What Greek Filial Terms Did the New Testament Authors Have in their Toolboxes?

A Response to Brown, Gray and Gray

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Most organizations involved in new Bible translations for the hundreds of language communities still lacking the Bible are committed to following some form of "meaning-based" or "functional equivalence" translation philosophy. The translation consultant standards of the Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) to which the various Wycliffe Bible Translator organizations, as well as SIL International, subscribe require that approved consultants "be committed to the principles of functional equivalence/meaning-based translation."[2] There are Bible translators who do not agree with this approach to translation, and instead feel that only a "formal equivalence" approach constitutes faithful translation.[3] However, the majority of the translators and translation consultants who have been involved in the discussion over the past decade regarding the controversial "Muslim-Idiom Translation" (MIT) approach to certain key terms, such as "Father" and "Son" used in reference to persons of the Trinity, have been translators who hold a common commitment to translate the meaning of the original manuscripts, and not primarily the form.[4]

Of course, in order to do "meaning-based translation" we need to start by understanding the "meaning" of the original texts. Most Bible translators who affirm the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Biblical texts identify the authoritative meaning of the texts as the meaning that the original human authors intended their audiences to interpret from the text. The authors did not necessarily assume that their readers and listeners would understand the full meaning upon the first reading or hearing, or with inadequate background. Rather the original authors intended their writings for audiences whom they assumed would have a certain preparation, adequate background information and truth commitments, and a willingness to cooperate with the author through careful attention and study and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

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[1] A pseudonym; the author is a translator working in a sensitive location. The current paper is a revision of an earlier paper written in March 2012, and revised based on the comments of several reviewers. The author is grateful to all reviewers, including Rick Brown. The author acknowledges errors of fact, judgment and spelling remain wholly his own.

[2] The FOBAI "Statement on qualifications for translation consultants" states: "A consultant should…be committed to the principles of functional equivalence/meaning-based translation while also showing sensitivity to local attitudes and situations regarding specific translation styles." Available online at:
http://www.forum-intl.org/uploadedFiles/about_ifoba/Translation%20Consultant%20Qualifications.pdf

[3] A formal equivalence approach attempts to reproduce the literary forms of the original texts as much as possible in the receptor languages, at times with the result of obscuring the original meaning, at least for those less familiar with the original Greek and Hebrew grammar, discourse patterns and other literary forms. Of course, there is a spectrum between formal equivalence and functional equivalence with other important variables as well, with many "meaning-based" translators holding to a philosophy that prioritizes non-substitution of (or formally equivalent translation of) key thematic elements, and maintenance of recognizable concordance for these terms such that readers (listeners) are able to perceive a developing theme through diverse passages of the Bible. For a brief overview of some of issues involved in formal and functional equivalence approaches see D. A. Carson's article: "The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation—And Other Limits, Too" in *The Challenge of Bible Translation* (2003).

[4] For background on Muslim Idiom Translation, see the list of key articles at the end of this paper. "Muslim Idiom Translation" has been defined by its proponents as translation that is specifically contextualized for Muslim people groups by using Arabic style names (e.g. *Isa al-Masih* vs. Jesus Christ), traditional Islamic honorifics for prophets and other respected characters, *Allah* as the name for God, "non-literal rendering" of father-son language in reference to God, and natural syntax. Among translators following a meaning-based (functional equivalent) approach, some of these things are non-controversial. The main controversy among meaning-based translators has been concerning the types of "non-literal renderings" that have been considered to be functionally equivalent to the original father-son language (or "divine familial terms").

So how do we determine what meaning the authors such as Luke and John, who use the phrase "Son of God," expected their readers and listeners to receive from those words? For example, did the original readers of the gospels understand this term as a functional synonym for "Messiah" or "Christ" (χριστός), as some Muslim Idiom Translation (MIT) philosophy proponents were suggesting a few years ago?[5] The term χριστός , meaning "anointed" or "anointed one," occurs fifty times in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), usually in reference to priests and Davidic kings, so should that background be the primary context to inform our understanding and translation of the phrase "Son of God"? Or did the term "Son of God" primarily describe to the original readers the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with the father, such that terms like "beloved," or "protégé" could be used as accurate translations? Is this term merely a metaphor which we can reduce to a simile by talking about Jesus as being "like a son" to God? Not excluding the Messianic and relational meanings, could this term have a broader, richer and deeper meaning than any of these, including things that human sons share with their fathers, such as being of the same essence, resembling each other, and being of the same will?

