

TOWARDS A FAITHFUL WITNESS

A Response To Wycliffe/SIL's *Considering Overture 9*

By Scott Seaton

Introduction

In June 2011, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) approved “A Call To Faithful Witness,” an overture that declared as “unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider Movement or any other translations of the Bible that remove from the text references to God as ‘Father’ (*pater*) or Jesus as ‘Son’ (*huios*).”

In order to focus on the issue itself, the overture intentionally did not reference any missions organization. Prior to the Assembly, however, the leadership of Wycliffe/SIL asked an SIL translator to prepare a response, called “Considering Overture 9,” included in full below. This document was sent to the Stated Clerk of the PCA and distributed to PCA pastors and elders at the General Assembly. The version of the overture referenced in “Considering Overture 9” and submitted to the Assembly included explanatory footnotes,¹ but it is the practice of the PCA to remove footnotes upon adoption. The final version of the overture can be found at the end of this document. Subsequent to the Assembly, critics of “Muslim-Idiom Translations” asked me as lead author of the overture to prepare a response to “Considering Overture 9,” given its public nature.

Note: As an organization, Wycliffe and SIL have a heritage they—and the entire Christian Church—should rightfully be proud of. Further, not all within Wycliffe or SIL are advocating for removing familial language; in fact, many disagree. But in words describing John Wycliffe’s commitment to the “*sufficiency and supremacy* of Holy Scripture,” the way forward is to evaluate all in light of the Word of God:

The true Christian was intended by Christ to prove all things by the Word of God, all churches, all ministers, all teaching, all preaching, all doctrines, all sermons, all writings, all opinions, all practices. These are his marching orders. Prove all by the Word of God; measure all by the measure of the Bible; compare all with the standard of the Bible; weigh all in the balances of the Bible; examine all by the light of the Bible; test all in the crucible of the Bible. That which cannot abide the fire of the Bible, reject, refuse, repudiate, and cast away. This is the flag which he nailed to the mast. May it never be lowered!²

Throughout this paper, the following fonts were used in order to clarify authors:

Bold: Excerpt from PCA Overture 9, “A Call To Faithful Witness”

Normal: Wycliffe/SIL’s response, “Considering Overture 9”, by Larry Chico

Italics: Response to “Considering Overture 9,” by Scott Seaton

¹ <http://www.pcaac.org/2011GeneralAssembly/Overture%209%20Potomac%20Faithful%20Witness%2031-11.pdf>.

² “Light From Old Times,” John Ryle, Wycliffe House, 1902, p. 3 www.tracts.ukgo.com/ryle_wycliffe.doc.

[Wycliffe:] CONSIDERING OVERTURE 9

The following was prepared by one scholar – an experienced translator, Scripture Use consultant, missiologist and academic with uncommon experience working in the Muslim world.

At the request of both Wycliffe and SIL leadership, he extracted the key claims and statements from the “Overture 9” proposal that has been put before the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) upcoming General Assembly. Beneath each claim he compiled a response based on comments and feedback from translators and consultants directly involved in translation projects done for Muslim language communities.

At the conclusion he provided links to some resources for further reading on this topic.

“some groups have produced Bible translations that have replaced references to Jesus as ‘Son’ (*huios*) with terms such as ‘Messiah’ . . .”

[Chico:] The scholars who are most aware of Bible translations that have been done for Muslim audiences are not aware of any approved Bible translations that systematically use the term “Messiah” for the term *huios tou theou* in Greek, nor are they aware of any that do not present and explain the Father-Son terminology of the original-language text. Consultants always insist that where a functional or non-familial alternative to the traditional translation for “Son” or “Father” is used, that the paratext (introductions, glossaries, articles and footnotes accompanying the Scripture text) explain this and provide the traditional rendering.

[Seaton:] *The central premise of the overture is this: there simply is no “functional alternative” for God’s identity as Father, Son and Spirit. He exists eternally and ontologically as God the Father, Son and Spirit, and thus he reveals himself in those familial terms—not as metaphor, but as who he is in his person. To replace “Father” and “Son” with a “non-familial alternative” is to portray God as exactly that: non-familial. But 1 John 4:14 says, “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” Thus, it is God as Father who sent God the Son. The Sonship of Jesus cannot be obscured; it is at the very heart of the gospel: Without the Son, there is no cross. Without the cross, there is no gospel.*

Regarding Wycliffe’s response, several comments either misrepresent the overture or obfuscate the issue.

First, Wycliffe says they do not know of approved Bible translations that systematically replace the phrase “huios tou theou” with “Messiah.” The overture does not assert that. Instead, it says that some translations have replaced references

- *for “Son” (*huios*), i.e. not specifically or exclusively the phrase “Son of God.”*
- *with other terms “such as Messiah,” i.e. “Messiah” is simply one example.*

Thus, the overture never claims a “systematic,” one-for-one replacement of “Son of God” with “Messiah,” and its claims cannot be dismissed simply by saying “scholars” are unaware of translations that “systematically use the term ‘Messiah’ for the term ‘huios tou theou.’” What the overture asserts is true. Translations indeed exist that replace references to Jesus as “Son” with terms such as “Messiah.” For example, the 2005 Bangla translation of the “Injil Sharif” that was financed by Global Partners For Development explicitly replaced “Son” with “Messiah.” Thus, in Mark 1:11, “And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased,” the word “Son” is replaced with “Messiah.” The 2005 translation lacks the familial affirmation of God the Father to the Son at the outset of Jesus’ ministry. “The Lives of the Prophets” (“Stories of the Prophets”) produced by SIL, and “The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ,” produced in conjunction with an SIL advisor, similarly replace “Son” with other terms.

Second, the overture never refers to such translations as being “approved”—simply that they exist. It would be easy to distance oneself from a translation by saying that it was not “approved” by whatever standard of approval was subjectively deemed necessary—and miss the main issue altogether. That is misleading. The main issue is that agencies are producing these translations at all. The added insult is that many supporters are unknowingly funding such projects due to lack of transparency.

