

Overly Contextualized Bible Translations: Exposing Issues and Problems in Linguistics, Lexical Meaning, Exegesis, Theology, and Methodology

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Introduction

In preaching to unbelievers, one seeks to avoid misunderstanding by carefully selecting words that are within the hearer's cognitive background in order to bridge the divide and bring the person into a right understanding of the gospel. At some point, though, the preacher has to introduce concepts and terminology that challenge the hearer's worldview, probably even offending him because the biblical concepts run completely contrary to everything the hearer has been taught. Only by the gracious working of the Spirit can an offended unbeliever have his heart softened to the gospel and come to embrace it. When giving a copy of the Bible to unbelievers, the translation committee cannot carefully select which texts the unbeliever reads or hears first. Thus, offending the unbeliever whose cognitive background is diametrically opposed to the Bible's message is unavoidable—or is it? What if the translation committee could alter the offending expressions to remove the offense, and then justify the alterations by a sophisticated application of translation theory and methodology, supported by clever exegesis and theological maneuvering? Such a

practice would probably be difficult for an ordinary believer¹ and even for most seminary-trained pastors to evaluate critically, because it draws from some disciplines that they have not studied and operates within the technical context of vernacular Bible translation.

This paper discusses in detail the linguistic, lexical, exegetical, theological, and methodological issues of what are commonly called Muslim Idiom Translations (MITs), which are heavily contextualized Bible translations to suit unbelieving Muslims.² As key advocates explain, “A Muslim-idiom translation is one that that (sic) uses the mother-tongue idiom of Muslim people groups while taking care to avoid unbiblical interpretations.”³ Adam Simnowitz, a prominent critic, notes that these translations have at least one or more of the following features: “non-literal renderings for Father and Son terminology, words and phrases from the Qur’an, Islamic theological terms, and the omission of certain sections of Scripture.”⁴ This paper will focus on how MITs have handled the expression “the Son of God.”⁵ MIT advocates’ contention is that the word “son” in Muslim languages communicates “God’s offspring from a sexual union with a woman.”⁶ Thus, “Son of God” communicates something equivalent to “(sexual) Offspring of God.” Since this is not the correct meaning of the biblical texts, they insist it must be altered.

¹ The editorial in *Christianity Today* stated in relation to a controversy surrounding the 2011 New International Version: “The only criterion for a good translation is this: Does it accurately convey what the authors said and what the original listeners heard?” “Battle for the Bible Translation,” *Christianity Today* (September 2011): 55. This is an oversimplification for English Bible translations, let alone vernacular Bible translations in mission field contexts.

² To understand the ethical and missiological dimensions, see *Muslim Conversions to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts*, edited by Ayman S. Ibrahim and Ant Greenham (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2018). See especially David Harriman, “Epilogue: Force Majeure: Ethics and Encounters in an Era of Extreme Contextualization.” See also Biblical Missiology’s “‘Son of God’ Unresolved: Ten Years After a Landmark Petition, Translators Continue to Remove ‘Son of God’ and Insert Islamic Teaching into New Translations.” Aug 1, 2022. [Biblicalmissiology.org](http://biblicalmissiology.org).

³ Rick Brown, John Penny, and Leith Gray, “Muslim Idiom Bible Translations: Claims and Facts,” *St. Francis Magazine*, 5:6 (December 2009): 94. They say, “The whole purpose of Muslim-idiom translations is to overcome the linguistic barriers that have hindered Muslims from reading the Scriptures” (95).

⁴ “Appendix: Do Muslim Idiom Translations Islamize the Bible? A Glimpse behind the Veil,” in *Islam and the Bible*, 501-2. Simnowitz did an MA thesis at Columbia University in 2015 entitled, “Muslim Idiom Translation: Assessing So-Called Scripture Translation for Muslim Audiences with a Look into its Origins in Eugene A. Nida’s Theories of Dynamic Equivalence and Cultural Anthropology.” He also regularly contributes to articles on <http://biblicalmissiology.org>.

⁵ This issue is part of the broader feature of how MITs handle “divine familial terms,” which also includes “Son” by itself and “Father.” Andy Warren-Rothlin, writing as an advocate for MITs, says, “The most distinctive features of contextualisation in MITs are perhaps the avoidance of anthropotheism and the use of euphemisms, honorific titles, and formulaic key expressions.” “From the Editor,” *The Bible Translator*, 74:3 (Dec 2023): 309.

⁶ Brown, Penny, Gray (MIBT’s: Claims and Facts, 2009), 89.

Though MIT advocates may deny it,⁷ this type of translation principally operates within the framework of the Insider Movement (IM) within Muslim-majority contexts.⁸ David Owen, a key proponent for both MITs and IMs,⁹ makes the clear link between MITs and “a movement for Jesus inside Islam.”¹⁰ The target receptors are defined in terms of the Muslim sub-culture of a language group, and the determination of what is deemed “unbiblical interpretation” is done by Muslims.

Anyone who follows mission news in the USA might think that this issue of MITs was sufficiently resolved in 2013 by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). In the early 2000s (and before), the issue was bound up in technical Bible translation and missiological journals; but it came to the public forefront in 2011-2013 through popular Christian magazines, denominational denouncements, and public statements on websites.¹¹ During the public controversy, Bible translation organizations continued to produce MITs.¹² In 2013 the WEA presented guidelines to Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL for the renderings of “Son of God” and “Father” in translations, giving the appearance of settling the issue; but the guidelines left many loopholes.¹³ These loopholes left room for these two

⁷ Harley Talman and John Travis (editors) state that “there is no inherent link between insider movements and Bible translation.” *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015), xxxvi. As Fred Farrokh points out, these two editors are key proponents of “insider movements” and of MITs. “An ‘Aye’ on Islam: The Theological Assumptions of Translators of Muslim Idiom Translations,” in *Islam and the Bible*, 196-7. Harley Talman (pseudonym for Mark Harlan) teaches at Dallas International University (DIU), a key training school for SIL and Wycliffe. He wrote an article entitled “Comprehensive Contextualization: Islam, Once a Hopeless Frontier, Now?” in which he notes Bible translation as one of seven critical areas that should be on a contextualization strategy. *International Journal of Frontier Missiology (IJFM)*, 21:1 (Spring 2004): 6-12.

⁸ *Muslim Conversions to Christ* is focused on addressing this separate but related issue.

⁹ Rebecca Lewis defines an “insider movement” (IM) as “any movement to faith in Christ where a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socioreligious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.” *IJFM*, 24:2 (Summer 2007): 75-76.

¹⁰ Simnowitz quotes from an unpublished document by Owen (MA Thesis, 18).