One of the most recent articles by SIL translation consultant and MIT proponent Richard Brown on the topic appears in the Fall 2011 issue of the International Journal of Mission Frontiers, co-written with Leith Gray and Andrea Gray.[6] Entitled "A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible," the article's stated goal is to "show that the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible express divine familial relationships by using general and social familial terms rather than biological terms," as expressed in a different article by the same authors in the same issue of IJFM. The methodology of the article is to first examine certain anthropological categories for familial terms, then to present "filial and paternal terms, as well as terms for generation in the Bible." The implication of the article is that it will present a comprehensive look at the terminological system the biblical languages use for describing filial, paternal and generational relations. The authors attempt to demonstrate that the biblical authors intentionally chose Greek and Hebrew "social familial terms" over available "biological familial terms," and therefore translators should choose social familial terms in target languages over familial terms that are exclusively used for biological kinship relations.[7] The authors state their objective as follows:

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[5] For example, see Brown, Rick. 2005a. "Explaining the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts." *International Journal of Frontier Missions.* 22(3): 91–96 and Brown, Rick. 2005b. "Translating the Biblical Term 'Son(s) of God' in Muslim Contexts." *International Journal of Frontier Missions.* 22(4): 135–145. "In most of the occurrences in which 'Son of God' is used for Jesus, the usage is Messianic, meaning the focus is on Jesus' role as Lord and Savior. But as Jesus progressively reveals what it means to be the Christ, this concept enlarges to divine proportions…In Luke 4:41, Luke quotes the phrase 'Son of God' literally in a quotation but immediately paraphrases it as meaning 'the Christ'. From a linguistic perspective, this demonstrates that Luke wanted his audience to understand that the meaning of 'the Son of God' is included within the meaning of the term 'the Christ'. Again, this is enough to establish that they are synonyms…The title 'Son' occurs more often in John's Epistles than in the rest of the New Testament, 24 times, largely because John uses it in place of the title 'Lord', which never occurs in his Epistles. Nevertheless, he makes it clear that it is synonymous with 'the Christ': Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God…Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:1,5) There are additional passages in John and the Synoptics (Matt. 16:16; Mark 14:61 par.; John 11:27; 20:31) where we find the extended title 'the Christ the Son of God'. From a linguistic perspective, both noun phrases must have the same sense in this usage, i.e., they are fairly synonymous." "The Jews were using 'Son of God' as a title of the awaited Messiah, and it was shown in part one that the New Testament authors use 'the Christ' and 'the Son of God' synonymously in regard to Jesus. In passages where that is the case, the terms 'the Son' and 'the Son of God' can be translated by terms like 'the Christ' and 'the Christ of God'. If there is a passage in which 'Son' connotes belovedness, then this can be communicated by saying 'God's Beloved Christ'."

[6] Brown, Rick. Leith Gray, Andrea Gray. 2011. "A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible." *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 28(3): 121-125.

[7] The authors previously published a shortened version of the same article based upon the assertion that "the Bible uses the Greek and Hebrew social familial terms, not the biological ones." (Brown, Richard. Andrea Gray, Leith Gray. 2011 (Oct.) "Translating Familial Biblical Terms: An Overview of the Issue" *Mission Frontiers*.) This article includes a section entitled "The Difference between Biological and Social Familial Terms" in which the authors introduce their proposed dichotomy by stating that "The biological father is the one who begets the children. The social father is the one who raises the children as their father, looks after them, and has authority over them…A similar distinction exists between social son, which signifies a filial social relationship to a father, and biological son, which signifies a filial biological relationship to the source of one's paternal genes." This article is currently being hosted on several websites, including the official site for Wycliffe Global Alliance, formerly Wycliffe Bible Translators International, in which Wycliffe Bible Translators USA is a member organization.

"Through these examples, we will show that Hebrew and Greek use social terms for the divine familial relations, arguing that modern Bible translations should follow the Hebrew and Greek by using expressions in the target language for general or social familial relations."

The authors define "biological terms" as terms for "kinship relations based on procreation," inclusive or exclusive of social relations. "Social familial terms" are described as any term that can include a social relationship, possibly, but not necessarily, inclusive of biological relations. Given the wide-ranging influence these authors have over the translations and Scripture materials being produced in many language groups,[8] it is essential that we examine carefully their arguments in support of applying this "biological sonship" versus "social sonship" dichotomy to the original Biblical texts and the ramifications for our understanding of, and translation of, the terms "Son" and "son of God" as applied to Jesus, and "Father" as applied to God.

The present essay will limit itself to examining their summary of the Greek filial terminology employed in the New Testament and will focus on the question of whether this "biological versus social kinship terms" analysis is the most fitting way of analyzing the Greek filial terminological system, considering all the relevant data. Linguists agree that in determining meaning for a particular word or phrase, consideration of context is essential, and an important element of context is the full system in which a given term participates. Therefore this present essay will consider some other aspects of the Greek filial terminological system that were not included in the 2011 articles on this topic by Brown, Gray and Gray.

