voice to identify itself. The answer (“Jesus”) that he receives was undoubtedly a shock to Paul, one that required time to process. When Ananias arrives, his greeting unites the phrase Paul used and the name given by the voice, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17, NAS). Paul is healed of his blindness (v.18) and strengthened as he spends a few days with the disciples. Luke’s narrative is compressed, to be sure, but within a matter of “days” Paul is preaching the gospel to the Jews in the Damascus synagogues. What does he preach? Luke condenses it for us and gives the essential message – “and immediately he *began* to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20, NAS). This description of his preaching comes before v. 22 where Luke elaborates further, “But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.”

What the above discussion demonstrates is that Paul’s conversion hinged on coming to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. However, an integral and inseparable part of that new identification was the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. One can only imagine how scandalous that theological confession would have been for a conservative rabbi reared in the Hebrew Scriptures and taught to confess daily the *Shema* – “Hear O’ Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is one.” Yet Paul is not alone in the immediacy of this realization and confession. Nathaniel, when he was confronted by Jesus and the undeniable evidence of His prophetic foreknowledge, declared, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel” (John 1:49,

NAS).⁷⁰

Was Familial Language an Integral Part of the Gospel that Paul Preached?

To answer this question requires us to return to Paul's conversion. In addition to Luke's three accounts in Acts (chapters 9, 22, and 26), Paul gives the Galatians a short account of his conversion. His purpose is to defend the validity of his apostleship and the authenticity of his gospel.

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received *it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus (Gal. 1:11-17, NAS).

If we ask, "Whose son is he referring to in v. 16, the answer is obvious from the context. He is God's Son, the Father of Jesus Christ. Note the latter identification is made three times in beginning of Paul's epistle:

Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever (Gal. 1:1-4, NAS).

⁷⁰This verse shows that even if Acts 8:37 is contested as to its authenticity, the two-fold identification of Jesus as both the Son of God, and Messiah was not unknown among the Jews. The identification of the Messiah as God's Son in verses like Psalms 2:7, 12 was understood and used to preach Jesus as the Messiah (see Acts 13:33).

It should be clear that in this identification of Jesus Christ, the Son of God - the Father is absolutely central to Paul's understanding of the gospel - the gospel which he defends against those who would pervert it. The stakes are not trivial but monumental. Delivering a false gospel is worthy of the judgment of God:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9, NAS).

Was Familial Language Essential to Paul's Apostolic Preaching?

Those conversant with the letters of Paul can easily provide evidence that such was the case, but before sampling his letters, it's interesting to note Paul's first recorded sermon in Acts to the Jews of Antioch of Pisidia. Note that in Acts when a recorded sermon is directed at a Jewish audience, Jesus is presented within the context of Israel's salvation history. This is so because Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hopes regarding God's Kingdom (Cf. Acts 1:6). Paul understands Israel's longing and presents Jesus as the Christ and fulfillment of Israel's long-awaited hopes.

And Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand, he said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. And for a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And after He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.' From the offspring of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And while John was completing his course, he kept

saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the word of this salvation is sent out. For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.

And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee.' And as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'Thou wilt not allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.' For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you (Acts 13:16-38, NAS).

From the above sermon we observe Paul preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is, that Jesus is the Davidic, Messiah-King who fulfills the promise of God to send a savior to Israel (v.23).⁷¹ This son/descendent of David, Jesus, accomplishes through His death on the cross the promised blessings of the Davidic covenant. But even more than that, because God raised Him from the dead, He is able to deliver the promise of the "New Covenant" the forgiveness of sins (v.38; Cf. Jer 31:31, 34) and freedom from the Law (v.39). Consequently, God calls Him "My Son," signifying His unique relationship to God, His Father.

In turning to Paul's epistles, we discover that the above understanding of Jesus' identity as the Son of God is indispensable to his apostolic understanding of the gospel, that is, the message of God's salvation accomplished through his Son Jesus Christ. In fact, faith in

⁷¹This is exactly the substance of Peter's identification of Jesus in his preaching on the Day of Pentecost. See Acts 2:14-36.

Jesus is faith not only in the Messiah, but also in His unique relationship to God His Father. Consider his words in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (NAS).

Jesus' sonship with the Father is highlighted in His rehearsal of salvation history which makes possible a filial relationship with the Father.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:4-7, NAS).

The believers' redemption from bondage to sin to freedom as sons, is one of royal significance for which we are called to give thanks: "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:12-14, NAS).

Salvation is both positional in its status and progressive in the appropriation of its provision. Paul describes the goal of God providing the various leadership gifts in the Church: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13, NAS). Thus, our spiritual maturation is tied to our coming into possession of a complete knowledge (epignōsis) of God's Son. The sonship of Jesus to God, the Father appears essential to that "complete knowledge."

The eschatological dimension of redemption involves repentance and faith in the God of our redemption. For Gentiles it involves a rejection of their idolatry and turning to the living and true God and to "wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10, NAS).

Concluding Observations: Pauline Corpus

1. The filial relationship of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is indispensable to Paul's Christology.
2. It is likewise integral and essential to his understanding of the identity of Jesus, the Messiah.
3. Most importantly, the filial relationship of the Son to the Father is inextricable to Paul's understanding of the gospel – the proclamation that in Jesus Christ, God has fulfilled the redemptive promises to Israel and provided a salvation that is inclusive of all humanity.