Third, Larry Chico confirms SIL’s approved practice of removing familial language in the statement, “where functional or non-familial alternative to the traditional translation for ‘Son’ or ‘Father’ is used.” This is deeply disturbing and would alarm most supporters. Moreover, this practice is not mitigated by saying that consultants “always insist” that explanations are given in the paratext when alternatives are used. This may be SIL’s official position; however, the overture does not refer to the “insistence” of any particular Bible translation agency, but only to actual translation practices. But more importantly, the overture expressly rejects removal of familial language from the text itself. In other words, relegating familial language only to the paratext is not adequate for God’s purposes of revelation. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” While paratext is helpful, as a pastor, I teach, reprove, correct and train from the text, not the footnotes. The text—not the paratext--should be considered authoritative, as God’s words “breathed-out.”

Fourth, appealing to the use of paratexts may satisfy some supporters, but it begs the question of what is actually written in the paratext. How do we know that the explanations are orthodox? If translators are willing to remove “Father” and “Son” from the text, who knows what kinds of explanations they may offer in the footnotes?

Finally, changing key terms such as “Father” and “Son” undermines the perceived credibility of the Bible. Removing familial language alters the actual meaning of the text and implies that translators are free to make whatever changes they deem necessary. Muslims have already been taught the Bible has been corrupted in transcription. Why should any Christian agency prove their claim?

“some groups . . . have replaced references . . . in order to be more acceptable to Muslims”

[Chico:] What Muslims find unacceptable about kinship terminology is not the theological meaning associated with it, but the sexual implications that they perceive in the phrases themselves. Professional Bible translation specialists and the local translators they work with are strongly committed to faithfully communicating the original meaning of the inspired Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic sources, making them clear, natural and accurate. They work to communicate this meaning as fully and accurately as possible, using expressions native to the language rather than imports from other dialects and communities. They test draft translation passages with members of the target audience, using alternative wordings, to find out how each wording is understood by them. The local translators and leading believers then decide which terms and wordings should be used, based on the testing.

[Seaton:] *Every generation of the Church is given a sacred trust. As Paul says to the church in Thessalonica, “We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.” (1 Thess 2:4). We also have been given a stewardship, to faithfully guard and proclaim the gospel. What we say cannot be determined by whether the audience is pleased by the message.*

Thus, the overture intentionally does not specify the reasons why Muslims find “Son” objectionable, because their reaction has no bearing on what God actually said. Determining whether the offense to Muslims is the sexual implication or the divine implication—or something else entirely—is not the focus of the overture and should not be the focus of a translation. Again, audience understanding is important in the challenging work of translation, but it cannot alter what God has revealed.

Rather than focus on the nature of Muslims’ objections, the overture simply declares that some groups have removed the term “Son” in order to make the translation more acceptable. As evidence, I referenced in the footnote the conversation I had with the translation advisor for Global Partners. I asked her why they replaced “Son” with “Messiah,” and she said that Muslims cannot accept the idea that God could have a son. Her response was an interpretative, sociological answer, not a biblical, theological one. And her type of response seems shared by many translation consultants who support Muslim-Idiom Translations and advocates of Insider Movements.

While objections of any sort cannot change God’s revelation of himself as Father and Son, many missionaries and believers from Muslim backgrounds disagree with the premise that, “What Muslims find unacceptable about kinship terminology is not the theological meaning associated with it, but the sexual implications . . .” The experience of many serving in the Muslim world is that Muslims’ primary objection to the term is not sexual but theological. “Son of God” indicates that God’s nature exists in more than one person, and that he is immanent. This Scriptural teaching, affirmed by the historic and global Church, is offensive to the Islamic understanding of absolute monotheism and transcendence. The solution is not to remove God’s own term for himself from the text,

but to explain it in the paratext. Certainly, this explanation will take time. But the witness of tens of thousands of Muslims around the world who have come to faith in Jesus as the Son of God, is that the Holy Spirit indeed is able to speak to their hearts, too.

Footnote iii: It is implied that translations for Muslim audiences “alter primary doctrines such as the authority of Scripture, the Trinity, and the necessity of Christ’s atonement.”

[Chico:] We have not seen that the translations in question provide any less evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity, the authority of Scripture, and the necessity of Christ’s atonement.

Translators would be very concerned if this were the case, and would want to revise them, because they are concerned to accurately communicate Biblical truth. It is for this reason they choose to use language and explanations that accurately communicate what the Bible in its original languages teaches. Translators repeatedly test the translations with members of the audience to find out how they understand them, so they would know if the translation was not conveying biblical doctrine correctly.

[Seaton:] *When God says in Deuteronomy 4:2, “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it,” it is because our doing so changes our understanding of God and his ways. Thus, on June 10, 2011, the Presbyterian Church in America overwhelmingly approved the overture, including its language that “such removals compromise doctrines of the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture.”*

Consider the doctrine of the Trinity, to see the impact of removing “Father” and “Son.” “Trinity” is a word we use to affirm the biblical witness that God exists eternally as one God in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit. These terms are not mere metaphors. Instead, they refer to God’s eternal person. As theologian John Murray said in “Jesus, the Son of God,”

The argument for the eternal Fatherhood and for its correlate the eternal Sonship must be extended one further step. There is what may be called the theological consideration. The doctrine of the Trinity is concerned with the differentiation within the Godhead that is necessary, intrinsic, and eternal. If there is Trinity there must be the distinction of persons and therefore the distinguishing property of each person, a property that is incommunicable.³

Thus, there is the property of God as Father that makes him distinct from God the Son or God the Spirit. This distinction is not simply for our comprehension of God, but is “necessary, intrinsic and eternal.” In other words, these eternal distinctions of God as Father, Son and Spirit are what “makes,” so to speak, the Trinity. According to Scripture, God does not become Trinitarian by his works of Creation or Redemption. He is eternally One God in three Persons, and therefore, “Father” and “Son” are not mere titles or

³ “Jesus, the Son of God” in “Collected Writings of John Murray, vol. 4” by John Murray, p. 66.

analogies. They are terms that God uses for himself, eternally. Take away God as Father or Son, and you have no Trinity.