Brown and the Grays (hereafter "the authors") write:

> "The usage of *huios* in Judeo-Greek often followed that in Hebrew, so we find *huios* where Jesus would have used the word *ben*, or its Aramaic counterpart *bar*. Examples are when he mentioned "attendants of the bridegroom" (Mark 2:19), "members of the Kingdom" (Matt. 8:12), "officials of the king" (Matt. 17:25), "people of this age" (Luke 20:34), "people who belong to the evil one" (Matt. 13:38; cf. 1 John 3:10), and "disciples of a teacher" (Matt. 12:27), all of which translate Greek *huios*. Adam is presented as God's son, evidently because God created him (Luke 3:38). In the wider Greek context, writers used *huios* for non-biological relations as well. According to Irenaeus (180 AD), "when any person has been taught from the mouth of another, he is termed the son of him who instructs him, and the latter [is called] his father."[1] In this vein Peter refers to Mark as his son (1 Pet. 5:13), and Paul refers to Timothy in similar terms (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; cf. 1 John 2:1; 3 John 4)."

They claim that Paul refers to Timothy "in similar terms" but fail to mention that the term Paul uses exclusively for Timothy, Titus, Onesimus, and the Galatians is not υἱός (*huios*) but τέκνον (*teknon*).[9] In fact, the authors

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[8] The IJFM article explains that Rick Brown has worked in the Muslim world since 1977 and has a PhD in Biblical studies. He has also held various leadership positions within SIL for the past several decades, has published prolifically on the topic of translating Trinitarian terms for Muslim contexts, and has been a leading proponent of MIT translation philosophy. The IJFM article cites Leith and Andrea Gray as being involved in "research, consulting, and outreach projects" in Asia and Africa.

[9] The apostle John, who uses the term υἱός (*huios*) to describe Jesus' relationship to God the Father more than any other NT author, like Paul, seems to prefer the term τέκνον (*teknon*) or its diminutive τέκνιον (*teknion*) over υἱός (*huios*) to describe the social sonship relationships, for example, of the recipients of his three epistles to himself (1 John 2:1, 12, 28, 3:7, 18, 4:4, 5:21, 3 John 1:4), the relationship of the children of the "chosen lady" and her sister (2 John 1:1, 4, 13), Jezebel's children (Rev. 2:23), the relationship of believers to God (John 1:12, 11:52, 1 John 3:1, 2, 10, 5:2) and non-believers' relationship with the devil (1 John 3:10). Although believers' relationship to God as his children is not a result of biological procreation, John identifies its origin not so much in a legal act of adoption (as Paul does) but rather in a (metaphorical) process of birth (γεννάω, *gennaô*) that entails a transformation of their spiritual natures, not merely the establishment of a new social relationship. Among the texts just cited, John 1:12-13 affirms that those who have become God's children (τέκνα, *tekna*), who believe in his name, "have been born (γεννάω) from God." John takes the metaphor of birth a step further in 1 John 3:9-10: "Everyone born (γεννάω, perfect participle) from God does not sin, because his seed (σπέρμα, *sperma*) remains in him, and he cannot sin, because from God he has been born (γεννάω, perfect indicative). By this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: everyone who does not perform righteousness is not from God, also the one who does not love his brother [is not from God]." (author's translation) In some contexts, then, John uses τέκνον to identify a social relationship (his relation to the recipients of his epistles), and in others he invests τέκνον with metaphorical overtones associated with a biological father's life-imparting relationship to his children. Still,

never refer to the term τέκνον at all in their treatment of Biblical filial terms, although it is the second most common Greek term for describing a child's relationship to a parent, used 99 times in the New Testament. The fact that this term, like υἱός, has various figurative and social senses, such as "inhabitant," "disciple," etc. should not exclude it from consideration in a treatment of available Greek filial terms.

The authors go on to say:

> "When the Greek Bible talks of people being "sons of God" it uses *huios*, the broad word for son, not *gennêma* "offspring." Jesus is described as God's *huios* "son", but with regard to his biological ancestors he is often described as their *sperma* "offspring" (Gal. 3:16, 19; 2 Tim. 2:8; Acts 3:25; 13:23; cf. Gen. 3:15). To his stepfather Joseph he is described, not as Joseph's *sperma* "offspring," but as his *huios* "social son" (John 1:45). Again, in a normal biological family, the fathers and sons are both social and biological at the same time, but in some cases they are not related biologically, and if they have been disowned or abandoned, then they are no longer related socially."