¹¹ See “Appendix: Selective Timeline of the Religious Idioms Translation Issue.” The earliest overview of the history was in 2015 with Adam Simnowitz’s MA thesis. A 2018 update was done by Donald Lowe, “‘Son of God’ in Muslim Idiom Translations of the Bible,” in *Muslim Conversions to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts*, edited by Ayman S. Ibrahim and Ant Greenham (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2018), 301-8. In 2023, Seth Vitrano-Wilson gave an overview with updates in “Handling the Hot Potato: How Organizations Have Dealt with Muslim Idiom Translations,” *Islam and the Bible* (Brentwood, TN: B & H Academic, 2023), 157-187.

¹² Lowe mentions some Muslim-friendly translations done during this decade: 1) Turkish translation of Matthew was produced by Frontiers and published by Sabeel Media, which has “representative of God” for “Son of God,” 2) Malaysian translation has ‘prince of God’ for ‘Son of God’. Also, he said that Russ Hersman, Wycliffe USA senior vice-president at the time, “estimated some 30-40 translations out of 200 translations in Muslim contexts employ some alternate renderings” (303).

¹³ On arlingtonstatement.org, in response to the question, “Wasn’t all this resolved a few years back?”, the following loopholes are mentioned: 1) The WEA was not asked to address any other issues, such as the inclusion of the Islamic statement of faith, the translation of kyrios “Lord,” or any other significant issues arising from some translations among Muslims and other religious contexts. 2) The WEA ruling on Father-Son terms does not apply to the majority of Bible translation organizations, but only to those that requested their input.

organizations to continue to publish what could still be called MITs,¹⁴ and other organizations just continued their MIT projects unabated.¹⁵

Thus, the issue certainly was not resolved in 2013. MIT advocates continued to make public statements in favor of it and to facilitate the publication of MITs, resulting in a significant disagreement even within the Wycliffe Global Alliance.¹⁶ Meanwhile, in 2017 and 2020 denominations, pastors, and a Bible society in Muslim-majority contexts denounced MITs published in their areas.¹⁷ In 2020 a new website was launched to expose the issue and to raise more public awareness.¹⁸ In spite of these denunciations and the public exposure, Andy Warren-Rothlin, the leader of UBS' efforts for MITs, advocated for highly contextualized Bible translations to be produced for other religious contexts besides the Islamic ones, dismissing WEA guidelines or any other imposition of rules or fixed boundaries.¹⁹ In December 2023, he edited a special issue of *The Bible Translator* in which he and others advocated for MITs and caricatured the opposition as unworthy of a serious hearing.²⁰ Thus, controversies were never fully settled; instead, they have

3) The WEA guidelines on Father and Son allow certain problematic renderings for the phrase "Son of God," such as "spiritual Son of God" or "son who comes from God," that obscure the full meaning of these terms. Such renderings also give credence to Muslims' accusations that Christians have "corrupted" the Bible.

¹⁴ The editor for Biblical Missiology details how Wycliffe and SIL continue to distribute older publications done before 2013, and they are producing "Scripture-based products," which the WEA guidelines allow. "'Son of God' Unresolved."

¹⁵ Warren-Rothlin, a UBS member and a member of the SIL board, mentions the following languages as having MITs: "Arabic, Chadian Arabic, Russian, Balochi, Urdu, Turkish, Bengali, Thai, Chinese, English, and many lesser-known languages." "From the Editor," 309. United Bible Societies, Frontiers, and the Navigators are among the organizations producing MITs.

¹⁶ In 2012 Wycliffe Associates published their own position, affirming formal equivalents for divine familial terms. Then, in 2016, they withdrew from Wycliffe Bible Translators, citing this issue as one of the reasons. Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, "Wycliffe Associates Leave Bible Translation Alliance over 'Son of God' for Muslims," *Christianity Today* (March 7, 2016). [Wycliffe Associates Leaves Bible Translation Alliance over..... | News & Reporting | Christianity Today](#) (accessed July 9, 2024).

¹⁷ See a denouncement by Arab pastors of MITs done in 2008 (revised in 2016), 2016, and 2021: "Open Letter from Arab Pastors Regarding Mistranslations of the Words 'Father' & 'Son' in the Bible." May 30, 2017. [Biblicalmissiology.org](#). Vitrano-Wilson notes that in 2020 "an intense controversy erupted in Egypt over two translations and two commentaries produced by the MIT publisher Al-Kalima." Coptic, Protestant, and Catholic churches denounced the four works, and the Bible Society of Egypt denied any involvement. (169-72).

¹⁸ [Arlingtonstatement.org](#).

¹⁹ In answer to the question, "Can a video be 'the Bible'?", he writes, "As for the Divine Familial Terms issue ..., do remember that the WEA guidelines only apply to certain organisations such as SIL that have chosen to adopt them. There are very many other Bible translation projects in the world that are untouched by (and unaware of) them, and churches and organisations ... that would not choose to impose such restrictions on their translators.... A key concern underlying this discussion for me is still how we articulate these considerations to funders without falling into the trap of setting rules and fixed boundaries." Comment given on April 28, 2020, on MAP (Modular Aggregation of Principles for Bible Translation), <https://map.bloomfire.com/questions/3796569>.

²⁰ He writes in relation to the books, articles and websites produced, "Such initiatives have typically been led by the same small group of US-based evangelical missiologists, not biblical scholars or Bible translation consultants, and have sometimes discredited themselves by their choice of words." "From the Editor," 310. He also notes, "One root cause of controversies has been a failure by western anglophone evangelical critics to recognise quite how contextualised are their own Christian-idiom Bibles" (309).

been hidden from public view and discourse. While some Bible translation organizations have established tighter policies and expressed their policies publicly, others have instituted looser policies, remained silent,²¹ discouraged their members from debate or discussion, and forbidden public declarations by their members.²² Meanwhile, support for MITs continues to grow and will soon infiltrate contexts in which religions other than Islam predominate.²³

This issue needs to be broken down into its linguistic, lexical, exegetical, theological, and methodological facets in order to understand what the main problems are.

Linguistics

Advocates for an MIT approach argue for their position from a functional-equivalent perspective. Those who are opposed to MITs often misunderstand some of the legitimate concerns of MIT advocates. Formerly called dynamic equivalence, the theory rightly points out the need for sensitivity to the understanding of the intended receptors of the translation. De Waard and Nida explain, “Functional equivalence ... means thoroughly understanding not only the meaning of the source text but also the manner in which the intended receptors of a text are likely to understand it in the receptor language.”²⁴ Bibles International’s translation philosophy details the theological, exegetical, and linguistic factors related to both the source text and the translated text. In conclusion, it states, “The factors related to the source text require that Bible translation be as literal as possible. Those related to the translated text require for the translation to be as comprehensible as possible.”²⁵ While we certainly do not espouse reader-response theory or many aspects of the functional-equivalence theory, we recognize that Bible translation operates within both the source-language world and the receptor-language world.