The overture also asserts that removing familial language compromises doctrines of “the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture.” For example:

- *Person of Jesus: the Sonship of Jesus is a primary way he revealed his divinity; the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus for calling God his Father. Jesus didn't correct them or change the term. Removing familial language not only obscures Jesus' deity, it also veils the unity of the Godhead, who exists in familial love and intimacy.*
- *Work of Jesus: God did not simply send a separate Lamb; the Father sent his Son. The atonement is the self-sacrifice of God on our behalf, freely given by grace. That is the gospel. Removing the Father and Son is preaching another gospel.*
- *Scripture: Removing familial language presumes we have authority to change what God really said, what is true about himself and what we need to know.*

Chico asserts they “have not seen that the translations in question provide any less evidence” for these doctrines. Perhaps they have not. But others have. Writing of the doctrinal impact of removing familial language, “Phil” offers the following from the context of Bangladesh:

One such tragedy is the proliferation of Insider thinking among Bible translators. A translation of the gospels in the Bengali language eliminates all reference to ‘Son of God’ and all other filial language within the Godhead. I was told by Lebu in Dhaka in September, 2007, that all the older converts from Islam under his care recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. The younger generation, which is being fed Insider ideology and reads the Insider translation of the gospels, is no longer clear on the identity of Jesus.⁴

Footnote v: “[Rick Brown’s solution to Muslim misunderstanding of the term ‘Son of God’] is to replace ‘Son’ in the New Testament with more acceptable terms such as Christ,’ ‘Messiah,’ or ‘Word’ . . .”

[Chico:] This is a distortion of what Rick Brown wrote. In the article this overture cites in IJFM 22:3, Dr. Brown emphasizes the importance of explaining this term to Muslims, since they believe that it means that God had sex with a woman and produced a child and is therefore a damnable insult to assert. In IJFM 22:4, the bulk of the article simply documents different approaches translators have taken to dealing with this term, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each one. His main point, set apart in bold print, is that if a non-kinship synonym is used in the text, then the kinship expression must be presented in the introduction and notes, with “...explanations of the full meaning of these terms. For a given context, the explanation of these terms should include everything that was originally conveyed by the Hebraic sonship term in that context. In

⁴ “A Response To Kevin Higgins’ ‘Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion And Insider Movements In Biblical Perspective,’” vol. 5:4, p. 118 <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/Phil-ResponsetoHiggins-August2009.pdf>.

this way one can preserve and communicate the full meaning of the phrase in each context and avoid communicating the wrong semantic and emotional meanings.” In addition, he states “the introduction or an introductory mini-article should explain the various senses of the term and how each one has been translated” and that this should be in accord with evangelical biblical scholarship. But the overture omits all this and erroneously states that Brown advocates removing all mention of the kinship expressions used in the original languages. In the October 2007 Evangelical Missions Quarterly he explained why it is sometimes more effective to present the Hebraic expressions in the introduction and notes, where they can be explained, rather than in text.

[Seaton:] *This footnote was attached to the assertion in the body of the overture that “some groups have produced Bible translations that have replaced references to Jesus as Son’ (huios) with terms such as ‘Messiah’ in order to be more acceptable to Muslims.” Frankly, most Christians I have spoken with find this assertion hard to believe. Few have ever heard of Insider Movements or translations that remove familial language, in large part because agencies and missionaries have not been transparent with their supporters. A fair question any agency or missionary should ask themselves is, “would our supporters be shocked or angry to discover something we are doing?” But supporters do not know. To substantiate this claim that the Scriptures are being altered, Rick Brown is quoted in the footnote as saying,*

“Muslims have heard that Christians call Jesus the ‘offspring of God’, and this has been presented to them repeatedly as exhibit A in the case against Christianity and its ‘corruption’ of the Bible. So there is a dire need to correct these misunderstandings and to invalidate the accusation in a timely manner. This can be done in communications of every sort, but by all means it should be done in the Scriptures” (emphasis added).⁵

In various articles, Rick Brown has advocated for alternatives to familial language.⁶ Rather than denying that such replacements are being made, Larry Chico defends the practice of explaining “kinship” terms in the introduction and notes instead. Further, he cites Rick Brown’s affirmation that it is sometimes “more effective” to present the familial terms in the introduction and notes “rather than in the text.” In so doing, Wycliffe/SIL is unequivocally defending the practice of removing “Father” and “Son” from the text. At the PCA’s General Assembly, pastors were astonished that Wycliffe/SIL would so explicitly defend the very practice that the overture was deeming “unfaithful.”

Furthermore, the overture was careful to use terms like “some groups,” rather than making a broad indictment of all agencies involved in Insider Movements. And in order to focus on the issue itself and not particular agencies, the overture never cites an agency

⁵ “Explaining the Biblical Term ‘Son(s) of God’ in Muslim Contexts,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 2005, 22(3) p. 95. http://www.30-days.net/reveal/wp-content/uploads/91-96brown_sog.pdf.

⁶ e.g. *ibid*; “Translating the Biblical Term ‘Son(s) of God’ in Muslim Contexts,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 2005, 22(4): 135-145. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/22_4_PDFs/135-145%20Brown_SOG.pdf.

by name. Thus, it was all the more surprising for PCA pastors to discover from “Considering Overture 9” that Wycliffe/SIL was explicitly defending the practice of removing familial language for God from the text.

“in recent initiatives known as “Insider Movements,” some groups have produced Bible translations...”

[Chico:] This statement makes an unwarranted connection between “insider movements” and translations into the authentic idiom of Muslim language communities. Some “insider movements” are using word-for-word translations. In most cases, church planters and those believers who do not belong to “insider movements” are the ones who have pushed for natural-language translations for Muslims.

[Seaton:] *Again, the overture is intentionally precise by saying “some” groups connected with Insider Movements are producing these translations. It does not say “all.” However, I stand by the assertion that within the context of Insider Movements, some groups are indeed producing Bible translations that are removing familial language. Bangladesh is one notable example. Thus, the connection is not “unwarranted.” In fact, Chico himself confirms a connection in a later section of “Concerning Overture 9” when he writes, “there is only one Arabic translation being produced by insiders, Mazhar Mallouhi’s translation” [pg. 11 of this paper, under “Footnote v”].*

Footnote v: “In Bangladesh, Insider Movements have done the same [replaced “Son” with “Messiah”] in their translation of the Gospels. For example, the key phrase in Mark 1:11, “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.’” (ESV) was changed to read, “You are my beloved Messiah.” When the American translation consultants, both connected to the PCA, were asked why they did this, they said Muslims would only understand the term “Son” as biological offspring, thus creating an obstacle for Muslims.”