Actually, when the Greek Bible talks of people being 'sons of God' it uses τέκνον (τέκνα θεοῦ) more often than it uses υἱός (υἱοὶ θεοῦ). (τέκνον in John 1:12, 11.52, Rom. 9:8, Eph. 5:1, Phil. 2:15, 1 John 3:1ff, 5:2, υἱός in Matt. 5:9, 5:45, 14:33, Luke 20:33, Rom. 8:14, 19, 9:26.) And it is not surprising that the New Testament authors avoided referring to God's chosen ones as γέννημα of God, given that this is a very marked and rare term, used only twice in the Septuagint (LXX)[10] and four times in the NT, and all four of those instances refer to the offspring of animals, specifically vipers! (Matt. 3:7, 12:4, 23:33, Luke 3:7.) The fact that this word is only used by NT authors in the single fixed phrase "brood of vipers," never by NT authors for human biological sons, strongly indicates that this was not a live option for the NT authors in expressing our relationship with God, and is not an argument in favor of preferring non-biological, social relationship terms. Therefore it seems unnecessary to include γέννημα (*gennêma*) in the article's chart of Greek familial relation terms, at least assuming this chart is supposed to present NT usage of Greek familial terms, which the context would lead the reader to assume.[11]

The chart is correct in treating υἱός as a broad enough term to cover biological, social and symbolic relationships. However, by leaving out τέκνον, which is used by NT authors such as Paul and John for a variety of social relational roles and figurative/symbolic relations, the chart gives the false impression that υἱός is the only noun available in the "Greek lexical toolbox" to communicate a social son-like relationship.

John generally reserves υἱός for prototypical biological sonship and descent relationships (including when referring to the "sons of Israel") and for references to Jesus' relationship with the Heavenly Father.

[10] The two LXX occurrences of γέννημα are in Judges 1:10 and in Sirach 10:18. The former apparently refers to the "offspring of Enak" but with no counterpart in the Hebrew Massoretic text for either LXX text, we cannot state conclusively why LXX translators chose this term in this context. Clearly γέννημα was not a natural option for NT Greek authors to express a biological/ontological father/son relationship in contrast to a "social sonship" relationship.

[11] The cognate verb of γέννημα (*gennêma*), γεννάω (*gennaô*, "beget; be born; give birth"), on the other hand, is very common in the NT, used 97 times, often with God as agent. (See John 1:13, 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 4, 18, etc.) Of course, to assume that the noun and verbal cognates by Koine times share exactly the same semantic range and usage would be to commit the etymological fallacy. Even if one were to use the cognate γεννάω to try to argue that γέννημα was a real possibility for the NT authors in describing the Son's relationship to the Father, it's hard to see how this would help the authors' case. As the authors acknowledge in their article, this verb, which often describes the result of sexual procreation, is also extensively used for spiritual, social and symbolic relationships, such as the spiritual rebirth of believers, as well as social sonship relationships, like that of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:15) and to Onesimus (Philemon 1:10). It is also used for the Father's relationship with the Son (Heb. 1:5, 5:5 quoting Ps. 2:7). So, similar to the situation with the word υἱός, we see the New Testament authors using the most common term with the broadest semantic range to describe how God is a Father to his children (Son and sons), even though that term can also include sexual reproduction. The NT authors apparently used these terms trusting that those who read their works in good faith would interpret them in the context in which they used them, for example, John's prologue to his gospel and Luke's description of Jesus' conception.

For example, as previously mentioned, Paul exclusively uses the term τέκνον when talking about "social," non-biological sonship of those whom he has discipled, (1 Tim. 1:2,1:18, 2 Tim. 1:2, 2:1, 1 Cor. 4:17, Phil. 2:22, Titus 1:4, Gal. 4:19 and Philemon 10), and John and Paul frequently use the term to describe our relationship to God as his children. This term is also used for various other types of symbolic (non-biological) and social sonship such as stones becoming children for Abraham (Matt. 3.9), Jesus' address to a paralytic (Matt. 9:2, Mark 2:5), wisdom's children (Luke 7:35), children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), children of light (Eph. 5:8), children of obedience (1 Peter 1:14), Mt. Sinai/Jerusalem's children (Gal. 4:25ff), children of the devil (1 John 3:10), children of the possibly symbolic women mentioned in 2 John, and of Jezebel in Rev. 2:20. Τέκνον is not used exclusively for symbolic or social sonship; it is also sometimes used by Matthew and Luke for biological children, e.g. Matt. 21:28, Luke 2:48, 15:31, especially in the plural, when the gender is not significant, or the focus is on descent, e.g. Luke 1:7, 20:31, Acts 7:5, 21:21. But τέκνον appears to be the term that the NT authors employed more commonly than υἱός when they want to focus on the relational aspect (social, descent, symbolic, etc.) and the term they employed less frequently than υἱός when describing male sons of the fathers who begat them (that is, the immediately preceding generation).