²¹ Vitrano-Wilson lists the following as having tighter policies: Tyndale Bible Translators, Bibles International, All Nations Bible Translation, Horizons International, Betheden Ministries, WorldView Ministries, Wycliffe Associates, and Unfolding Word. The Wycliffe Global Alliance (Wycliffe, SIL, The Seed Company, etc.) have looser policies. Then, there are those with no public policy as either having had no known involvement with MITs (Ethnos360, Pioneer Bible Translators, and Lutheran Bible Translators) or having had past (and current?) involvement (Frontiers, United Bible Societies, The Navigators, and Global Teams) (184). Naming organizations as having policy problems is not intended to characterize all members of those organizations as having the same views. Many good people remain within these organizations and are not promoting MITs.

²² When Vitrano-Wilson was a member of SIL (until 2020), he recalls an unpublished internal policy document created in 2012 and revised in 2014, after Biblical Missiology started its online petition. Because of the policy, he and his wife were “threatened with forced resignation if [they] continued to seek feedback” on issues related to Religious Idiom Translations (182). At the annual conference, no discussion is allowed. The editor at Biblical Missiology writes, “At the Bible Translation Conference of 2019, for example, translators and linguists from SIL and other organizations requested and received permission to advertise their workshop on ‘Alternatives to Religious Idiom Translations’ on the conference website. Yet conference organizers from SIL removed this link the following month, despite the fact that the conference advertised ‘Religious Idiom Translations’ as one of the themes of the conference, and despite a detailed agenda of the workshop being sent to a conference organizer in SIL weeks before.” “‘Son of God’ Unresolved.”

²³ See Vitrano-Wilson for other public comments by Warren-Rothlin, which are not publicly accessible (185).

²⁴ *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1986), 9.

²⁵ <https://biblesint.org/translation-philosophy> (accessed June 14, 2024).

This thinking agrees with the twofold aspect of faithful communication in translation, as outlined in the Forum of Bible Agencies International's (FOBAI) "Basic Principles and Procedures for Bible Translation." The two pertinent statements, the first listed below related to translation principles and the second related to translation procedures, are as follows:

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.

To test the translation as extensively as possible in the receptor community to ensure that it communicates accurately, clearly and naturally, keeping in mind the sensitivities and experience of the receptor audience.²⁶

Accuracy in Bible translation requires thorough exegesis of the source texts and extensive testing of the translated texts before publication. An accurate communication of the meaning of the source texts can be assessed only by asking the intended receptors what they understand to be the meaning of the translation. Even though Bibles International follows a "modified literal" approach to Bible translation, we are as equally concerned about meaning as the functional-equivalent practitioners. Our translation philosophy ends with this summary statement:

The meaning of the original text, communicated through the form of that text, must be fully conveyed both by using natural structures of the receptor language and by mirroring the vocabulary and grammatical elements of the original language, neither rigidly reproducing the form of the original nor going beyond the stated meaning of the text to explanation, interpretation, or cultural adaptation.

If the meaning of the original text is not communicated clearly, whether by communicating no meaning or wrong meaning, then modifications should be explored;²⁷ but they must be done

²⁶ <https://forum-intl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FOBAITranslationBasicPrinciplesandProceduresApril2017.pdf>

FOBAI (Forum of Bible Agencies International) has adopted standards to "enable cooperation and collaboration among agencies." They are the "industry standards" to which all recognized Bible societies need to comply in order to benefit from the tools and services of other agencies. Thankfully, Bibles International agrees with their standards, though we have only associate membership in order to safeguard against compromising cooperation and collaboration with certain agencies.

²⁷ MIT proponents discuss the translation issue in terms of the target recipients' responses, and then they connect this to the translation principle of accuracy. But as Glenn Kerr points out, "redefining 'accuracy' so that it is a function of reader response is removing a safeguard." Later, he writes, "Accuracy must have some relationship to the original text as its primary focus, and it might be better to say that accuracy of the text reflects the degree to which the reader has access through the translation itself to the original data of the text" (Bible Translation Conference 2003 paper, "The Pursuit of Quality: The Three Stages in Theoretical Development of the Writings of Eugene A. Nida," 16). Kerr makes these comments when discussing Eugene Nida's early emphasis on reader response, which he later modified in terms of sociosemiotics (*From One Language to Another*, 73). Mark Durie tries to dismantle the MIT approach by attacking the theory of reader response, as taught by Nida in his earlier works (Durie does not make any reference to Nida's 1986 work with de Waard). "The Influence of Charles Kraft on Missions to Muslims" in *Islam and the Bible*. While it could be true that some MITs are incorrectly applying reader-response theory, others are just trying to do responsible Bible translation by testing the meaning of the translation with target-language recipients.

incrementally, with a desire to minimize added interpretation as much as possible and with a fear of disturbing the rich tapestry of the Scriptures.²⁸ The problem with MITs, then, is not their recognition of the need to modify the text in order to avoid misunderstanding, but rather their proposed solutions, which are based on inaccurate lexical meaning, exegesis, and theology, and which operate within a flawed methodology.²⁹

Lexical Meaning

MIT advocates correctly identify the referents used with the expression “son(s) of God,”³⁰ and most of them seem to understand the theological dimensions of the term,³¹ but they fail to define the Hebrew and Greek expressions themselves, and they do not see the exegetical and theological significance of the expressions in the complex richness of the whole Bible. Though they correctly point out that Christ is not the product of sexual relations between God and Mary, that leads them to misleading descriptions of “Son of God” being a “social familial term”³² or a metaphor.³³

The expression “Son of God” is connected to Christ only in the New Testament. However, the Greek expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ is based on the Hebrew expression בֶּן הָאֱלֹהִים . This is an adjectival genitive (X of Y) which indicates “the relationship of an individual to a class of beings.”³⁴ So, the son (X) is in the category of supernatural beings (Y). This Hebrew expression can be applied

²⁸ Vern Poythress notes, “One must not evade the difficulty [of misunderstanding] merely by blindly translating everything with maximal literalness, without regard to intelligibility and misunderstanding.” Then he balances that out with the following: “On the other hand, one must resist cutting the Gordian knot of difficulty by always preferring immediate clarity and intelligibility, even to unbelievers, at the expense of richer representation of original meaning.” “Bible Translation and Contextualization: Theory and Practice in Bangladesh,” June 5, 2012. <https://frame-poythress.org>. Note, however, that Poythress makes clear in another article that he is not critical of Rick Brown’s approach. See “Bible Translations for Muslim Readers,” May 17, 2012. <https://frame-poythress.org>.

²⁹ Roger Dixon worked in Muslim-majority Indonesia and realized translating “Son of God” as problematic. In the end, he found that the first three and a half chapters of Luke give “the exposition of Messianic theology for a non-Jewish population.” “Identity Theft: Retheologizing the Son of God,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (April 2007): 223. In other words, the solution is teaching, not translation.

³⁰ Brown lists the “senses of the phrase “son(s) of God” by giving nine referents for the expression “Explaining the Biblical Terms ‘Son(s) of God’ in Muslim Contexts,” *IJFM*, 22:3 (Fall 2005): 93.

³¹ In the 2011, Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray note the eight “aspects of meaning” for “Son of God.” “A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms,” *IJFM*, 28:3 (Fall 2011): 110.