[Chico:] The wording of this allegation implies that the translation decisions for the Bangla New Testament in question were made by American consultants. The PCA people involved were advisors but were not certified translation consultants. The local translators did not engage a certified translation consultant until after they had circulated a trial version in early 2005 for feedback.

At this point, a PCA missionary in Bangladesh informed Rick Brown about the translation and expressed concerns. Rick explained the rationale for using a functional equivalent that expressed the Mediatorial/Messianic meaning of the term, rather than a phrase understood by Muslims to be sexually suggestive and an unforgivable insult to God. Rick then wrote to the translators explaining that the translation would be inadequate if it failed (1) to mention the relationship to God inherent in the use of *huios tou theou* and (2) if it did not present and explain *huios tou theou* in the introduction and glossary. He sent them a pre-publication version of an IJFM article that urged this very point, and encouraged them to acquire the services of a translation consultant. They did, and the consultant said the same thing. This consultant urged them to search for an

expression that emphasized Christ's unique relationship to God. So in late 2005 the Bangla translation team agreed to work with the consultant to find a new term, and they agreed to present and explain the Father-Son terminology in the introduction and glossary. For over two years the team tested various wordings with believers, prebelievers, pastors, and teachers until in March 2008 they all finally decided on a wording. The consultant says that in the synoptic Gospels it is *Ekanto Prio Mononito Jon* and means “God's Uniquely-Intimate Beloved Chosen One,” and that in John it is usually “God's Uniquely-Intimate Beloved One”. The local translators also wrote explanations for the introduction and glossary that described the original-language description in terms of a Father-Son relationship. The top leaders of the United Bible Societies corresponded with the translation team and approved the translation and explanations in 2009. The consultant writes, “In the revised translation there are no places where 'Son' is translated as 'Messiah'.” So the Overture is complaining about a trial translation choice that was tested and abandoned in 2005.

This translation uses the following glossary entry:

“God’s Uniquely Intimate Beloved Chosen One: This phrase is a translation of a title which is used for the Lord Jesus Christ in the Noble Gospel. In the Heavenly Books, this title was used for the kings of the Sons of Israel to show that they are specially chosen and empowered by Almighty God to rule and lead their people, see Psalms 2:6-7; 89:26-27. In the original language, father-son words are used to express this meaning.

By using this title for a king, they wished to show that the king was chosen and appointed by God. The Lord Jesus Christ accepted this unique title for himself and used it in expressing his relationship with God. In the course of time, it has been used with an even deeper meaning for the Lord Jesus Christ; this title is used to express the deep relationship between God and the Lord Jesus Christ which was later specified in the creeds. In this translation we have translated this title on the basis of its scholarly accepted meaning at the time of Jesus Christ.”

This note gives the same explanation that is found in the sidenotes of the Holy Gospel published in 2001 by the UBS Asia Pacific region as a model for other translations. It is similar to the explanations of mainstream evangelical study Bibles in English, such as the NLT Study Bible, the Reformation Study Bible, the NET Bible, and the NIV Study Bible.

[Seaton:] *When I referred to the “American translation consultants,” I was simply using the term that Global Partners for Development used for their own personnel. I had no knowledge then of Wycliffe/SIL’s official usage of the term “certified translation consultant” as a specific type of role within SIL. And until Larry Chico’s response, I was not aware of a revision to the 2005 Bangla edition. His response also revealed that the local translators “engage[d] a certified translation consultant.” Again, it was surprising to learn that Wycliffe/SIL was involved with this “Muslim-idiom” translation project in Bangladesh. According to Larry Chico above, Rick Brown was personally involved in advising the translators to improve the “inadequate” 2005 translation by “using a functional equivalent” rather than a “phrase understood by Muslims to be sexually*

suggestive,” i.e. “Son of God.” The translation consultant reported that the new wording, “God’s Uniquely-Intimate Beloved Chosen One,” was subsequently approved. Larry Chico seems to be confirming SIL’s involvement in a “Muslim-idiom” translation produced by Global Partners For Development, a Western agency significantly involved in supporting the Insider Movement in Bangladesh.

Regarding the notes for the Study Bibles Chico mentions, some notes for Mark 1:11 indeed indicate “Son of God” points to Jesus’ kingly role. But they do not stop there, e.g.:

- *Reformation Study Bible*: “Mark 1:9-11 Witness at Baptism. When John baptized Jesus, the Father revealed Jesus’ unique status as the divine Son of God by sending the Holy Spirit to descend upon him like a dove.” The note for Mark 1:11 declares Jesus “is the second person of the Godhead.”
- *NIV Study Bible*: “Mark 1:10-11 All three persons of the Trinity are involved: (1) the Father speaks, (2) the Son is baptized, and (3) the Holy Spirit descends on the Son.”

The *ESV Study Bible* was not referenced but is worth quoting: “Mark 1:11 . . . the voice confirms the eternal, love-filled Sonship of Jesus. Note that all three persons of the Godhead—the Spirit, the Father, and the Son—are involved here.”

The above “explanations of mainstream evangelical study Bibles in English” in fact are orthodox and trinitarian—but they are not “similar” to the glossary entry Chico cites, where there is no mention of Jesus’ divinity or the Trinity.

Thus, I fail to see how “God’s Uniquely Intimate Beloved Chosen One” is an improvement over “Son of God,” as it still lacks familial language. This is the heart of the problem. While “Son of God” can include kingly and messianic connotations, the term in reference to Jesus also points to more. In Matthew 14, the disciples see Jesus walking on the water during a storm. When he gets in their boat, the winds cease. Jesus is demonstrating his authority over creation itself, and that he is a refuge in the midst of our physical and spiritual storms. The disciples respond as they ought: “those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’” (Mt. 14:32). No messianic or kingly terms are added—they simply worship him as the Son of God. And Jesus does not correct them for blasphemy, as a mere human must. Instead, he receives their worship.

Moreover, using Islamic terms for Jesus encourages Muslims to see Jesus through an Islamic understanding. And referring to the usage of those terms in the *Noble Gospel* and the *Heavenly Books* (an Islamic term meaning God’s equally inspired revelation of the Torah, Psalms, Gospel and the *Qur’an*), without any qualification, lends credence to Muslims’ belief that the *Qur’an* is inspired and authoritative. But clearly, the *Qur’an* does not hold to a biblical view of Jesus as the divine Son of God.