The Witness of the General Epistles

With the exception of Hebrews, the General Epistles yield few examples of familial language in defining the relationship between Jesus and God. Nevertheless, where they occur is not without significance. Jude, for example, does not use the phrase "Son of God" to refer to Jesus. However, he calls believers, "those who are the called, beloved in God, the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:1, NAS). The juxtaposition of God, the Father and Jesus Christ surrounded by the language of election (cf. Rom. 11:28-29) elevates the latter's status to that of deity.

Similarly James in his epistle, which has little Christology proper, and no mention of Jesus as the "Son of God," nevertheless identifies himself as a bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (James 1:1). This pious Jew, whose exhortations would find little objection among a Jewish audience, speaks at length of "faith" as the character of one's belief and trust in God, especially in trials (e.g. 1:2 - 12). Yet, when addressing the topic at length (chapter 2), he calls it "faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1). It is hard to miss how the theocentric focus of OT Jewish faith has become Christocentric for James without contradiction or diminution of the latter.

Moreover, God is referred to as "Father" three times: as "the Father (source of) lights" (1:17), "God and Father" (1:27) and "Lord and Father" (3:9). The last phrase is articular and should be read either as "the Lord and Father," or borrowing from the syntax of the first person plural verb, "our Lord and Father." In either case it is difficult to ignore the familial term. God continues to reveal Himself as "Father" to

the New Covenant people of God even as He did to Israel in the OT.⁷² What is unique is that His identity as “Father” is amplified in the NT, particularly as it relates to His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus uses the phrase in a specific and personal sense, primarily of His own unique relationship with God. He can speak of God as “My Father,” and can enjoin His disciples to address God as “our Father;” the latter phrase is never inclusive of Himself. Thus, the Fatherhood of God is derived and shared with believers because of their faith in Christ. It is a phrase used by the redeemed people of God.

Consequently, Peter outlines salvation using a Trinitarian reference to “the foreknowledge of God the Father,” the sanctifying work of “the Spirit,” resulting in obedience to “Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2). Yet in the very next verse he praises “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” for the new birth and the “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Salvation is then the work of the Triune God and Peter later reminds his readers that the Lord Jesus Christ received glory and honor from God the Father himself when he declared him His “beloved Son” (2 Peter 1:17).

Hebrews

The Father-Son relationship of God to Jesus is of paramount importance to the author of Hebrews and deserves separate treatment. It is a central plank in his polemic against Jewish Christians who are tempted to return to the old covenant of law for their religious identity. In response he mounts an apologia for the superiority of new covenant Christianity which hinges on the identity and work of Jesus Christ. Consider how Jesus’ sonship with the Father is at the crux of that identity and central to his defense.

1. Jesus is God’s Son, the eschatological word from the One who is heir of all things, creator of the world, and the fullest revelation of God’s glory, nature and power (1:1-3).
2. Sonship with the Father, specifically declared by the Father (1:5), is what constitutes Jesus as a better revelation of God than that brought by angels (1:4-7).
3. Sonship is foundational to the superiority of Jesus to the angels since it elevates the rule and authority of the Son as divine co-

⁷²With regard to the Old Testament, the title Father designates Yahweh’s role as Creator (Mal 2:10; Isa 64:8) and theocratic ruler of Israel as defined by His covenant with His people (Mal 1:6).

- regent with God (1:8-14).
4. Jesus, who is the Apostle and high priest of our Christian confession is superior to Moses in that He serves “as a Son” over God’s house, the Christian church (3:6).
 5. “Jesus, the Son of God” is our great high priest who dwells in the heavens and because of His incarnation (2:9-10, 14-15) is uniquely qualified to represent us and intercede for us in securing God’s mercy and grace (4:14-16).
 6. Like Aaron, Christ’s position as high priest did not come via human initiative but received from God Himself. In doing so, He declared, “You are my son, today I have begotten You” (5:5; Ps 2:7). Thus, the priestly office occupied by Christ is also defined by divine sonship. This is what gives His high priesthood its transcendence over Aaron’s. God declares “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek” (5:6; Psalms 110:4).
 7. The nature of the Melchizedek priesthood is enigmatic at best. All that is known about him in the OT is reduced to two passages (Gen. 14:17-20; Psalms 110:4), but the author draws on Jewish tradition to make a point about the uniqueness of Jesus, our high priest. What he points out is what is not said about Melchizedek in Scripture (7:3), then draws an inference that his priesthood is not an earthly but a transcendent one. It is Jesus’ eternal being as the Son of God that is in view, not his human origin. Consequently, his priesthood is everlasting, as eternal as is the Son of God.⁷³
 8. Jesus’ high priestly ministry is qualified as unique and eternal, yet bears continuity with humanity, in that “as a Son” Jesus learned obedience, through His earthly sufferings (5:8). The answer to the question “Whose Son?” is obvious from the context. It is the One to whom He offered prayers and supplications for deliverance during the days of flesh (5:7), and the One who declared from heaven, “Thou art my Son” (5:6). Nevertheless, His priesthood in character is not like that under the Law. Instead, the God who appointed Him high priest, declared Him a Son via an oath that succeeded the Law, making Him perfect forever (7:28).
 9. The transcendent and supreme dignity of this High Priest, who is also the Son of God, is why the author points out the peril of those

⁷³Bruce points out that Jesus is not the type but the antetype, “Jesus is not portrayed after the pattern of Melchizedek, but Melchizedek is ‘made like unto the Son of God.’” See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews in The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), p.138.

who reject His instruction. Apostates face irrevocable judgment in that by turning from the faith they “crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame” (6:6). This is tantamount to trampling “underfoot the Son of God” by rejecting the blood of the new covenant (see 10:29).