In the section cited above, the authors imply that the term υἱός, which they later gloss as "social son," was chosen by NT authors over the "biological familial term" σπέρμα (sperma), to describe Jesus' relationship to God the Father by arguing that it is υἱός, rather than the more marked term σπέρμα, that is used of Jesus' relationship to his adoptive father Joseph in John 1:45. But they fail to note that υἱός is the word used for both Jesus' (biological) relationship to Mary and also John the Baptist's to his parents, in Luke 1 (vv. 31 and 13, respectively). The fact that υἱός, rather than σπέρμα, is used of Jesus' adoptive father in no way proves that the NT authors actually had a lexical choice between a "social sonship term" υἱός and a "biological sonship term" σπέρμα for their description of Jesus' divine sonship. In fact, the term σπέρμα has very marked usage in the NT. When not used for plant seeds, it is used primarily for the posterity of Abraham or David, and in the parable about the seven dead brothers (because of the posterity issue associated with Levirate marriage laws), and in the very symbolic context of Rev. 12:17 (clearly symbolic, not biological, as it is the σπέρμα of a woman!). Though the authors gloss this term simply as "offspring," Louw & Nida describe the sense of the word as: "posterity, with emphasis upon the ancestor's role in founding the lineage - 'posterity, descendants, offspring.'"[12] Likewise, in addition to the two literal meanings of the seeds of plants and the semen of men, BAGD provides two figurative senses: "survivors, from whom a new generation will arise" and "descendants, children, posterity."[13] So it would be quite unusual for the NT authors to use this term to describe the biological relationship of any of the NT characters to their immediate fathers, and indeed we never see James and John referred to as σπέρμα of Zebedee, nor John the Baptist as σπέρμα to Zechariah and Elizabeth; and Jesus is never described as σπέρμα of Mary. Rather James and John are υἱοὶ to Zebedee, and Jesus is the υἱός of Mary. Neither Matthew nor Luke's genealogies use the term σπέρμα.[14] The passages that the authors cite in which Jesus is referred to as the σπέρμα of Abraham or David all deal with the specific fulfillment of OT prophecy to long dead ancestors, not with an intimate relationship with a living father.

Joseph himself is referred to as a υἱός rather than a σπέρμα of David (Matt. 1:20). In theory we could interpret this as "social sonship" also (that is, by the authors' definition, a relationship including more than just

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[12] Louw, Johannes P., Eugene A. Nida. 1998. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains.* United Bible Societies.

[13] Bauer, Walter, W. F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Fredrick W. Danker. 1979. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Second Edition. University of Chicago Press. Also, consider the social/spiritual usage of the term σπέρμα in Gal. 3:29 as Paul addresses believers, including those with no biological connection to Abraham: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring (σπέρμα), heirs according to promise." (ESV) This mirrors Paul's statement earlier in the chapter: "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons (υἱοί) of Abraham." (3:7, ESV) Clearly the distinction between σπέρμα and υἱός and the NT authors' decision about when to employ one over the other is not based upon categories of "biological" versus "social sonship."

[14] Matthew prefaces his genealogy by identifying Jesus as "son (υἱός) of David, son (υἱός) of Abraham" (1:1). He then traces the intergenerational chain of father-son relationships linking those notable ancestors to Jesus the Messiah using the verb "begat" (γεννάω) repeatedly. Luke's genealogy opens with the identification of Jesus as "son (υἱός), as it was supposed, of Joseph" (3:23). Thereafter the noun υἱός is unstated but implied to relate son to father in preceding generations. Thus neither Evangelist employs σπέρμα to refer to the relationship between biological fathers and their progeny in the next generation.

biological ancestry), but it's hard to see in what sense Joseph, a carpenter who never sat on the throne of Israel, and lived a millennium after David, could have had any kind of on-going social relationship with King David, or why Matthew would want to focus on this here. Clearly the meaning has to be that Joseph was a biological descendent, a "great-grandson," to David, in other words a "biological son" (grandson) by the authors' definition.

In the following verse (Matt. 1:21), the angel informs Joseph that his fiancée Mary will *bear*[15] a υἱός, not a σπέρμα or a γέννημα. Here the primarily biological meaning of the word υἱός would be difficult to contest as the angel has just said "what has been conceived (γεννάω) in her," and there is no focus or indication yet as to what kind of on-going social relationship Mary will have with her son. We know, of course, that Mary did have a biological relationship to Jesus and Joseph only had a social relationship to Jesus, whereas Joseph only had a biological relationship to King David, and no social relationship. And yet the common Greek sonship term υἱός is used for all these three types of relationships, regardless of whether they are based on biological parenthood without social contact, social contact without biological parenthood or both social contact and biological parenthood. Thus it would seem that, contra the authors' claims, the gospel writer Matthew did not have a real choice between the term σπέρμα and υἱός in this context.[16] The authors' distinction between exclusively "biological familial terms" and "social familial terms" appears to be foreign to the Greek filial terminological system and in fact does not fit the Greek NT data well.

