OPEN TO SCRUTINY

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Category: Bible Translation

If you've ever wondered how Bible translation actually happens on the field, it would be worth taking a few minutes to look at this slideshow.

What the slideshow demonstrates is that the initial translation of a Biblical text will be revised many times over before it is ready for publication. Of course, it is necessary to take time to make sure that the translation is accurate and that it communicates what it is supposed to in an appropriate fashion. Then again, to be honest, the whole process of checking and revision can be pretty frustrating for the translator.

Just imagine it. You have worked through a difficult passage in Paul; you've exegeted the Greek text, read the commentaries, consulted translations in related languages and finally come up with a great way to phrase the passage in the host language. Now, after all that sweat and effort, you have to allow fellow speakers of the language to comment on your work and perhaps suggest changes and after that a consultant will look it over and suggest even more changes. By the time publication comes round, your elegant, hard-worked prose, may well have changed completely.

All of these changes are to improve the translation. The translator knows this, but it is very hard to see something that you have struggled with changed because of the way other people react to it. Even when the translation is finished and published, there is always room for improvement. It took 150 years before the final text of the AV was actually agreed on and any Bible translation would benefit from a revision.

Now, nobody finds scrutiny and correction easy, I used to hate it when people pointed out that things we had drafted were not as clear as we thought they were. But, listening to that sort of input is all part of the job. If nothing else, translators should learn how to handle constructive criticism - they receive an awful lot of it!

Over the last few months, Wycliffe and some other organisations have been criticised about their approach to translating some terms in the New Testament (I blogged on this here and here). Some of this criticism has been of the constructive and helpful kind and some has been positively destructive and unhelpful.

Wycliffe's response to this criticism has been to ask an independant body, the World Evangelical Alliance, to convene a panel of experts to examine Wycliffe and its partner organsation SIL's translation policies with regard to translating terms such as the Son of God.

> *In the light of certain controversies about Bible translation, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), as a respected and trusted global evangelical association, has been asked to form a panel to independently review Wycliffe and SIL Internationalâ€™s translation of â€œGod the Fatherâ€ and the â€œSon of God.â€*
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> *â€œRejoicing that many Christians globally do not have to learn Hebrew or Greek to read*

> *Godâ€™s Word and wishing to strengthen Evangelical unity on the basis of Godâ€™s Word, the WEA has agreed to facilitate an independent external audit of Wycliffe and SIL Internationalâ€™s practice of the translation of â€œGod the Fatherâ€ and the â€œSon of Godâ€ ,â€ said Dr. Geoff Tunnicliffe, Secretary General of the WEA.*
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> *Wycliffe Global Alliance and SIL International as organizations dedicated to the accurate translation of Godâ€™s Word are committed to applying this reviewâ€™s recommendations. The panelâ€™s mandate includes reviewing SILâ€™s translation practices; setting boundaries for theologically acceptable translation methodology particularly in Muslim contexts; and suggesting how to practically implement these recommendations. (Read the statement in full.)*

Asking another organisation to take a long hard look at our translation policies is far from comfortable. We don't know what they willÂ recommend, but those who are directly involved in translation are committed to follow whatever recommendations are made.

Is this some sort of tacit admission that Wycliffe and SIL have done something wrong? No, not at all. But it certainly is a recognition that translations can always be improved and that by asking others to look at our policies we may well be able to do better in the future. To be honest, it is a huge privilege to know that a distinguished group of scholars are going to review what we are doing and make suggestions about how it can be improved. It may not be comfortable, but as all translators know, constructive criticism helps you do a better job.

During the time this review is being carried out, I don't plan to write anything further on this subject. This means that my unfinished series on this controversy, will remain unfinished - sorry about that, but blame the virus that has kept me low for the last month or so.