Concluding Observations: Hebrews

1. Familial language in the General Epistles is essential to their understanding of who Jesus is and the role He plays in God’s plan of redemption. More specifically, they also present Him as the Messiah-Son of God.
2. The manner of the use of Jesus Christ and its juxtaposition to God, the Father, implies filial relationship, even when the corollary terminology “Son/Son of God” is absent.
3. Moreover, the use of phrases using familial language convey something most profound. Jesus is of equal dignity, and divine status so as to become a joint object of praise, worship and faith.

The letter to the Hebrews uses the familial terms of sonship as an integral and inseparable part of the author’s entire defense of New Testament Christianity. This is especially true when presenting the high priestly role of Jesus in God’s plan of redemption. The undeniable conclusion is that the divine sonship of God’s redemptive agent, the Messiah, is what makes His high priestly ministry superior to that of the old covenant.

Concluding Remarks and Assessment

As we have seen the familial language of Son/Son of God and Father is widespread throughout the canonical New Testament. However, it is not simply its pervasiveness that demands our theological reflection but its inextricability from New Testament Christology. The doctrine of Christ is, as we have seen, an eschatological advancement in the revelatory self-disclosure of God (Heb. 1:1). This revelation, as Hebrews states (1:1) is the culmination of salvation History, and this culminative expression is conveyed through one who God identifies as “Son.” Sonship is therefore not an incidental but an essential feature of that eschatological revelation. To repeat the sobering assessment of Bruce Waltke, “It is inexcusable hubris and idolatry on the part of mortals to change the images by

which the eternal God chooses to represent Himself.”⁷⁴

While the terminology “Son” and “the Son of God” find location in messianic contexts, so that they are applied to Jesus, the Messiah, they are not simply equivalent terms. That is, identifying Jesus as the Son of God says something more about the Messiah than Judaism understood or expected from their reading of the Old Testament. That something more came through a special revelation of God – the incarnation of the Word (John 1:1, 14). This revelation is presented and interpreted in the New Testament. The corporate witness of the New Testament establishes that Jesus, the Christ or Messiah of God bears a unique filial relationship to God, His Father. That relationship is unique, unprecedented and without a true analogy. He is uniquely the Son of God! While the ecumenical councils and succeeding generations of Church Fathers would hammer out in Trinitarian language the dual nature of Christ and His eternal relationship to the Father, their theological legacy demonstrates clearly that they grounded their formulations in the witness of the Scriptures and especially the Apostolic writings of our canonical New Testament.

Finally, as Paul stated that it is through the foolishness of the kerygma that God was pleased to save humanity (1 Cor. 1:21). That the kerygma refers to the gospel Paul expounded in this preaching is evident from the context (v.17). We have explored at length the Christological centrality of the gospel and demonstrated that His messianic identity is indispensable to that message. Moreover, we have showed that Jesus’ messianic identity is bound up with his filial relationship to God, His Father. We submit to you today that the extraction of so vital an element to the identity of Jesus Christ, is tantamount to a distortion of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6). We further contend that any translation of the Scripture that contributes to that distortion must not be used in witness or witness as it ceases to be the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16), and is subject to the judgment of God (Gal. 1:8-9).

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⁷⁴Comments supplied at http://knoxseminary.edu/instructors/instructor_waltke/php.

Appendix A

Examples of specialized “translations” for Muslims

The following include any non-literal renderings for Father and Son terminology, including “Son of God” and “son of God”:

| Verse | NASB | Back Translation | Original Language |
|-------------------|---|--|---|
| Gospel Of Matthew | Son of God | 'God's representative' | Turkish (Incil-i Serif'in Yuce Anlami – Havari Matta'nin Kaleminden) |
| Gospel Of Matthew | Father | Protector/Helper | Turkish (Incil-i Serif'in Yuce Anlami – Havari Matta'nin Kaleminden) |
| Matthew 6:9 | "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. | And when you pray then pray in the following manner, saying, “O our guardian whose throne has encompassed the heavens, blessed [be] your name, the exalted. | Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ (aka, The Lighthouse, An Eastern Reading of the Gospels and Acts, 2008) |
| Matthew 6:9 | "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. | And when you pray then pray in the following manner, saying, “O our guardian whose throne has encompassed the heavens, blessed [be] your name, the exalted. | Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ (aka, The Lighthouse, An Eastern Reading of the Gospels and Acts, 2008) |
| Matthew 6:9 | "Pray, then, in this way: | O our sustainer (parvardigaar) that | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka |

| | | | |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| | 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. | you are at the great throne, may your holy name be honored | Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |
| Matthew 28:19 | "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit | Cleanse them by water in the name of God, his Messiah and his Holy Spirit. | Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ (aka, The Lighthouse, An Eastern Reading of the Gospels and Acts, 2008) |
| Matthew 28:19 | "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit | Cleanse them by water in the name of God, his Messiah and his Holy Spirit. | Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ (aka, The Lighthouse, An Eastern Reading of the Gospels and Acts, 2008) |
| Matthew 28:19 | "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit | and baptize them with water in the name of God and His Messiah and the Holy Spirit. | Arabic Baghdadi (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |
| Matthew 28:19 | "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit | wash (ghusul) in the name of the sustainer (parvardigaar), in my name that am his beloved (habeeb), and in the holy spirit's name [it is no trifling matter that "name" is repeated three times, contrary to the Greek. This is the same thing that | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |

| | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|---|
| | | is done by Jehovah's Witnesses in the New World Translation in order to deny the unity of the singular name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit] | |
| Matthew 28:19 | "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit | Now go to all the nations and train [islamic] disciples to me and make them purify themselves by [islamic ritualistic] washing unto repentance to the name of the Protector, his Representative (or, deputy, agent) and the Holy Spirit. | Turkish (Incil-i Serif'in Yuce Anlami – Havarî Matta'nin Kaleminden) |
| Mark 1:1 | The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . | Here begins the biography of the unique Son of God (the unique beloved of God) | Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ (aka, The Lighthouse, An Eastern Reading of the Gospels and Acts, 2008) |
| Mark 1:1 | The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . | Beginning of the Injil of Isah Masih. [Son of God is not ranslated at all] | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |
| Mark 1:11 | and a voice came out of the heavens: "Thou art My beloved Son , in Thee I am well-pleased." | At his exiting from the water, he saw the heavens had split [open], and the Spirit of God descended upon him as a | Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ (aka, The Lighthouse, An Eastern |

| | | | |
|------------------|--|--|--|
| | | dove, and a voice was heard from heaven and it said, "You are my beloved Son (the beloved chosen one), and with you I am well pleased." | Reading of the Gospels and Acts, 2008) |
| Mark 1:11 | and a voice came out of the heavens: "Thou art My beloved Son , in Thee I am well-pleased." | From heaven a voice came, that "you are my beloved (habeeb), I am happy with you." [Son is not translated] | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |
| Mark 1:11 | and a voice came out of the heavens: "Thou art My beloved Son , in Thee I am well-pleased." | As soon as he came out of the water, he saw - the sky had opened up and Ruhul Kuddus was coming down towards him appearing like a pigeon. And a voice chanted from the heaven: 'You are my beloved Masih , I am very much pleased with you.' (Masih has been replaced by either, " God's Uniquely-Intimate Beloved Chosen One " or " God's Uniquely-Intimate Beloved One " in the revised edition) | Bengali (Injil Sharif, 2005 ed.) |
| Mark 9:7 | Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the | Suddenly a cloud covered them and gave them a voice from heaven saying, "This is my | Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ (aka, The |

| | | | |
|-------------------|--|--|--|
| | cloud, "This is My beloved Son , listen to Him!" | beloved Son (the beloved Messiah), he is the one you must listen to and obey!" Then they turned around and they did not find [anyone] except Isa. | Lighthouse, An Eastern Reading of the Gospels and Acts, 2008) |
| Mark 9:7 | Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son , listen to Him!" | a voice came from the cloud that, "this is my beloved (habeeb), obey his words." [Son is not translated] | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |
| Mark 9:7 | Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son , listen to Him!" | At that point, a white cloudlet came and covered them, and from that cloud, these words were pronounced, "This is my beloved Masih , you listen to what he says.' Instantly they looked around but couldn't find anybody with them except Isah. (Masih has been replaced by either, " God's Uniquely-Intimate Beloved Chosen One " or " God's Uniquely-Intimate Beloved One " in the revised edition) | Bengali (Injil Sharif, 2005 ed.) |
| Mark 14:36 | And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for | And he cried out, "O my Lord , you are the Almighty over everything, | Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ |

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| | Thee; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt." | put this cup of sorrows far from me; however, O Lord, may it be what you want, not what I want." | (aka, The Lighthouse, An Eastern Reading of the Gospels and Acts, 2008) |
| Mark 14:36 | And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for Thee; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt." | in place of "Abba, Father" sustainer (parvardigaar) is used | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |
| Mark 14:36 | And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for Thee; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt." | in place of "Abba, Father" sustainer (parvardigaar) is used | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |
| Mark 14:36 | And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for Thee; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt." | He said, 'Oh Rabbul Alamin , everything is possible for you. Take this glass away from me. Nonetheless, let it not happen in accordance of my wish, but according to your wish.' [Rabbul Alamin is Arabic for "Lord of the worlds" and is one of the titles of God in the First Sura of the Quran which is also repeated in their 5 daily prayers] | Bengali (Injil Sharif, 2005 ed.) |
| Mark 14:61 | But He kept silent, and made no answer. Again the | Isah said, 'I'm he. You will see Ibnul Insan to sit to the | Bengali (Injil Sharif, 2005 ed.) |