The authors summarize their argument as follows:

> In summary, Hebrew and Greek have relational nouns that signify a biological son, but they are not used in the Bible to express divine sonship. The commonly used filial terms, Hebrew *ben* and Greek *huios*, signify a son, usually social, whether generated by procreation, by marriage, by inheritance, by adoption, by teaching and mentoring, by patronage, or by faith and grace (Gal. 4:19). These are the terms used in the Bible to express divine sonship, along with the terms for an only son and a firstborn son. These are social as well, because they signify an ongoing relationship regardless of its manner of origin. In translation, if the target language has a filial expression for social sonship or general sonship, i.e., one that does not entail procreative generation when used to express divine sonship, then this would be the closest semantic equivalent, whether it consists of one word or a phrase. The use of strictly biological terms to express divine sonship is therefore inaccurate.

The authors have failed to show that the so-called biological relational terms cited here, σπέρμα and γέννημα, are valid choices for any of the contexts they have cited. They have failed to mention τέκνον and its diminutive τέκνιον (*teknion*), that were available in Koiné Greek for use to describe various types of non-biological, social son-like relations, such as the relationship between Paul and the Galatians described in Gal. 4:19.[17] The

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[15] Τίκτω (*tikto*), used of biological childbirth in the NT in Matt. 1:21, 23, 25; 2:2; Luke 1:31, 57; 2:6, 7, 11; John 16:21; Gal. 4:27; Rev. 12:2, 4, 3, 13; of farmland "bearing" crops in Heb. 1:15; and metaphorically of desire "conceiving" and "giving birth to" sin, evoking childbirth imagery in James 1:15.

[16] The fact that the LXX translation of Genesis 19:32 uses as the term σπέρμα does not support a claim that this was a possible word choice for Matthew. In that context clearly the focus of Lot's daughters' statement is on preserving an offspring or posterity for their father's family line. ("δεῦρο καὶ ποτίσωμεν τὸν πατέρα ἡμῶν οἶνον καὶ κοιμηθῶμεν μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξαναστήσωμεν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν σπέρμα" Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father. ESV)" Because the Sonship of Jesus to the Father has nothing to do with the preservation of surviving offspring to outlive God the Father and carry on his family line, it is unlikely that using σπέρμα to describe Jesus' relationship to God the Father would have even entered Matthew's mind as a possible word choice.

[17] The authors here specifically list Gal. 4:19 as an example of the "Greek huios" signifying a "a son, usually social" generated "by faith and grace," although Gal. 4:19 does not actually contain the term υἱός, but rather τέκνα, the plural of τέκνον. A fuller treatment of the Greek words available to the authors for describing the social relationship of the Son to the Father should also include the term παῖς (*pais*) used of Jesus in Matt. 12:18; Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30; with the sense of 'servant,' echoing the use of this term by the LXX translation of Isaiah 42-53 and other passages. Had the New Testament authors been concerned to avoid a term with any biological/ontological sonship associations, perhaps παῖς (*pais*) was

authors state that the Greek term υἱός signifies "a son, usually social…" because this term, along with those for an only son and a firstborn son "signify an ongoing relationship regardless of its manner of origin." However, the authors have not considered the significant number of the 377 occurrences of υἱός in the NT where the focus appears to be purely biological, procreative sonship, with no focus on social relations, ongoing or otherwise.[18] Remarkably, the authors have made no reference to the standard tools for Koiné Greek such as the BAGD and BDAG,[19] which certainly include various social and figurative senses, but do not support a claim that υἱός is being used in juxtaposition to other "biological sonship terms" that only describe results of sexual procreation with no ongoing relationship, nor support the authors' claim that a key semantic distinctive of υἱός in comparison to other filial terms is a focus on an ongoing social relationship. So the authors have not satisfactorily answered a key question regarding how the meaning of the terms "Son" and "Son of God" should be understood and translated, namely, that if the NT authors actually wanted to convey to their readers a relationship between Jesus and God that was **more than** an ongoing social relationship, that was in fact, a type of eternal generation analogous to biological reproduction, what Greek term **other than** υἱός would they have chosen? If they meant to say (as John 5:17-18 portrays Jesus' hearers as understanding him to claim—see below) that Jesus' relationship to God was what the church has confessed it to be since its early centuries, even long before the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, then what other word than υἱός was readily available to them to express that unique Trinitarian identity-relationship?

