

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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