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| | high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" | right of The Almighty and to come along with the cloud of the sky.' [Ibnul Insan is Arabic for " Son of Man"] | |
| Luke 1:32, 35 | Luke 1:32-35 32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God . | The Spirit of God will come down upon you and this thing is the proof that this child is the awaited Christ who will rule forever. | Arabic Baghdadi (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |
| Luke 1:32, 35 | 32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason | He will be great among all the people and he will be the king, God's caliph , the exalted. And God will give him the throne of the prophet David, his great [lit. first] grandfather. The spirit* of God will descend on you and from his power [that] you see, you will bring forth a boy [who] will be the awaited | Arabic Urbed (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |

| | | | |
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| | the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. | king from God, he who will be God's awaited caliph. *contrary to standard Bible translations in Arabic, spirit of God is given a feminine adjective | |
| Luke 1:32, 35 | Luke 1:32-35 32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. | He will become great and will be called the Son who comes from Allah the Most High. Allah, our God, will give him the throne of David, his ancestor. The angel replied, "Ruh Allah will come upon you and the power of Allah the Most High will over/envelop you. Because the child who will be born will be called holy, the Son who comes from Allah. | Indonesian (Bahasa) (Kitab Suci Injil) |
| Luke 1:32, 35 | 32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; | He will be great and will be called the prince of God Most High. God, our Lord will grant the throne of David, his ancestor to him, The angel said, "Holy Spirit will descend upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy child to be born will be called | Malay ("Shellabear revision") (My Kitab Suci) |

| | | | |
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| | and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. | the prince of God. | |
| Luke 3:38 | ...Adam, the son of God | ...Adam whom God created | Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ (aka, The Lighthouse, An Eastern Reading of the Gospels and Acts, 2008) |
| Luke 3:38 | ...Adam, the son of God | ... God created Adam | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |
| Luke 3:38 | ...Adam, the son of God | ...Adam was from God | Dari http://gospelgo.com/q/Dari%20Bible%20-%20New%20Testament.Pdf |
| Luke 3:38 | ...Adam, the son of God | ...Adam, child/offspring of God (the typical word for "son" is not used while in the rest of the genealogy it is present) | Sorani-Kurdish Injili Sorani (Kurdish NT (Sorani) or NKV, 1999) |
| Luke 9:35 | And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son , My Chosen One; listen to Him!" | ...they heard a voice from heaven saying: "This is the beloved Messiah whom I have sent, so listen to Him and obey Him." | Arabic Baghdadi (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |
| Luke 11:2 | And He said to them, "When you pray, say: ' Father , hallowed be Thy | When you pray, say: Our loving, heavenly Lord | Arabic Baghdadi (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the |

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| | name. Thy kingdom come. | | Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |
| John 20:31 | but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing you may have life in His name. | ...Isa is the Messiah, the Son who comes from God . | Indonesian (Bahasa) (Kitab Suci Injil) |
| Romans 1:7 | to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. | The word "Father" is skipped in this verse: God's peace be upon you, His mercy and blessings* through our master Jesus (Isa) Christ. *A distinct Islamic phrase is used here. | Arabic Urbed (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |
| Romans 8:14-17 | 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God . 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, " Abba! Father! " 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God , 17 and if children , heirs also, heirs of God and fellow | Completely skipped. Only 4 of the 39 verses in this chapter were rendered (vv. 10-11, 34, 37) | Arabic Urbed (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |

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| | heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. | | |
| Romans 8:14-17 | 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God . 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, " Abba! Father! " 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God , 17 and if children , heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. | 14 ...they are God's friends (dost). 15 - we are God's friends (dost)... " O sustainer (parvardigaar). 16 - we are God's friends (dost). 17 - if we are God's friends (dost)... | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |
| Galatians 2:20 | "I have been crucified with Christ...by faith in the Son of God ..." | I, in the old life was crucified with my master Christ...by the faith of the caliph of God ... | Arabic Urbed (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |
| Galatians 2:20 | "I have been crucified with Christ...by faith in the Son of God ..." | here in place of "Son of God" is " God's beloved (habeeb) 'Eesaa" [Son is not | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |

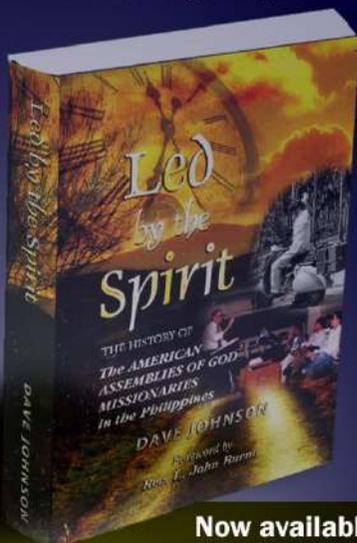
| | | | |
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| | | translated] | |
| Galatians 2:20 | "I have been crucified with Christ...by faith in the Son of God ... | I have been crucified with Al-Masih...because of faith in the Son who came from Allah ... | Indonesian (Bahasa) (Kitab Suci Injil) |
| Galatians 3:26 | For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. | For this reason, you, oh Galatians, whether you were sons of Jacob or not, today you have become members of God's household | Arabic Urbed (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |
| Galatians 3:26 | For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. | ...you are God's friends (dost)... | Baluchi/Balochi Injil Sharif (aka Greek-Balochi NT, 2 nd ed., 2001) |
| Gal 4:4-7 | 4 But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son , born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons . 6 And because you are sons , God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father! " 7then an heir through God . | Completely skipped | Arabic Urbed (Lives of the Prophets aka Stories of the Prophets, an audio panoramic Bible) |
| Gal 4:4-6 | 4 But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son , born | 4 When the time was fulfilled, God sent the Son who came from him . | Indonesian (Bahasa) (Kitab Suci Injil) |