The authors' conclusion—that "if the target language has a filial expression for social sonship or general sonship," this term should be used over a term that *exclusively* implies biological generation because it would be more accurate—is sound. However, because their articles have failed to consider all the components in the Greek filial terminological system, an inaccurate impression has been created that the NT authors were choosing υἱός over and against several available, common, exclusively procreative sonship terms, perhaps to avoid a biological understanding of the term. In fact, the NT authors were more likely choosing υἱός, a term whose prototypical, default meaning did indeed include biological reproduction, over and against another term, τέκνον, a term more frequently employed than υἱός when the focus was on purely social, non-ontological (essential) relationships. The authors' statement that "the use of strictly biological terms to express divine sonship is therefore inaccurate," fails to recognize the fact that the most common sonship terms in any language will include biological, sexual reproduction as a semantic element in prototypical situations, as the Greek term υἱός does. The translator's job is not to avoid using any terms that could, in a prototypical situation, be perceived to be "strictly biological,"[20] but rather to translate using the most common filial term and formula that language possesses, just as the NT authors chose. Wrong understandings should be limited by presenting

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another term they could have used more widely instead of using the term υἱός (huios). (See BAGD senses for παῖς #1 β and #1 γ.) The fact that the NT authors did frequently choose to use υἱός rather than παῖς in various passages to describe Jesus' relationship to his Heavenly Father is another indicator that the communicative intent in these particular passages is likely more than would be communicated by using receptor language terms equivalent to "servant," contra Arie de Kuiper and Barclay Newman, in their article "Jesus, Son of God—a Translation Problem." (*The Bible Translator* 28:4 (1977) 432–38.)

[18] Consider the use of υἱός in the following passages in which the focus does not appear to be on an ongoing social relationship: Matt. 1:1, 20, 9:27, 20:20, 20:31, 21:5, 23:35, 26:37, 27:56; Mark 10:35, 46, 47, 48, 12:35; Luke 1:16, 3:2, 5:10, 18:38, 39, 19:9, 20:41; John 1:42; Acts 5:21, 7:16, 7:37, 9:15, 10:35, 13:21, 26, 23:16; Rom 9:27, 2 Cor. 3:7, 13; Heb. 7:5; Rev 2:14, 7:4, 21:12. While some of these, such as "son of David" and "sons of Israel," could be argued to represent a symbolic ongoing social relationship of clan identity with the "social father," even though there is no personal social relationship, others, such as a "son of a donkey" in Matt. 21:5, clearly denote nothing more than simply biological generation, with no ongoing relationship of any kind. The point is that the New Testament usage seems to support an understanding of υἱός as the most basic, most common, broadest term for sonship in Koiné Greek, including the semantic element in prototypical examples of biological descent resulting from sexual union.

[19] Bauer, Walter, Fredrick W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich. 2001. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Third Edition. University of Chicago Press.

[20] Contra the original 2011 "SIL International Statement of Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms" which states: "Scripture translations should promote understanding of the term "Son of God" in all its richness, including his filial relationship with the Father, while avoiding any possible implication of sexual activity by God." SIL International. (http://www.sil.org/translation/divine_familial_terms.htm; accessed 21 January 2012; this wording is no longer available online, and wording in a new version of the "best practices" document concludes this sentence with: "…while avoiding the implication of sexual activity by God as much as possible.")

the terms within the contexts that the NT authors themselves provide (for example, Luke and Matthew's nativity narratives, and John's prologue), as well as through extra-textual teaching by the church and through appropriate media, including paratextual notes and essays. When the early church confronted various heretical understandings of what is meant by the "God the Son" and "God the Father," they responded by teaching and explanation, not by changing the terminology of the sacred text.

Regarding the relationships of the Trinity, the church has historically interpreted the paternal and filial terms used by the NT authors to be describing a relationship of shared nature (ontology, that is, not just intimacy) that is analogous to the relationship between biological fathers and sons of created beings but also transcends the creaturely relationship in a way that we cannot fully understand or explain. For example, John's gospel records that Jesus' listeners understood Jesus' references to God as his "Father" to imply a claim of equality with God, and considered this blasphemy (John 5:17-18, see also 10:28-33). As John Piper has recently written,[21] John has, in his prologue, already given his readers the keys to understand that Jesus' listeners were not wrong in their understanding: in referring to himself as the "Son" and God as "his Father" he was indeed claiming to be equal to the Father ontologically, not just intimate with the Father relationally. The church has understood that God's description of his own nature in terms of being "Father" and "Son" is not a anthropomorphism or idiom God uses to condescend to our social environment, but rather is an eternal reality that creaturely fatherhood and sonship were created to mirror, albeit in a limited way and since the fall, in way degraded by the effects of sin. In other words, just as we were created in God's image, and not the reverse, human fatherhood and sonship were created in God's image—God as "Father" and God as "Son" are not verbal creations modeled after human society.