³² Brown, Gray, Gray (2011, “A Brief Analysis”), 106. Bob Carter argues that their three categories of familial terms (1) biological and non-social, 2) biological and social, and 3) non-biological and social) are not valid for Biblical Hebrew. “A Response to Brown, Gray and Gray, The Terms of Translation: A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible,” *IJFM*, 28:3 (Fall 2011): 121-5. Dennison corrects their handling of the Greek terms. “What Greek Filial Terms Did the New Testament Authors Have in their Toolboxes? A Response to Brown, Gray and Gray,” May 22, 2012. <https://www.btdnetwork.org>.

³³ Warren-Rothlin uses the term “anthropotheistic metaphor.” “From the Editor,” 310. David Abernathy rejects “metaphorical” and chooses “metaphysical.” “Jesus is the Eternal Son of God,” *St. Francis Magazine*, 6:2 (April 2010): 328.

³⁴ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 150.

to angels (Gen. 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) or even judges (Psa 82:6)³⁵ when they function as representatives of God and channels of His words. Though the Hebrew expression is never used in the Old Testament to refer to the second Person of the Godhead,³⁶ the Greek expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, having the same Semitic significance, makes this connection, as can be seen in the contexts in which the expression is used.³⁷ The contexts indicate that the referent is a divine Person. He is the eternal Son who has come as the incarnate Jesus (1Jo 5:5,20; cf. Luk 1:35; Heb 4:14; 7:3). He is the One who must be believed (Joh 3:18; 1Jo 4:15; 5:10,12,13; cf. Gal 2:20; Eph 4:13) and whose voice will raise the dead (Joh 5:25). The Jews accused Him of blasphemy, “because He made Himself out to be the Son of God” (Joh 19:7). They are using the Greek expression with the Semitic significance to identify Jesus’ claim. With the same significance, another phrase is also connected to Jesus, “the Son of the Most High” (Luk 1:32; cf. Mar 5:7).

Though the “Son of God” expression focuses on the categorical designation of the second Person of the Godhead, it becomes synonymous with the “Son” designation in the New Testament, as can be seen by the contexts in which the two occur together (1Jo 5:10, 20). The latter designation is one way in which God has chosen to describe the trinitarian nature of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mat 28:19). God says at Jesus’ baptism, “This is My beloved Son” (Mat 3:17; Mar 1:11; Luk 3:22). But this relationship precedes the incarnation and is eternal, because the Son is the One whom God “gave” (Joh 3:16) and “sent” (Gal 4:4; 1Jo 4:10,14; cf. Rom 8:3), indicating His status as Son prior to the incarnation. He “appeared” (1Jo 3:8) and “has come” (1Jo 5:20) in relation to the incarnation, but as the eternal Son, He is always “in the bosom of the Father” (Joh 1:18). Thus, though the terminology can be called “divine familial terminology,” it is not a metaphor but rather a literal statement that expresses how the Father relates to His Son and His Spirit.³⁸ In relation to Jesus the Son, “Son of God” expresses an intimacy of relations, a oneness of essence and activity (Joh 10:30), and a completeness of revelation of the divine essence (Joh 14:9). Thus, the terminology communicates much more than just the Messianic identity of the Son of God, which MIT advocates usually focus on. More will be said about this in the “theology” section of this paper.

In the Old Testament, however, the “Son” designation does have Messianic connections. In Psalm 2, the Messiah (v. 2) is called “my King” (v. 6) and then “my Son” (v. 7).³⁹ This prophecy connects back to the Davidic covenant, where God’s covenant with David promises a descendant who will

³⁵ In John 10:34-36, Jesus used this Psalm to assert an *a fortiori* statement that if judges are in that category in terms of their function, how much more is He, as seen by His supernatural deeds. Only One who is deity can perform divine deeds.

³⁶ The Aramaic phrase ܒܪ ܐܢܫܝܢ (“son of man”) does occur in Daniel 7:13 with Him as the referent. The expression means that this Person coming with the clouds of heaven (i.e., divine) is in the class of humanity.

³⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Nida put it under the classification “supernatural beings,” not kinship terms. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Fortress Press, 1999).

³⁸ Peter Toon asserts that the term “Father” is a “literal statement—God is truly and really God.” Later he writes, “When Jesus addressed his Father he was not using a metaphor drawn from human experience. He was speaking in the literal mode according to personal knowledge.” *Our Triune God* (Vancouver, British Columbia, 2002), 144-147.

³⁹ Acts 13:33 makes it clear that the prophecy of Psalm 2:7 was fulfilled at the resurrection of Christ. He did not become the Son at that moment. Rather, He was begotten, or entered, into a new stage of existence as the resurrected Son (cf. Rom. 1:4).

have an eternal kingdom (2Sa 7:8-17). In this context, God speaks in terms of a familial metaphor of Himself being a “father” and the king being a “son” (v. 14).⁴⁰ As the king accomplishes the will of the Father, he demonstrates his father’s characteristics and is like a son, analogically speaking. Functionally, this is fulfilled in all good Judean kings after David, including the Messiah, but ontologically, the eternality of the kingdom necessitates One who is also eternal. In Psalm 89:19-29 (cf. Eze 34:10-15, 23-24), the righteous functions of the messianic King are fleshed out, earning Him the right to call God “my Father.” He will eternally have His Father’s favor, immortal descendants with Himself as the “firstborn,” and an eternal throne. No wonder the Messiah is designated “My Son” in Psalm 2:7! In Isaiah 7:14 the eternal King-Son concept is further developed in that this Davidic Son would be born of a virgin (יְלִידָהּ),⁴¹ and He would be called Immanuel (see Mat 1:23). According to Isaiah 9:6-7, the Messiah would come through natural birth and would be given more divine designations. Functionally and ontologically, the divine Messiah would fulfill all the messianic prophecies as the perfect descendant of David.

Thus, the Son of God became the Messiah as a physical descendant of David. He became the biological son of Mary, a female descendant of David, but He received the kingly rights and privileges through His adoptive father, Joseph, a male descendant of David (Luk 3:23-38). The Son is the heir to the Father’s possession (Heb 1:2; cf. Mat 21:28; Mar 12:7). He is the “firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rom 8:29), who as part of His family will also have an eternal inheritance (Eph 1:11, 14, 18; Col 1:12; 3:24; Heb 9:15; 1Pe 1:4; Rev 21:7). Thus, any attempts by MIT advocates to remove the biological dimension of “Son of God” for the sake of Muslims destroy the exegetical and theological significance of the term. Only a familial term that has biological dimensions can work in a Bible translation for Muslims, because those are the Hebrew and Greek terms used in the original texts.

This lexical study paves the way for an exposure of the exegetical and theological flaws of the MIT perspective.