Finally, Larry Chico above and Rick Brown in personal conversation have referred to the 2005 translation as a “test” or “test translation.” Take a moment and imagine the number of copies that a “test translation” might involve. 100? 500? The actual number

of copies of this “test” was 10,000.⁷ 10,000 is no test. 10,000 is a campaign. To say that this “trial translation” was “tested and abandoned,” when thousands of copies have already been distributed and remain in usage, is misleading at best.

Footnote iv: In Islamic contexts where Insider Movements were first developed and are most prevalent, Muslims who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah are encouraged to identify themselves as Muslims, consider the Qur’an as authoritative, and practice the Five Pillars of Islam, including affirming the confession that “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.”

[Chico:] Whether this happens or not, it has nothing to do with how translation teams translate the Scriptures.

[Seaton:] *This footnote is attached to the first usage in the overture of the term “Insider Movement,” in order to provide a brief description. The vast majority of Christians have never heard of Insider Movements, and so the footnote begins with an oft-quoted definition by a proponent:*

*According to one proponent, Insider Movements “can take place within any socio-religious context, Western or not (such as Russian Orthodox, Mormon, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Chinese Communist, etc.), as long as believers remain inside their families, networks and communities, retaining the socio-religious identity of that group.” (Rebecca Lewis, “Promoting Movements to Christ Within Natural Communities,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Summer 2007).*

Furthermore, to encourage readers of the overture to read articles on both sides of the debate, the footnote goes on to refer to widely-cited summary articles by authors representing various positions. While I am convinced that Insider Movements and “Muslim-idiom translations” are deeply in need of correction, I sincerely tried to be accurate in representing others’ positions.

Footnote v: “Insider Movements have replaced “Son” with “Messiah” in Arabic translations of the New Testament.”

[Chico:] Specialists in translation working with Arabic are not aware of any Bible translation that systematically translates *huios tou theou* in Greek with the term “Messiah” in Arabic. There is only one Arabic translation being produced by insiders, Mazhar Mallouhi’s translation, and they are working with traditional Arab Christians as well. In this translation the traditional Arabic term for “Son of God” is used, with an alternative expression following in parentheses.

[Seaton:] *The assertion in the footnote is that “Son” has been replaced with “Messiah,” which cannot be dismissed by referring to another phrase, “Son of God.” When the*

⁷ “Inside Out,” *World*, May 7, 2011 <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/17944>.

overture was written, “Lives of the Prophets” (“Stories of the Prophets”) would be one example where “Son” was replaced with “Messiah.”

Furthermore, Chico himself confirms an example of Insider Movements producing translations using alternative terms when he says, “there is only one Arabic translation being produced by insiders, Mazhar Mallouhi’s translation.” Chico, an SIL translation consultant, was an advisor on this project and thus is familiar with the material.

Footnote v: “This obstacle [Muslim misunderstanding of the term ‘Son of God’], though, is no different from that facing the Jews in John 5:17, 18, and John 10:29-33. Jesus knew that by using familial language to describe his relationship with God, the Jews would understand he was claiming to be divine. Yet despite the offense it caused the Jews, who even tried to kill him for it, Jesus affirmed his Sonship.”

[Chico:] This claim confuses two issues. Muslims understand the term “Son of God” to communicate that God sexually coupled with Mary and had a child. They do not understand it to be a claim of deity. There are many other passages which Muslims clearly understand to imply the deity of Christ, but this does not frighten them or keep them from reading the text.

[Seaton:] *My personal experience, as well as what I hear from those sharing the gospel with Muslims, is that Muslims’ first and primary understanding of “Son of God” is a claim to deity, to which they strongly object. But the assertion in the footnote isn’t whether the obstacle is sexual or theological, but that Jesus doesn’t change his self-description based on the audience’s objection or misunderstanding of the term. The footnote affirms that, indeed, “Son” creates an obstacle for Muslims—but in principle, this same term “Son” created an obstacle for the Jews as well. Jesus is eternally the Son of God, prior to and independent of any cultural understanding of the term. In John 5 and John 10, Jesus was simply asserting who he is as Son. He did not back down from the term. Thus, neither can we.*

[Chico:] This sexual meaning is not the sense of the term in Scripture, nor in Nicene theology. The Jews understood that Jesus was claiming a close relationship with God, not that he was biologically produced by God’s sexual act. This bold claim of being in the closest position of authority to God caused the Jews to object.

[Seaton:] *It was not the “claim of being in the closest position of authority to God” that caused the Jews to pick up stones to kill Jesus. It was for blasphemy. Jesus was “making himself equal with God” (John 5:18). This is a good example where the original audience significantly adds to our understanding of the author’s intent: the Jews at the scene, the people in the best position to understand what Jesus was meaning by calling God his Father, charged Jesus with “blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God” (John 10:33). Further, that original understanding is declared throughout the Scriptures, that Jesus is indeed divine.*

[Chico:] The divine sonship of Jesus, however, is not the result of sexual procreation, and it is far more than the physical sonship of the virgin birth (Luke 1:35). First of all, Jesus is the incarnation of God the Son, who is “eternally generate” (traditionally based on Prov 8:25 and Micah 5:2), meaning his eternal generation was neither biological nor creative and had no beginning in time. So God the Son is not a biological-son but an eternally generated relational-son, and his sonship is by nature rather than by grace. Secondly, he is Son by virtue of his incarnational mission as God’s “first-born” (traditionally based on Heb 1:5–7 and Ps 89:27; with John 1:14 and Col 1:15 interpreted both ways). And just as the “first-born son” of a Jewish noble managed his father’s household of family and servants, Jesus as God’s “first-born” Son is Lord and Savior over the people of his Father’s Kingdom and over all mankind. Similarly as the “Christ” he is both the creator of all things (Col 1:16) and the anointed King over God’s people, their Lord and Savior. In historical theology, this functional meaning of “Son” and “Christ” was often summarized as being “the Mediator.” Theologians have long recognized these aspects of divine sonship, the eternal and the mediatorial, as corresponding to “the nature and office” of Christ.

The issue in John 10 is that the Jews wanted to stone Jesus because he said “I and the Father are one.” They said “You claim to be God.” The issue in John 5 is that Jesus said “my Father” instead of “our Father” and declared he does what God does, “making himself equal to God.” The claim to divinity in these passages is just as strong in the Bangla translation.