In summary, as has been clear to speakers and students of Greek for over two millennia, υἱός is the normal, default Greek word for an intimate, genetic, biological father-son relationship. As the most basic and natural word for prototypical human sons in relation to their fathers (and mothers), it had developed a number of other social and figurative uses by Koiné times, including being used for adoptive sons and social relations that are similar to a father-son relationship in some way. The usage of υἱός in the NT, when compared with τέκνον, σπέρμα, and γέννημα, does not justify using a less natural, more restricted term for socially-focused sonship when translating the term υἱός in reference to Jesus' relationship to his father, God. If it were the objective of the NT writers to focus specifically on the ongoing relational aspect of Jesus' relationship to God the Father, and to carefully guard against any possibility of understanding the term to mean biologically-generated sonship, it seems likely they would have used another "tool" in their Greek "toolboxes," that is, τέκνον (τέκνιον), the term more frequently used in the New Testament for the type of on-going relational social sonship such as Paul had with Timothy and Titus, and John had with the recipients of his epistles. Yet, we find that not one of the inspired Biblical authors referred to the second person of the Trinity as τέκνον θεοῦ (*teknon* of God), most likely because they found that the breadth and depth of the term υἱός could be matched by no other word when speaking of the relationship of the Son to the Father in the Trinity. More restricted terms might avoid certain wrong understandings, but would also leave out certain important semantic elements essential to our understanding of the eternal Sonship of the Son with respect to his Father.

So instead, in order to communicate the full range of meaning they understood to be inherent in Jesus' identity as the "Son of God," the NT authors found it suitable to use the most natural and default, least marked and restricted, term for expressing a prototypical father-son relationship that the Greek language possessed: υἱός. They were surely not naive to the wrong understandings that the use of this term could cause among Greco-Roman polytheists, as well as feelings of extreme offense and defilement the term did provoke among absolute monotheistic Jews. As the apostle Peter wrote, the NT authors knew that the Scriptures contain truths that "are hard to understand," and "which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction" (I Peter 3:16). But as faithful witnesses, they did not feel at liberty to reduce the revelation of the Triune nature of God that they had received in order to avoid those misunderstandings and offenses. Therefore, in order to translate this revelation from God that has been passed down to us in a manner as faithful to the communicative intent of the original authors (and Author) as possible, should we not also select the most natural filial term available in

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[21] Piper, John. 2012. "John's Solution." *World Magazine*, March 10, 2012.

the toolboxes of the languages into which we translate,[22] and consistently and clearly use that in the translated text itself,[23] and then pray and teach in faith that He will "open their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45)?

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[22] Our understanding of the semantics of the Greek term υἱός and the strong preference of the NT authors to use this term over other available terms leads us to the conclusion that our best strategy to avoid reducing the profound meaning(s) of this most important of key terms is to use the most natural and common filial term that the language possesses. However, this conclusion should not be misunderstood as a call for a strictly literal, grammatically word-for-word, equivalent translation of the phrase "υἱός (τοῦ) θεοῦ" (Son of God) with something formally similar to "son/child.male + definite + genitive/possessive + supreme deity.monadic" in all languages. The author is personally acquainted with languages in which the natural, default word for "son" is not gender specific (gender is indicated elsewhere by pronouns or classifiers when necessary) and has heard of reports of at least one language in which the phrase closest to "Son of God" is already a common fixed phrase with a different idiomatic meaning. In such situations "child of God," with the male pronouns or classifiers when in reference to Jesus, or a formula such as Peter's "Son of the living God" (to avoid the indigenous idiom) may be necessary (Matt. 16:16, also Rom. 9:26). Of course, there are other issues that must be considered as well, such as preserving recognizable concordance, such that readers (listeners) are able to come to understand the similarities between Abraham's son, Isaac, and God's son, Jesus.

[23] We do not find it sufficient to use a given language's natural filial terminology only in a footnote or other paratextual explanation. Footnotes and other paratextual material are often not considered to be inspired and authoritative. Brown and the Grays write: "readers and listeners revere the text more highly than the paratext, making it difficult for the paratext to overrule any wrong meaning in the text." ("A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms.") Elsewhere Brown describes how Muslims feel that in a holy book, "The text of Scripture should be set apart by framing it with a special border. Except for verse numbers, anything extra-textual should be outside the frame, including section headings and notes." Clearly this would seem to indicate a clear distinction for Muslim readers between inspired text and non-inspired notes, and thus the common, natural filial term that translates υἱός cannot be relegated to the uninspired notes. (Brown, Rick. 2006. "Muslim Worldviews and the Bible: Bridges and Barriers." (part 2 of 3) *International Journal of Frontier Missions,* 23(2):48-56.*)*