Exegesis

From an exegetical perspective, MIT advocates fail to take into account the interpretive complexities of the biblical texts. They flatten the texts in which “Son of God” occurs by making the title synonymous with titles that are interchanged with one another, juxtaposed to each other, or used in the same story in Gospel parallels.⁴² Muslim scholar Ungaran Rashid asserts that the titles “Christ” and “Son of God” are synonymous, and SIL scholar Mark Harlan affirms Rashid’s

⁴⁰ D. A. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God: A Christological Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 26-27.

⁴¹ Regardless of how we understand the fulfillment in Isaiah’s time, Matthew makes it clear that the virgin Mary fulfills it through the birth of Jesus (Mat. 1:23).

⁴² Brown cites various parallel passages where Luke is supposedly translating “Son of God” into another title for his Gentile readers (2005, “Explaining”), 94. David A. Doherty disproves this thinking in the very next issue of *The Bible Translator*, which is a good balancing article after the December 2023 issue. “Does Luke Replace ‘Son of God’ with Non-filial Language,” *The Bible Translator*, 75:1 (April 2024): 37-49.

understanding, drawing upon earlier articles by Rick Brown.⁴³ He also bases his ideas on the understanding that later Greek reflection inserted the ontological dimensions of “Son of God,” but that only the functional dimensions were present in the context of Jesus’ time and that of the Gospel authors. Harlan claims that the divinity of Christ is in terms of His being the Word and the Wisdom by which God worked.⁴⁴ Arie De Kuiper and Barclay Newman justify their proposal of changing the title “Son of God” to “servant of God” by holding that Mark and John had different understandings of the term.⁴⁵

More conservative scholars argue that we should not read into the texts what was only later apparent after the coming of the Spirit (Joh 14:26; 16:13-15; 1Jo 2:20, 27).⁴⁶ However, if the explanation of the title this paper gave above is correct, we need to take the Gospel characters’ and authors’ use of the term at face value, albeit recognizing that they confessed more than they knew at the time.⁴⁷ It is improper to claim that the Gospel writers infused their post-Easter understanding into the pre-Easter quotations, because such an exegetical method implicitly assigns historical inaccuracy to the Gospel authors. If the believers, Peter (Mat 16:16), John the Baptist (Joh 1:34), Nathanael (Joh 1:49), and Martha (Joh 11:27), attributed this title to Him, they were at least recognizing something supernatural about Him.⁴⁸ As Jesus subsequently explained to Peter in Matthew 16:17, this understanding came only through the Father’s aid. The Old Testament predicted a divine Messiah, but the first-century Jews, both believers and unbelievers, did not expect it. Jesus proved it through His earthly ministry, and then the Gospel authors, writing with the aid of the Spirit after Pentecost, recorded and expounded upon that identification—Jesus is the Son of God (Joh 1:14; 12:45; 14:7, 9; 20:31; cf. Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). The New Testament epistles further flesh out the meaning and significance of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

⁴³ Ungaran Rashid (96) and Mark Harlan (101), “The ‘Son of God’ in the Gospel of John and Its Relevance for Muslim-Christian Dialogue,” in *Interfaith Engagement Beyond the Divide*, J.M Luetz et al (eds.) (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2023).

⁴⁴ Harlan, “The ‘Son of God,’” 106. Rashid and Harlan represent an effort to bring Muslims and Christians together. Hasan H. Akkuş and Bill T. Richardson argue for Bible scholars and Qur’an scholars to join efforts to produce a Bible translation that would be more acceptable to Muslims. “Bible Translations for Turkish-Speaking Muslims: Contemporary Considerations (*The Bible Translator*, 74:2 (Dec 2023): 431-452. Fabian N. Dapila also advances the same line of thinking, encouraging “an open and trusting relationship.” “Bible Translation into Pasaale by a Muslim and by Christians: A Comparison” (*The Bible Translator*, 74:2 (Dec 2023): 415-430. Harley Talman encourages the same in “Comprehensive Contextualizations.” Tim James explains the many benefits of using Muslim translators and even discusses how much more beneficial they can be than Christian translators with their traditional understandings. “Working with Colleagues from Other Faith Traditions,” *IJFM*, 23:2 (Summer 2006): 61-66.

⁴⁵ “Jesus, Son of God—A Translation Problem,” *The Bible Translator*, 28:4 (October 1977): 432-438.

⁴⁶ See J. Scott Horrell, “No Other Name: Muslim Idiom Translations of ‘Son of God,’ Cautions and Balance,” a paper given at the 2011 Evangelical Theological Society Annual Convention.

⁴⁷ The reality is that when we confess that Jesus is the Son of God today, we are also confessing more than we know.

⁴⁸ The subsequent narrative for Peter’s and Martha’s confession shows that they clearly did not have a full understanding of Jesus’ deity. However, Satan (Mat 4:3, 6; Luk 4:3, 9) and his demons (Mat 8:29; Mar 3:11; Luk 4:41) surely understood His divine nature. His enemies were not believing and were simply challenging His claims (Mat 26:63; 27:40, 43; Luk 22:70; Joh 19:7). The centurion probably believed what he confessed, but there’s so little information about this man (Mat 27:54; Mar 15:39). In John 20:28, Thomas said, “My Lord and my God!”

Theology

From a theological perspective, it is important to note that most MIT advocates claim to believe the orthodox teaching about the Son of God.⁴⁹ According to them, they are simply trying to solve a translation problem. But they lose their theological moorings in their linguistic and sociolinguistic analysis. Pattemore says the issue should be located “in the domain of sociolinguistic markers of group belonging.” In his Buddhist and Muslim Thailand context, he speaks of the linguistic markers for “social group membership” among the Christians and Muslims.⁵⁰ Thus, he approves the validity of the rendering “the messiah, the one greatly loved by Allah.”⁵¹ Brown states that the issue is “not theological” or “semantic,” “but rather it is an affective and cultural phenomenon: it is an utterly taboo term.” He bases his theological understanding on esteemed theologians Richard Bauckham and Millard Erickson, who apparently do not cite “Son of God” as one support for the deity of Christ. So, we just need to find a familial equivalent for “Son of God” that has no biological dimensions to remove any offense for Muslims.⁵² He proposes “the Son who comes from God,” “the honored Son who comes from God,” “God’s Loved One,” “God’s Unique Loved One,” or “God’s Spiritual Offspring.” Though Brown correctly identifies the eight dimensions of the Sonship of Christ in his 2011 article, he still misses the theological meaning inherent in the title itself. Pattemore and others have reduced “Son of God” to a synonym of “Messiah.”⁵³ Their linguistic and sociolinguistic solutions have emptied the term of its theological significance.

