BIBLE TRANSLATION CONTROVERSY: BACKGROUND

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Category: Controversies

Over the last few weeks, a good deal has been written on websites, in emails and even in the press saying that Wycliffe Bible Translators has deliberately removed key concepts from the Bible so as not to offend certain audiences. Specifically, the charge is that Wycliffe (and others) have removed the terms "Son of God", "Father" and other familial terms from the Bible. An online petition has been set up (which names me personally) toÂ pressurize Wycliffe into changing these alleged practices. Rather sadly, many people have taken these allegations at face value and have been prepared to accept them, without seeking to understand any of the background information. It particularly saddens me, that people I know have been prepared to sign up to a petition which criticises me personally, without first of all talking to me.

Over the next few days I'm going to publish a series of blog posts which look at this controversy from a variety of angles. However, before I do, I need to make a few statements about how I propose to approach this.

- For the most part, I will not be linking to sites which have criticised Wycliffe or other organisations over this issue. They have done a great job of self-publicity over the last few months and don't need my help. Do a Google search if you want to find them.
- Equally, for reasons which will become clear, I will not always be able to cite the sources that I quote. I'm sure you will understand why as time goes on.
- Unusually, I will be moderating comments from now on. Comments which are abusive or which show no understanding of the background issues will simply be deleted. There are plenty of other places on the internet where those sorts of comments are allowed or even welcome. I will allow comments which take a contrary position to mine as long as I feel that they have adequately engaged with the issues.
- Important! **This is my personal blog and anything I say here, unless indicated otherwise, is purely my opinion.** If you want to know what Wycliffe Bible Translators or our partner organisation SIL have to say on this subject, please visit their websites.

Before moving on, it is important to note that Wycliffe reject the claim that they have removed the terms concerned from the Bible:

> *The Wycliffe Global Alliance organizations and their personnel are not omitting or removing the familial terms, translated in English as â€œSon of Godâ€ or â€œFather,â€ from any Scripture translation. Erroneous information and rumors on the internet have recently raised questions concerning this issue. Wycliffe never has and never will be involved in a translation which does not translate these terms. To say that we are removing any familial terms from the Bible is simply not true. Wycliffe continues to be faithful to accurate and clear translation of Scripture. The eternal deity of Jesus Christ and the understanding of Jesusâ€™ relationship with God the Father must be preserved in every translation. Wycliffe personnel from nations around the world are committed to working alongside language communities and other*

> *partners to translate Godâ€™s Word with great care from the original languages of Scripture into the languages of the worldâ€™s people so that all may know the redeeming love and glory of God--Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*
> *(Read the full statement and follow links here .)*

If you want more background on the question of translating familial terms such as Son of God, the following links might be of interest:

- One of the UK's best known Christian bloggers, Archbishop Cranmer, has written an elegant and thoughtful overview of the question.
- Bible Translation Blogger, Joel Hofman, weighs in on the subject; here and here.
- The International Journal of Frontier Missions has a whole issue devoted to the question, which includes the standards by which all Bible translation projects are checked.
- Vern Poythress of Westminster Theological Seminary has written a very helpful review of the question which you can read here.

I'll finish this post with a quote from Prof. Poythress:

> *We should rejoice that we are seeing Muslims who are reading the Bible. And we should rejoice that Bible translators are paying close attention to what a variety of expressions mean in a target language, and are trying hard to convey meaning accurately for the sake of the gospel and the salvation of souls. This process can help to overcome barriers of misunderstanding among Muslims, without compromising the message of the Bible.*

Further Posts in this Series

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