[Seaton:] *The overture’s reference to John 5 and John 10 was included to show Jesus did not back down in the face of audience misunderstanding of his use of “Father” and “Son.” Further, Chico is not correct when he states, “the claim to divinity in these passages is just as strong in the Bangla translation.” In the Bangla Muslim-idiom translation in John 5 and John 10, “Father” is translated as “Guardian” and “Son” is translated as “Messiah.” Thus, Jesus’ declaration of a familial, divine relationship between God the Father and the Son is not “just as strong.” It is completely lost in the Bangla Muslim-idiom translation.*

“These same Bible translations of Insider Movements have replaced references to God as ‘Father’ (*pater*) with terms such as ‘Guardian’ and ‘Lord.’”

[Chico:] Many languages have different expressions for a biological father and a nurturing father. God is our nurturing father rather than our biological begetter. For that reason some translations use the Arabic word *rabb*. This word comes from the verb for parenting children, and the noun is used for the head of a household. It is used of God to describe him as the one who nurtures and sustains his people. It describes the care and authority of a father without implying sexual procreation. Another Arabic term, *waliyy*, is also used for a nurturing parent but without necessarily implying sexual procreation.

[Seaton:] *“Waliyy” is Arabic for “guardian.” To suggest that this is an acceptable alternative is to deny Muslims the biblical privilege of knowing God as “Father.” That depth of intimacy is at the heart of the gospel, that God sends his Son to adopt us into his*

family—not simply to rule or guard over us. No human father would discourage his children from calling him “father” and instead direct them to call him “guardian.”

Several times I have heard the following defense for alternatives to familial language: “We must use alternatives to ‘Father’ or ‘Son’ because Muslims have implications for those words that are abhorrent and unbiblical when associated with God. Those misunderstandings thus misrepresent the true character of God—and so we must use non-familial terms.”

I completely disagree. If a woman has been abused by her biological father and finds it difficult to think of God as a good and loving heavenly Father, do we prepare a Bible for her that removes “Father”? Of course not! Instead, we show her how God is the true and perfect Father she never had, and her deep longing for a loving father can only be met with a right understanding of God the Father’s perfect love and care for her.

If parents have a son who has publicly shamed and abandoned them, such that it is difficult for them to think of Jesus as the good and noble Son sent from heaven, do we prepare a Bible for them that removes “Son”? Of course not! Instead, we show them how Jesus is the true and perfect Son they never had, and their deep longing for a faithful son can only be met with a right understanding of God the Son’s perfect honor and faithfulness.

In the same way, a Muslim’s sub-biblical understanding of God the Father and God the Son can only be answered with who God really is—God the perfect, eternal, good, loving Father, Son and Spirit. Words are important. If a Bible translation fails to include references to Jesus as “Son” or “Son of God,” Muslims will fail to think of him as such.

[Chico:] The term used in Bangla, *Protipalok* God, in the same way means “one who looks after someone as a father” rather than “one who sexually begets as a father.”

As mentioned elsewhere, this claim also overlooks the fact that these versions present literal translations and explanations of kinship terminology in the introduction, glossary, and footnotes.

[Seaton:] *Larry Chico elsewhere argues that removing familial language and instead explaining “kinship terminology in the introduction, glossary, and footnotes” is an acceptable solution. Here, he asserts the overture overlooks this. The overture does not “overlook” this practice. It rejects it. The phrase “from the text” was expressly included in the key section of the overture, as an explicit rebuttal to the practice of demoting familial language to the “paratext.” The pertinent section of the overture reads, the*

“General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America . . . declares as unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider Movement or any other translations of the Bible that remove from the text references to God as “Father” (pater) or Jesus as “Son” (huios), because such removals compromise doctrines of the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture.”

Footnote vi: “In Arabic translations of these verses [Matthew 10:32-33], Insider Movements have replaced “my Father” with “my Lord,” and in Bangladesh with “my Guardian.” Similar changes to familial language have been made throughout the Gospels.”

[Chico:] It is not clear which Arabic translations this allegation is referring to. In Arabic, the “True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ” translation uses two non-biological paternal words mentioned above to translate *tou patros mou*. One of these is a word that could be translated in English as “my Lord”. But this distorts the picture. The word has the sense of “to be master, to be lord, to have possession,” but the root of the word is also used for words related to caring for and raising children. There are related words from the same root such as *raab*, a stepfather, and *rabeeb*, a foster father. In any event, this translation has three articles on kinship language explaining this issue using the traditional term, as well as a glossary entry. Incidentally, the “True Meaning” translation was not initiated by an insider movement. There are believers from Muslim background, traditional church background (including clergymen), as well as open-minded Muslims on the translation committee.

In Bangla, the Greek term *pater* is translated with *Protipalok*, a term which could be translated as “guardian” in some contexts, if a father figure is meant by that. The glossary of this translation provides the following explanation:

Protipalok: The Greek word *pater*, literal meaning ‘father’, has been translated *Protipalok*. The places where this word is used for God in the heavenly books, we have translated *Protipalok*. In the Noble Gospel where this word is used, it is to show relationship with God. This is to show His love and care towards us. The Lord Jesus used *Protipalok* to show his deep relationship with God.

[Seaton]: *In the Arabic “Lives of the Prophets” (“Stories of the Prophets”), the word “Father” (pater) has been translated with terms such as “God” and “Lord.” In “The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ,” the word “Father” in reference to God is never literally translated as “Father.” Instead, it is translated with terms such as “God,” “Lord,” and “Guardian.” In the 2005 Bangla translation, “The Injil Sharif,” the word “Father” is translated as “Guardian.” In all such cases, the intimacy, love and care of God’s Fatherhood is obscured.*

“These Bible translations are harmful to the doctrines of the authority of Scripture and the deity of Christ, bringing confusion to people in need of Christ—concerns that are held by many national leaders and Bible societies.”

[Chico:] The local translators and believers working on these translations are eager to uphold the authority of Scripture and the deity and mission of Christ by translating the Scriptures clearly and accurately for their people, and by providing notes and mini-articles that explain terms like ‘Son of God’. Many national leaders and Bible societies are supportive of these translations. For example, the “True Meaning” project has been endorsed by several church leaders, including the former head of a Bible society. They

have not found that the translations harm the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity or undermine the authority of Scripture.