There is also an effort to strip Bible translations of any theological bias, even a Christian one. Thus, any effort to retain a literal rendering of “Son of God” simply reflects a traditional Christian understanding, and this must be reconsidered. Warren-Rothlin claims that MITs are more in line with the history of Bible translation practices than what he calls “modern Christian-idiom translation.”⁵⁴ Tayyeb Saleem, writing from an Islamic Pakistan context, acknowledges that

⁴⁹ Though when scholars like Mark Harlan start to align themselves more closely with the beliefs of Muslim scholars like Rashid Ungaran, one must wonder what theological drift has to have happened to make that possible. In his article “Comprehensive Contextualization,” Harlan believes Paul’s admonition about staying in the same social situation in which you were saved (1 Cor 7) justifies Muslims staying in their same socioreligious situation (6-12). If this is what Paul meant, then what did he mean when he exhorted them not to be bound with unbelievers (2Co 6:14-18)?

⁵⁰ “God Talk: Christians Talking with Muslims in Buddhist Thailand,” *The Bible Translator*, 74:3 (Dec 2023).

⁵¹ Pattemore, 479.

⁵² Brown, “Why Muslims are Repelled by the Term ‘Son of God,’” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Oct 2007): 2007.

⁵³ Pattemore reflects the earlier thinking of Brown and others, though Brown, Gray, and Gray corrected themselves in the 2011, seeing both the ontological and functional dimensions of “Son of God” (110). His earlier published articles, beginning in 2000 are “The ‘Son of God’: Understanding Messianic Titles,” *IJFM*, 17:1 (Spring 2000): 42-52; Brown, “Presenting the Deity of Christ from the Bible,” *IJFM*, 19:1 (Spring 2001): 20-27; Brown “Explaining the Biblical Terms,” (Fall 2005): 91-96; Brown, “Translating the Biblical Terms ‘Son(s) of God’ in Muslim Contexts,” *IJFM*, 22:4 (Winter 2005): 135-45; Brown, “Why Muslims are Repelled by the Term ‘Son of God,’” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 43:4 (2007): 422-9. See also Brown, Penny, and Gray (2009). Leith and Andrea Gray, who were co-authors of the 2011 article, apparently also had a change of thinking. They reduced “Son of God” to a “messianic title” in “A Muslim Encounters the Gospel of Mark: Theological Implications of Contextual Mismatch,” *IJFM*, 25:3 (Fall 2008): 127-134.

⁵⁴ He encourages caution in relation to “distinctive Islamic and qur’anic intertextual connotations and associations.” But then he suggests, where appropriate, peppering Bible translations with “Islamic formulaic

Christian Bible translators see problems in Islamic terms, transliterations, and expressions, but he counters that they have to recognize that “the traditional ‘Christian’ alternatives are at least equally problematic, if not much worse, for non-Christian readers and hearers.”⁵⁵ While Bible translators should “make every effort to ensure that no political, ideological, social, cultural, or theological agenda is allowed to distort the translation,”⁵⁶ they should themselves be believers and should translate for believers as their primary recipients, since the Bible was written for Jewish and Christian believers (Ps. 119:13; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 1:17-19). They should interpret the meaning of individual texts in light of the entire corpus of the Bible, within the theological framework established by the Bible itself and brought to its fullness in the New Testament.

MIT advocates frame the narrative in terms of cultural offense at certain expressions found in the Bible,⁵⁷ but the issue is deeper and relates to the theological clash of Islam and Christianity.⁵⁸ Cynthia L. Miller-Naudé and Jacobus A. Naudé explain that while the Qur’anic passages often cited should be understood as a broad denial of polytheism, “it is also widely understood to be in opposition to the Christian belief in Jesus as the ‘son of God.’”⁵⁹ As Donald Lowe correctly states, “... for the Muslims for whom it is a linguistics issue, it’s a linguistics issue *because* of a theological issue.” He cites three doctrines of Islamic theology that are relevant for this linguistic issue: God does not have a son, God is not called “Father,” and Islamic law prohibits adoption in a legal sense. He asserts that this third doctrine has made the Arabic word (*ibn*) have only a strictly biological meaning. The adoption prohibition is not upon all Muslims, but it is likely followed by

phrases and interjections and qur’anic allusions.” Even paratextual material can include “full qur’anic citations in support reading the *Taurat*, *Zabur*, and *Injil* (351-2). Simnowitz documents some Bible translations or Scripture-based products that have inserted the Shahada, which is the Islamic confession of faith (“There is no god but Allah”), into their texts. “Appendix,” 509. See also his article, “Making the Bible More Islamic Than the Qur’an Through the First Half of the Islamic Creed (the Shahada)” (Aug 26, 2020) at BiblicalMissiology.org.

⁵⁵ “The Myth of the Theologically ‘Neutral’ Terms.” *The Bible Translator*, 74:2 (Dec 2023): 453-468.

⁵⁶ FOBAI, Translation Principles and Procedures.

⁵⁷ Anecdotes are also given to show how seriously Muslims take that passage. Brown distinguishes three types of responses: suspicious, alienated, and terrified. He says the first group are “cautiously receptive toward the scripture message itself” (2005, “Why Muslims”), 424-5. So, it seems this first group is not completely turned away and can be taught the true meaning of the term. Matthew Carlton, on the other side, has anecdotes from those who evangelize Muslims regularly and those who have been converted out of Islam. These stories show that it is clearly possible to simply present the truths of Scripture in their pure form and see the Spirit of God bring faith through proper understanding. “Jesus, the Son of God: Biblical Meaning, Muslim Understanding, and Implications for Translation and Biblical Literacy,” *St. Francis Magazine*, 7:3 (2011): 1-30.

⁵⁸ D. A. Chowdhury, who warns of the problems with using formal equivalents for “God’s Son” and “Lord Jesus,” points out the futility of trying to reach Muslims without first teaching them Christianity. He states, “Almost every Christian doctrine and most of the facts of Christian history have been perverted by Islam, and until the Moslem knows something of what Christianity teaches, it is unprofitable for the Christian to discuss with him the claims of his religion.” “Should we use the Terms ‘Isa’ and ‘Beta’?” *The Bible Translator*, 4:1 (January 1953): 26-27.

⁵⁹ “Ideology and Translation Strategy in Muslim-Sensitive Bible Translation,” *New Testament Society of Southern Africa*, 47:1 (2013): 172.

most Arab Muslims.⁶⁰ Surah At-Tawbah 9:30 clearly condemns Christians for believing that Jesus is the Son of God.

The Jews say, "Ezra is the son of Allah"; and the Christians say, "The Messiah is the son of Allah." That is their statement from their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved [before them]. May Allah destroy them; how are they deluded?⁶¹

Other passages say God does not have a son (6:101, 19:35; 19:88-92), or neither son nor companion (6:101; 17:111; 23:91). Since only Christians have a Trinitarian doctrine of God, the passages that condemn those who believe God has a Son are directed primarily at Christians. If Christian Bible translators adjust their translations to no longer contradict these Islamic beliefs, which are intentionally antagonistic to Christianity, then it will simply create more problems to overcome in evangelizing Muslims.⁶² A better methodology will be presented in the next section.