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| | <p>of a woman, born under the Law, 5 in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"</p> | <p>He was born of a woman and was under the Law (Taurat). 5 The reason was so he could redeem every person who was under the law and so we could receive the rights of a child. 6 Because you have become his children, God sent the Spirit of the Son who comes from him to go into our hearts and cry, "Ya Abba, ya Bapa."</p> | |
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Led by the Spirit

"After reading through the pages of this very exhaustive and interesting history of the Assemblies of God in the Philippines, you will note three elements that are essential for church-building. Our forefathers had the foresight to establish correct, biblical missiology. In most cases, this was practiced by our early pioneers. You will see the wisdom of this missiology as you read through the pages of this great work. David Johnson has done much research and has been able to blend in certain elements. . ."

From the Forward by Rev. L. John Bueno



About the Author

Dave Johnson, D-Miss, has been an Assemblies of God (USA) missionary to the Philippines since 1994 and has conducted extensive research on lowland Filipino culture. He is also the author of *Theology in Context: A Case Study in the Philippines* (APTS Press, 2013) and is the managing editor of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, the *theological Journal of the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary* in Baguio City, Philippines. He can be contacted at www.apt.s.edu or through his own website, www.daveanddebbiejohnson.com.

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WHY DID GOD CHOOSE FATHER-SON FAMILIAL LANGUAGE FOR THE BIBLICAL TEXT?

Editorial

Dr. Mark A. Hausfeld
International Director
Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples/AGWM USA

The hottest issue among ministry to Muslims that is weaving its way through academic arenas; the committee rooms of mission agencies; in conversations between global missionaries and among leaders of respective national churches is the use or non-use of familial language in Bible translations for Islamic people groups. Here is the essence of the challenge.

Certain para-church Bible translation agencies have been either translating or acting as consultants to Bible translations that remove the use of the words “Father” and “Son” Bible translations for certain Muslim people groups. Why? The rationale that I have personally heard in face to face meetings with one major Bible translation agency is so that the Muslim reading the text of the Bible will not misunderstand and/or be offended by the familial terms “Father” and “Son” as found in the original languages of the Bible. Here in lies the major difficulty this trajectory of translation practice creates. Why did God choose familial language for the Biblical text? Before I finally address that question let’s first reflect on other considerations and problems that changing familial language in the Bible causes. As this is an editorial, I will not go into great detail. However I will address presuppositions that ready the reader for the scholarly articles that lie ahead to be read and reflected upon in this journal.

Let’s first consider the life setting in which the Church began in first century Israel/Palestine.

The religious fervor was at an apex of proselyte activity. Jesus said, “*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!*

You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (Matthew 23:15). Interestingly, Jesus used familial language to refer to the position of the convert of the teachers of the Law the Pharisees. The Jewish diaspora not only pushed and pulled Jews throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, it was also a time of conversion of non-Jewish peoples among whom they lived.

The use of familial language as Jesus refers to himself and the "Father" was extremely volatile in that context. Yet in such a setting, at the epicenter of Judaism... Jerusalem. Jesus intentionally uses familial language of himself and the Father. This familial language is abundantly clear when Jesus stood before the high priest. What language was the word used that put Jesus on the cross? Christ was asked point blank by the "*council of the Elders...both the chief priests and the teachers of the Law*" the question: "*They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied, "You are right in saying I am (Luke 22:70)." Their reaction: "Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips (Luke 22:71)."*

Jesus used familial language in the midst of people who found it at the height of offence and even blasphemy. He had to do so.

In this same historical context the Roman occupational government would have found Jesus claim as the "Son of God" to be anti-Caesar (see Matthew 27:11-24). Remember Caesar Augustus was not only King/Caesar, but also god. There was no room Jesus as the Son of God. The Roman law of *Pontifex Maximus* assured this fact. Jesus affirmed his person and position in the text as he did because he had to.

From the brief words above it is simple to ascertain the religious, cultural, social and political climate was anti familial language. However this is the very language God choose despite it being offensive and misunderstood...because he needed to do so. Now let's consider nearly six centuries forward in Arabia and the supposed recited revelation Mohammed received from the angel Gabriel. In the counterfeit revelation of the *Qur'an* do we understand why today's Muslims anywhere on the earth find familial language offensive. The *Qur'an* reads:

Those who say: 'The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son,' preach a monstrous falsehood, at which the very heavens might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust. That they should ascribe a son to the Merciful, when it does not become the Lord of Mercy to beget one (Sura 19:88)!

There are numerous texts in the *Qur'an* that support this belief. So the Muslim finds such familial language offensive. So did the religious and political authorities of Jesus time and place. If this is the case in first century in Jerusalem, the seventh century in Mecca why should it not be so today? The Muslim expects to find offensive familial language in the Bible. After all the *Qur'an* says that Jews and Christians corrupted God's earlier revelations in the Torah, Psalms and Gospel:

There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (As they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book; and they say, "That is from Allah," but it is not from Allah (Sura 3:78).

They change words from their context and forget a part of that whereof they were admonished (5:13).