In contrast to these, the Bible Society of Bangladesh expressed objections to the new Bangla translation, or what they knew of it. So the United Bible Societies in 2008 organized a fact-finding commission led by Richard Jeske of the American Bible Society to visit Bangladesh and conduct an investigation of the issues. This “Goodwill Mission” included leading figures from the United Bible Societies, American Bible Society, and two Bible societies of Asia. They found the situation there to be quite different from what had been reported to them. They wrote a fifty-page report which everyone interested in the topic ought to read.

[Seaton:] *As Larry Chico confirms, the Bangladesh Bible Society indeed raised objections to the new Bangla translation of 2005. It is both illuminating and tragic that the concerns of indigenous Christians were rejected by outside agencies and Westerners.*

Powerless to stand against the resources of well-funded Western agencies, the Bangladesh Bible Society published a legal notice on June 10, 2005, in the Dhaka Daily Star,

. . . to inform the public at large that a version of the Scriptures, i.e. the Holy Bible, has been marketed by some persons/an interested quarter, without any consultation with or approval of [the Bangladesh Bible Society], who has found the same as controversial and as such could lead to misunderstanding and disturb the religious harmony among the people within the Christian community as well among the other faith or faiths.

Furthermore, in May 2011, the Presbyterian Church of Bangladesh wrote to the PCA asking for its help and identifying the harmful practices of Insiders in Bangladesh:

- *The greatest challenge is their publishing the Gospel of Mark under the name of “Masih” and four Gospels and Acts of the New Testament named as “Injil.” In these publications, they omitted the phrases like “Son of God,” “Father,” “Abba,” etc. or replaced with other words. We are convinced that they published a new Injil to justify their theology and missiology.*
- *The Insiders through these practices are destroying the image of Christians with their Muslim neighbors and the reputation of the Bible.*
- *Reactions: The Bangladesh Bible Society (BBS), Isai Fellowship in Bangladesh – IFB [a national association of the Muslim Background Churches] and other national bodies in Bangladesh have strongly opposed the Insiders. Christian leaders recognize that this movement is not local or indigenous but imported by Western missionaries, and this work continues because of money flow.*

Larry Chico may be correct that outside agencies support the Insider translations, but clearly Bengali Christians—including those from a Muslim background—do not.

The Presbyterian Church in America joins with these Bengali Christians, affirming that Bible translations that remove “Father,” “Son” and “Son of God” from the text are indeed “harmful to the doctrines of the authority of Scripture and the deity of Christ.”

Footnote vii: Statistics from Parshall article used to support claim of syncretism.

[Chico:] The data cited by the author of this Overture, taken from article by Phil Parshall, left out other statistics given by Parshall that would undermine the bleak picture he wishes to paint. Here are some of the statistics that Parshall calls “the good news” in his article:

- 76 percent meet once a week in Christian worship.
 - 16 percent meet more than once a week in worship.
 - 66 percent read or listen to the Gospels daily.
 - 21 percent read or listen to the Gospels once a week.
 - 55 percent say God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. [Others seem to prefer other terms, such as “God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit,” as Paul usually did.]
 - 97 percent say Jesus is the only Savior.
 - 93 percent say, “Allah loves and forgives because Jesus gave His life for me.”
 - 100 percent say, “People can be saved from evil spirits by faith in Jesus.”
 - 100 percent pray to Jesus for forgiveness of sin.
 - 97 percent say they are not saved because of Muhammad’s prayers.
 - 100 percent feel peace and close to God when reading the New Testament.
- (Taken from Phil Parshall, “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization” October 1998, EMQ Online)

[Seaton:] *The footnote is attached to the assertion in the main body of the overture that “these Bible translations are harmful to the doctrines of the authority of Scripture and the deity of Christ, bringing confusion to people in need of Christ.” The issues regarding doctrinal compromise have already been addressed above. The assertion that these translations are confusing people is substantiated by the footnote and the reference to the EMQ article. The statistics that are cited are the ones most germane to the issue of revelation and the concern in the footnote of the “potential for syncretism.” A statistic showing how often people read or listen to the Gospels has little to do with syncretism per se—unless those Gospels have been compromised by removing familial language. The following statistics “from a survey of nationals in an Insider Movement in South Asia” were included in the footnote:*

Of these C5 adherents,

- 50% go to the traditional mosque on Friday.
- 31% go to the mosque more than once a day. They do standard Arabic prayers which affirm Muhammad as a prophet of God.
- 96% say there are four heavenly books, i.e. Torah, Prophets, Gospels, and Qur'an.
- 66% say the Qur'an is the greatest of the four books.
- 45% do not affirm God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- 45% feel peace or close to Allah when listening to the reading of the Qur'an.

The concern prompting the overture is not that “100 percent feel peace and close to God when reading the New Testament” or any of the other statistics that Larry Chico cites. The concern is that the translations in question are leading many people astray. The concern is that explicit or implicit affirmations that the Qur’an is authoritative are leading many people astray. When 96% of C5 adherents affirm that the Qur’an is one of four “heavenly books,” i.e. a revelation from God himself, that is cause for alarm. In fact, if even one person affirms the Qur’an in this way, it is cause for corrective action.

Footnote vii cites criticism by a Bengali Christian leader.

[Chico:] The Overture only cites this one critic. All new Bible translations have their critics. Critics do not need to use this translation, but many Bangladeshi brothers and sisters prefer it. It is worth noting that the main translator in this project, a Bangladeshi, is an ordained member of the largest Presbyterian synod in Bangladesh and has served as its general secretary. Certain local critics demanded that the synod dismiss the translator from membership and denounce his faith. Those in the synod backed the translator and refused to do so. The dean of the largest Catholic college in the capital city has complimented the translator on the translation.