Methodology

From a methodological perspective, the MIT approach displaces the church from its supervisory and recipient roles in Bible translation. The traditional approach has been to translate the Bible for the entire language group. But MIT practitioners have applied *skopostheorie* (focused on the *skopos*, or purpose, of the translation), a secular theory which can be rightly used in relation to non-inspired texts, in order to justify translating the Bible for just the Muslim segment of the language group.⁶³ Vitrano-Wilson explains that the concept of *skopos* is closely related to functionalism, which is another theory developed out of secular translation studies. Though functionalism can be rightly applied in certain ways, it can be abused in that the function of the translation takes priority over the authority of the source text. As MIT practitioners apply the theories, translation choices need to fit the function and the needs of the selected recipients, not the meanings arrived at by the Church over centuries of exegetical study and debate. Only "insiders" within Islam can rightly assess the quality of these translations. Muslim-background believers in churches are to be ignored because "they have been 'extracted' from their 'socioreligious context' and are too influenced by Christians." Questions concerning meaning and faithfulness can only be answered by insiders, because they remain within their socioreligious

⁶⁰ Lowe, 311.

⁶¹ <https://legacy.quran.com/9/30>.

⁶² Matt Finlay concurs and adds an additional thought: "To produce a version in which this most controversial term ['Son of God'] has been removed would create an uproar. One of the most common accusations against Christians by Muslims is that we have corrupted our Scriptures." He proposes 'Son of Elohim' as a possibility. Matt Finlay and Lamin O. Sanneh, "Jesus, Son of God—A Translation Problem: Some Further Comments," *The Bible Translator*, 30:2 (April 1979), 241-2. Eugene Glassman agrees with Finlay and suggests being selective in what Scriptures are given first, preferring Matthew and Luke over Mark and John. "Bible Translation for Muslim Audiences," *The Bible Translator*, 33:4 (October 1982): 439-445.

⁶³ Saleem (454) and Warren-Rothlin ("Linguistic Equivalence," 355) mention this concept. Sanneh states, "I think it would be wrong to produce one Bible for the Muslims and another for the Christians. There is only one Bible, which comes in many languages, and which God has used to give people a knowledge of Himself." Finlay and Sanneh, 244.

context.⁶⁴ Such an approach has completely uprooted the Church's supervisory and recipient roles in Bible translation.

The Church is defined in the Bible as "the pillar and support of truth" (1Ti 3:15), which means that the Church has the primary responsibility of passing on the Truth to future generations of believers. Christ accomplishes this by commissioning His followers to take the Gospel to the world and teach disciples the truths He taught (Mat 28:18-20; Acts 13:2; 2Ti 4:5). In the context of local churches, faithful leaders (2Ti 2:2) equip Christ's followers to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11-13), including evangelizing and discipling unbelievers both inside and outside local churches (1Co 14:23-25 and throughout Acts). Bible translations help to accomplish this mission by publishing reliable translations for language groups without clear access to the Bible. Trained, believing translators who possess the Spirit of God are able to understand the Bible in light of the orthodox teaching of the Church that has been passed down through the ages. The goal of missions, including Bible translation, "is establishing and strengthening healthy local congregations."⁶⁵ Any missionary endeavor that is not seeking to fulfill Christ's mission according to His prescribed plan is sure to fail and may do even worse, to entrench unbelievers deeper in theological error.

MIT advocates seek to justify their practices by requiring that paratextual information be included in their Bible translations and producing Scripture-based products that are supposedly to bring Muslims closer to the Scriptures.⁶⁶ However, the Scriptures teach that "the primary, intended audience of the Scriptures is the believer" (Heb 1:1-2; Jude 3). Such being the case, Bible translations should not be treated like an evangelistic tract for unbelievers. They can come to faith in Christ only through the Word of Christ, but as Paul makes clear in Romans 10, it is the Bible in the hands of the commissioned preacher (10:14-17). Therefore, the Bible should not be translated with the unbeliever primarily in mind. Surely this entails that the actual translation should not be Islamized for the Muslim with Christian teaching only in the paratextual material, especially since such material is left out of audio recordings, one of the primary ways Muslims first come in contact with the Scriptures. It also excludes Scripture-based products, if those texts include actual biblical texts with the content Islamized.

Conclusion

MIT advocates may have good intentions, but they have manipulated the text in a way that is not lexically, exegetically, theologically, or methodologically sound. They have taken Bible translating out of the hands of the Church and put it into the hands of Muslims, causing their translation choices to become uprooted from the Bible's presentation of Jesus as the Son of God. Pastors⁶⁷, professors, and believers need to be aware of these overly contextualized Bible translations and the faulty thinking that has produced them. May God use this paper to arm the Church with the necessary information to stand up against the proliferation of MITs. Unbelieving Muslims need

⁶⁴ Vitrano-Wilson, "Functionalism: Why the New Dominant Paradigm of Bible Translation Makes Syncretism Inevitable," May 17, 2021. [Biblicalmissiology.com](https://biblicalmissiology.com)

⁶⁵ Kyle Franklin, "Bible Translation by and for the Church," in *Islam and the Bible*, 327.

⁶⁶ This latter point is a major loophole in the WEA guidelines. Many examples could be given.

⁶⁷ A good resource for pastors can be found here: https://biblicalmissiology.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Simnowitz-MIT_brochure_for_AG_fourfold_color_proof.pdf.

Bible translators who will simply preserve the Truth so that they might be saved and sanctified by it for God's glory. May God raise up such laborers to reach them!

Appendix: Selective Timeline of the Religious Idioms Translation Issue

Earlier than 2000¹

- 1953—D.A. Chowdhury wrote an article in *The Bible Translator*, 4:1 (January 1953) [“Should we use the Terms ‘Isa’ and ‘Beta’?”], arguing that we should not use formal equivalents for the Arabic terms for ‘God’s Son’ and ‘Lord Jesus’
- 1977—Arie de Kuyper and Barclay Newman wrote an article in *The Bible Translator*, 28:4 (October 1977) [“Jesus, Son of God—A Translation Problem”], recommending using a functional translation like “God’s servant” or some other modified translation of ‘Son of God’ while giving the literal meaning and an explanation for the translation modification
- 1979—Matt Finlay and Lamin O. Sanneh wrote an article in *The Bible Translator*, 30:2 (April 1979) [“Jesus, Son of God—A Translation Problem: Some Further Comments”], objecting to Kuyper’s and Newman’s article and using alternatives for ‘Son of God’
- 1982—Eugene Glassman wrote an article in *The Bible Translator*, 33:4 (October 1982) [“Bible Translation for Muslim Audiences”], concurring with Finlay
- 1994—WBT/SIL produced audio recordings called *The Lives of the Prophets*, in which ‘Messiah’ was used in the place of ‘Son of God’