Chapter five in the *Qur'an* clearly claims that earlier revelations of God were distorted by Jews and Christians. The religion of Islam teaches God's inspired texts through Moses (the Torah), David (Psalms) and Jesus (the Gospel) have been changed by Jews and Christians through time. Therefore, if Bible translators removed familial language from the Biblical text and replaced familial words with substitute words that are less offensive to the Muslim reader the translator then has participated in the criticism that the *Qur'an* states Jews and Christians did in changing the words of God's revelation! The result is that what the *Qur'an* accuses Jews and Christians of doing is actually done.

There is another caveat in this mistaken effort in that it involves misrepresentation. I do believe the sisters and brothers doing non-familial Bible translation are well meaning. They desire to see Muslims embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. However the language God has chosen to communicate to humankind is God's prime salvific love language to humankind is familial language. Take a look at the Gospel and Epistles of John. If the familial love language of these books is removed the inspired theological implications of God's relationship to the world is gutted. The apostolic missionary going to an unreached Muslim people group that has a non-familial language translation of the Bible is left in a challenging place to communicate the familial intimacy God has chosen to communicate His relationship to humankind.

The Muslim needs to know the one God as God the Father and God the Son. To use any other linguistic identifiers is incomplete in

comprehension and thus relationship. As humans we can only grasp meaning and feeling values in finite human terms and experience. How does the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent God relate his love, grace, sacrifice and mercy in greater terms that humans can understand than found in a healthy family? What greater intimacy can be identified among any people, culture and languages of the world than deep, meaningful familial relationships? Therefore God had to use familial language to communicate the intimacy He expresses towards people. Such language is the pinnacle of what God can use to divinely accommodate Himself to human beings. There is nothing else and that's why God chose Father-Son familial language for the biblical text.

Michael W. Goheen, *Light to the Nations, A: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. 256 pp. USD \$15.63.

In this enlightening new book, Goheen contends that the church needs a practical vision for mission, but there has not been enough discussion regarding the biblical theological concept of mission as the foundation for being missional. *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* is Goheen's effort to fill this gap.

"Mission", as Goheen defines it, "is the role and identity of the church in the context of the biblical story" (p. 4). Thus, being missional is not about "describing the activity of the church but the very essence and identity of the church as it takes up its role in God's story in the context of its culture and participates in God's mission to the world" (p. 4). To put another way, "Mission is what God is doing for the sake of the world: it is God's long-term plan to renew creation. The people of God are missional in that they are taken up into this work for the sake of the world" (p. 25). So, since much of the discussion on the missional church has been dominated by the pragmatic implications of the mission of the church, there has been more discussion on its activity rather than its identity and essence. Goheen believes we need to get back to the mission of the church as found in the biblical story (or biblical theology) and then move forward from there lest we continue to lose our way.

A Light to the Nations can be summed up in three main stages that present the biblical development of the people of God as missional people: (1) OT Israel as the beginning of the people of God, (2) the coming of Jesus to restore the people of God and (3) the NT church as the reconstituted people of God.

In the search for the uncovering of the mission of the church as found in its biblical theological context, Goheen begins in the Old Testament. For Goheen, the OT is the only proper place to begin for because the place of the church in the mission of God is the same as and a continuation of that of the children of Israel but with added implications of Christ's resurrection. This is a necessary corrective to much of the missional church discussion. Following Gerhard Lohfink's comments Goheen states:

The church was not founded or established for the first time in the New Testament. Rather, the church is a covenant community that has been gathered and restored to its original calling. A proper

understanding of the church begins with Israel – its role and identity, its relation to other nations – because the church is Israel’s heir (p. 21).

Take a moment to soak that statement in – the church is Israel’s heir. For Goheen, there is only one people of God and therefore one mission of God for His people. This mission begins in the OT with Israel and continues with the church as the reconstituted people of God.

The mission of God begins with Abraham in Genesis 12: 1-3. Here, there are two aspects that help to define the mission of the church. First, Abraham is chosen to receive the blessings of God. Second, as recipients of God’s blessings God’s people are to in turn mediate those blessings to the world. From Genesis 12 we move to Exodus 1-18 where we see God releasing Israel from their captivity in order “to fulfill its Abrahamic role and identity” (p. 34). Once Israel is delivered from captivity they are given the covenant at Sinai which functions to show that they are bound to God and not Pharaoh. At Sinai God tells Israel how they are to live in order to receive God’s blessings and how they are to mediate those blessings to the nations (p. 37). Exodus 32-34 describes how God will dwell with Israel which is important for Israel to be able to carry out their two sided purpose.

Flowing from Sinai to Israel’s missional living is the threefold role and identity of Israel. First, Israel was to be a people in the center of the nations. Surely this was their position when they entered the Promised Land in Joshua. Israel was to visibly live out their identity before the nation’s such that they would desire to come and see and join. They are not to be passive observers but active engagers “with the pagan cultures of the surrounding nations, by which it is to confront idolatry with the claims of the living God” (p. 53). Second, Israel was to function as a priestly kingdom. The life surrounding the priesthood was to nourish Israel amidst their missional encounter with the pagan nations. The temple plays a huge role in this purpose. The prophets are seen as Israel’s ‘covenant enforcers’ keeping Israel on track (p. 59). Third, the story of Israel in the OT closes with them as a dispersed people whose God is faithful to his covenant promises to return and restore them (Isaiah 60; Ezekiel 36:24-27).