2000s

- 2000—Rick Brown (SIL translation consultant) published several articles on the topic, beginning with “The ‘Son of God’: Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus” in the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (IFJM), asserting that ‘the Son of God’ and ‘the Christ’ are synonymous titles
- 2004—Harley Talman published an article in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 21:1 (Spring 2004) (“Comprehensive Contextualization”) in favor of highly contextualized translations.
- 2005—Rick Brown wrote other articles in IFJM in which he advocated for the use of synonyms, like ‘Christ sent from God,’ ‘Word from God,’ or ‘God’s Beloved Christ’
- 2005—Bengali translation called *Injil Sharif* was published by Global Partners for Development, which translation is based on Brown’s writings and also used ‘Messiah’ in the place of ‘Son of God’
- 2006—John Travis published an article in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 32:2 (Summer 2006) (“Producing and Using Meaningful Translations of the Taurat, Zabur, and Injil”), arguing in favor of publishing MITs.
- 2006—Bill Nikides wrote an article in *St. Francis Magazine*, critiquing alternative translations of divine familial terms
- 2007—Rick Brown wrote an article in IFJM in which he claimed that a person could be both biblical and Muslim

- Dec 2009-Dec 2010—six academic articles written by proponents (Rick Brown, John Penny, Leith Gray, and Bradford Greer) and critics (David Abernathy, Roger Dixon, and J. Scott Horrell)
- Bob Carter wrote an article exposing the weaknesses of Rick Brown’s explanation about Hebrew familial terms

2011

- Feb—Collin Hansen wrote an article in *Christianity Today*
- May, Oct—Emily Belz wrote an article in *World Magazine*
- May—Pakistan Bible Society severed ties with SIL
- June—Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) passed an overture in their general assembly, condemning translations that remove from the text references to God as ‘Father’ or Jesus as ‘Son’ and encouraged assessment and correction of any Bible translation projects supported by their congregations
- Oct—SIL convened translators and scholars in Istanbul to develop standards on translating Father-Son terms, encouraging the retention of the familial meaning of ‘Son of God’ as much as possible and requiring the literal form in paratextual material when non-literal renderings are used in the text²
- D.A. Carson wrote a short book on the “Son of God” controversy
- Vern Poythress wrote articles that are somewhat critical and somewhat supportive of MIT practices.

2012

- Jan—Biblical Missiology posted a petition that asked Wycliffe, SIL and Frontiers to “Keep ‘Father’ & ‘Son’ in the Bible, gaining over 15,000 people worldwide
- Feb—Emily Belz wrote an article in *World Magazine*
- Feb—Wycliffe issued public statements that they are not “omitting or removing the familial terms, translated into English as ‘Son of God’ or ‘Father,’” which they eventually had to acknowledge doing it in some translations, thus hurting their public credibility³
- April—Assemblies of God issued a paper entitled “The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology in Scripture Translations for Muslims”⁴
- SIL created a policy document entitled “Communication Protocols for SIL Publications and Presentations on Divine Familial Terms or Other Controversial Topics,” which “forbids any public discussion, internet posting, communication with media, or publication of academic articles related to ‘controversial topics such as divine familial terms and insider movements’ without explicit permission from SIL leadership.”⁵

- E. Dennison wrote an article exposing the weaknesses of Rick Brown’s explanation about Greek familial terms

2013

- April—WEA issues their report, requiring translating divined familiar terms with “the most directly equivalent words within the given linguistic and cultural context of the recipients, while also allowing for adding modifiers and opening a loophole for Scripture-based products (i.e., not directly biblical translations)

2015

- The Evangelical Missiological Society met and heard presentations by Patrick Kraye, Executive Director of Interserve USA, and Kevin Higgins, International Director of Global Team, in which they critiqued the WEA guidelines.⁶
- Adam Simnowitz submitted his MA thesis at Columbia International University, entitled “Muslim Idiom Translation: Assessing So-Called Scripture Translation for Muslim Audiences with a Look into Its Origins in Eugene A. Nida’s Theories of Dynamic Equivalence and Cultural Anthropology.”

2016

- March—Wycliffe Associates announce they are leaving the Wycliffe Global Alliance because of their commitment to literal translation of “Father” and “Son of God”⁷
- Dec—SIL issues their document entitled “Divine Familial Terms Translation Procedures” (DFTTP), implementing the WEA report and allowing the possibility of using familial terms other than “son by nature” and not requiring adherence for “Scripture-based products”
- Frontiers voted against the WEA panel recommendations [Vitrano-Wilson refers to *Muslim Conversions to Christ*, 488-9

2017

- May 2017—over two dozen Arab pastors signed an open letter rejecting three MIT’s, particularly in their modification of Father-Son terms⁸

2018

- *Muslim Conversions to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts*, edited by Ayman S. Ibrahim and Ant Greenham (Peter Lang Publishing) is published. One chapter and an appendix focus specifically on MIT’s.

2019

- Oct—group of men (including Troy Manning) met in Arlington, TX, to begin drafting the Arlington Statement on Bible Translation (ASBT)

- Oct—Bible translation practitioners have their advertisement to their workshop “Alternatives to Religious Idiom Translations” removed from the annual Bible Translation website, though one of the themes was “Religious Idioms Translations.”

2020

- July—the Coptic Church, Protestant churches, and Catholic churches denounced two translation (including *True Meaning*) and two commentaries published by MIT publisher Al-Kalima (with support from Frontiers, Wycliffe, and SIL) in Egypt. Egyptian newspapers, TV stations, and Arabic versions of international news sites covered the issue.
- Dec 8—Troy Manning wrote an [article](#) for the proclaimanddefend.org podcast (connected to *Frontline* magazine and Foundations Baptist Fellowship International)⁹
- Oct – new website (arlingtonstatement.org) launched, addressing more broadly various issues related to Religious Idioms Translations.
- Oct—Dick Kroneman of SIL publicly announced that they are not supportive of the Arlington Statement since they felt FOBAI’s and WEA’s standards are

2021

- Feb 16 – Troy Manning engaged in a podcast [interview](#) for Theologically Speaking (BJU)¹⁰
- May – Troy Manning wrote an [article](#) in BMM’s Serve blog about the issue of RIT’s¹¹
- Oct—UBS produced a new policy document which Andy Warren-Rothlin called “Bible for Other Faiths,” which encourages contextualized translation strategies for religions other than Islam.¹²

2023

- *Islam and the Bible: Questioning Muslim Idiom Translations*, edited by Ayman S. Ibrahim and Ant Greenham (B&H Academic) is published. Most articles are written by MIT opponents, but some are written by advocates with editorial comments given in reply to their chapters.
- May--Vitrano-Wilson wrote an article on BiblicalMissiology.org about the syncretistic nature of functionalism as applied to MIT practices.
- Dec—UBS publishes a special issue of *The Bible Translator* on Muslim-Idiom Translation
- Muslim scholar Ungaran Rashid and SIL scholar Mark Harlan team up to write a chapter on the meaning of “the Son of God” in the Gospel of John in *Interfaith Engagement Beyond the Divide*

2024

- May 8—Global Trends Zoom discussion led by Tom McCormick with panelists who are some of the authors of the chapters in *Islam and the Bible*. People from both sides of the issue joined in the meeting.

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