Goheen does not mince words when it comes to his assessment of the significance of Jesus’ coming, “With the coming of Jesus, the promised gathering of God’s eschatological people begins” (p. 76). Following the gospel of Mark, Goheen defines the kingdom of God as “the restoration of God’s rule over the whole world” (p. 77).

Though God rules on His own, His people are to proclaim this rulership to all the world as they carry out their missional identity.

While many believe Israel rejected the offer of the kingdom, Goheen contends that many within Israel do respond to the invitation of faith and begin to form the true eschatological Israel, the true kingdom, with a task of being a light to the nations (pp. 84-85).

Though there are no doubt many Jews who will reject the offer of the kingdom and the call to restoration, there is a remnant that accepts and thus becomes the beginning of the eschatological fulfillment of the people of God – the light to the nations.

It is Jesus' work on the cross and resurrection that become the defining works of Jesus that enable Him to restore Israel and give them the power to carry out their missional task. It is through the cross that Jesus takes on the punishment of Israel's sin, thus freeing them from it. "The death of Jesus creates a restored community, reinstated in its vocation as a channel of salvation to the nations. The cross is an event that creates a redeemed and transformed people" (p. 107). As for the resurrection it "marks the restoration of God's people to new life as part of a new creation" (p. 112). Of this new creation Jesus is the "first fruits," the "first born" and the "beginning." At the close of the Gospels, we see Jesus giving restored Israel (the church) its new identity through the great Commission (Matthew. 28:19-20). The church is to take the gospel to all the nations. The church is the new Israel and thus the light to the nations as Israel was in the OT.

The question for many is how do the NT writers perceive and describe the church as the reconstituted people of God – the restored Israel? For Goheen, the clearest NT example of how the church (reconstituted Israel) continues the mission of God is to read the book of Acts. Beginning with Pentecost (Acts 2) and running through the end of the book we see God's people spreading the gospel to the nations while God builds His church and kingdom through this activity. The geographical structure of Acts is huge for Goheen. "The story line of Acts is about the geographical spread of the Word" (p. 129). Jerusalem has great redemptive-historical and eschatological significance (p. 129 & 131). "God has chosen Israel to be a blessing to all nations, and the centrifugal movement in Acts marks the beginning of the process by which that blessing is to be fulfilled" (p. 131). What Goheen believes is clear from the book of Acts is that God restored many Jews and that He brought many Gentiles into the church.

So how what evidence is there that the NT writers saw the church and themselves as the reconstituted people of God? Take Peter

for example. In 1 Peter 2:9-10, Peter uses no less than 5 explicit word/phrases to describe the church that are used in the OT to describe Israel. Peter uses “a chosen race,” “a royal priesthood,” “a holy nation,” and “a people for his own possession” all to describe the church. Not only is the language telling but the historical context of 1 Peter. 1 Peter is written to dispersed believers. In the OT Israel was dispersed because of unbelief and disobedience. Now, reconstituted Israel is once again dispersed but not because of unbelief. Their dispersion is caused because of their belief and by command (Matt. 28:19-20). 1 Peter exemplifies for us “how the church can live faithfully in a non-Christian environment” (p. 182). Goheen contends that the imagery and word usage here in 1 Peter is just a small example of the many examples in the NT where the authors saw the church as the continuation and expansion of Israel.

A presentation of a biblical theology of mission would be incomplete without some suggestion for what this might look like today. Goheen offers thirteen suggestions. Some of the most notable are the need for the church to reach out to the world with its message. This follows along the lines of the people of God being the mediators of God’s blessings to the world – namely, salvation. Along the same lines we need preaching that is more missional minded. While the ministry of the Word through preaching is primarily for believers, we need to make sure our preaching proclaims the biblical story of redemption. Perhaps the most relevant of Goheen’s suggestions is the need for the church to live out as a community within its community. This is how the NT church lived mission and this is how the church today and in the future needs to live out its mission.

The thirteen suggestions about what a missional church might look like today are as listed: 1. A church with worship that nurtures our missional identity; 2. A church empowered by the preaching of the Gospel; 3. A church devoted to communal prayer; 4. A church striving to live as a contrast community; 5. A church that understands its cultural context; 6. A church trained for a missionary encounter in its callings in the world; 7. A church trained to evangelism in an organic way; 8. A church deeply involved in the needs of its neighborhood and world; 9. A church committed to missions; 10. A church with well-trained leaders; 11. A church with parents trained to take up the task of nurturing children in faith; 12. A church with small groups that nurture for mission in the world; 13. A church that seeks and expresses the unity of the body of Christ. (Pages 202-225)

A Light to the Nations is a great corrective to much of the missional talk of the day. It puts the meat on the bones of any weak theology of mission. The greatest strength of the book is its truly biblical theology approach as it begins with the concept as originated with Israel and Abraham. For those who see more discontinuity within Scripture in regards to Israel and the church this book will be a much needed dose of corrective medicine. This a book of solid biblical theology of missions.

Teresa Chai, Ph.D

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ASSEMBLIES OF GOD WORLD MISSIONS, the foreign outreach arm of the Assemblies of God USA is committed to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person on earth. Currently more than 2,500 missionaries serve a constituency of more than 60 million people in more than 330,000 churches around the world.

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