[Seaton:] *At the time of writing the overture, I chose to use a direct quote of a Bengali Christian leader I know personally. This man is from a Muslim background, and is now faithfully starting new churches and training leaders from Muslim backgrounds to reach their countrymen for Christ. It is one of the largest networks of its kind anywhere, and something we should support.*

Since drafting the overture, though, other leaders in other Muslim countries have heard about the PCA’s interest in taking up this issue. Formal letters from churches and Bible societies in Malaysia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran, and the Middle East were sent to the General Assembly of the PCA. These letters expressed heartfelt concerns about Insider Movements and the translations that remove familial language. Each of these letters asked the PCA to stand with them. A representative quote from the letter dated June 5, 2011, from the Presbyterian Church in Malaysia expresses their shared convictions:

As a church in a Muslim majority country, we are concerned that there are currently movements to remove all reference to God as “Father” and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ as “Son of God” in the translation of the Holy Scripture to the local language. It has come to our knowledge that you are discussing this issue at your General Assembly. We ask that you stand with us, to inform your churches to cease funding such translation work if there is and also to use your good office to ask churches in other denominations in America to do the same. We pray that all the faithful of the Lord will reach out to all people in need of the gospel with the true Word of God in all languages.

Further, some pertinent details about the “main translator in this project” are also “worth noting,” learned from my own experience. This man was raised in a Muslim

home, became a Christian, and as Larry Chico indicates, an ordained Presbyterian pastor. When Insider Movements were developing in Bangladesh, the American director supporting this initiative “urged [him] to return to his roots” and identify as a Muslim. When I and two colleagues visited Bangladesh in 2003, we asked him where he saw this C5 movement going: “Do you see this as a sect of Islam?” “No,” he said, “I see this as true Islam. It is what Muhammad would have wanted had he lived long enough.” We were stunned at this affirmation of syncretism. And yet, according to Larry Chico, he is the “main translator in this project” and from his quote below, the “leader of the [C5] movement.” Larry Chico certainly implies support for his role. Should not the Church be wary of supporting a self-professing Muslim translating the Bible for Muslims, creating what some have termed an “Islamic translation” of the Scriptures?

Footnote viii: “they do not reference the historic creeds and confessions of the Church, even the most ancient creeds accepted by the universal Church.”

[Chico:] Again, this is a blanket statement made without evidence. In the large Jesus movement in Bangladesh, the leader of the movement, who also heads the translation project, is a trained teacher of Reformed Christian theology. He was the head of the synodal theological training program, which became a national program, and he translated into Bengali a series of 21 books used in evangelical theological education. He also wrote two booklets for teaching local believers. He is certainly not opposed to the ancient creeds.

[Seaton:] *The “leader of the movement” is the same man I referred to above who returned to Islam. Years ago, prior to his “returning to his roots,” he certainly referenced the historic creeds of the Church. Whether he continues to privately affirm them I do not know, but he does not reference them in his role as “leader of the movement.” When I was first learning about C5 years ago, I met several times with the American director of the Western agency that works closely with this man. In trying to understand what C5 followers actually believed, I asked the American director whether the Insiders use or refer to any of the historic creeds. He expressly told me they did not and would not. Instead, they wanted their movement to develop their own theology, independent of outside influence. My desire was, and still is, not that Insider Movements would formally adopt ancient creeds, but that they would connect to the broader body of Christ—both its historic and global expressions. There is one body of Christ, one family, one tree, one temple. Each part needs the others. It is unwise and unbiblical to intentionally cut off one part of Christ’s body from the others.*

[Chico:] Concluding comments

For those who desire to read more on this issue, it might be best to refer directly to the articles of Dr. Rick Brown which were cited in this Overture. These articles, available online in International Journal of Frontier Missiology 22:3 and 22:4, can be found here: http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/22_3_PDFs/91-96Brown_SOG.pdf
http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/22_4_PDFs/135-145%20Brown_SOG.pdf

Vern Poythress, professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, has also written recently on this topic here: www.frame-poythress.org/poythress_articles/2011Bible.htm

The Wycliffe Global Alliance has made a statement to clarify their stance on this matter: <http://www.wycliffe.net/Missiology/BibleTranslationandMission/tabid/94/Default.aspx?id=2213>

[Seaton:] *Other articles cited in the overture that may be beneficial to read include*

- Jay Smith, “An Assessment of the Insider’s Principle Paradigms,” (April 2009) http://www.answering-islam.org/fileadmin/authors/smith/insider_assessment.pdf;
- Basil Grafas, “Insider Movements: An Evangelical Assessment,” (August 2006); http://www.i2ministries.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=120:insider-movements-an-evangelical-assessment&catid=27:articles-category&Itemid=72
- Timothy Tennent, “Followers of Jesus (Isa) In Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 ‘High Spectrum’ Contextualization,” (Fall 2006). <http://174.121.134.66/~mtwcr/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Followers-of-Jesus-in-Islamic-Mosques-Tennent.pdf>

[Chico:] May God guide the deliberations of the General Assembly on this important matter.

[Seaton:] *Regarding the final outcome of the Assembly, the overture was approved by an overwhelming majority, with no pastor or elder publicly defending the removal of familial language. The final version of the overture is attached to the end of this paper.*

Note: In preparation of “Towards A Faithful Witness,” I contacted Rick Brown and Larry Chico to ask for feedback on the final draft of this paper. Their feedback came in the form of four documents: three articles that, in their words, express their views more clearly, and a seven page document stating their clarifications to what was written in the paper. As it would be beyond the scope of this paper to include all of that feedback, along with any additional response I might feel obligated to offer, I refer the interested reader to contact Wycliffe and/or SIL for these documents. For my part, I was not persuaded to make changes to my response. While we disagree over what I perceive are the necessary conclusions of “Concerning Overture 9” and published material referenced in this paper, my hope is that we can all echo Larry Chico’s prayer for God’s guidance on this exceedingly important matter.

Scott Seaton
October 2011

A Call To Faithful Witness

Approved By The 39th General Assembly
Of The Presbyterian Church In America
June 10, 2011

Whereas; the Church is called to take the gospel to all peoples, including those who have historically been resistant to the gospel;

Whereas; contextualizing the language and forms of the gospel, while remaining faithful to the truths of Scripture, is good and necessary for the advancement of the gospel;

Whereas; the Church must exercise wisdom in discerning appropriate expressions of contextualization, reserving its public corrections for genuine and substantive threats to the gospel;

Whereas; in recent initiatives known as “Insider Movements”, some groups have produced Bible translations that have replaced references to Jesus as “Son” (*huios*) with terms such as “Messiah” in order to be more acceptable to Muslims;

Whereas; some Bible translations of Insider Movements have replaced references to God as “Father” (*pater*) with terms such as “Guardian” and “Lord”;

Whereas; these Bible translations are harmful to the doctrines of the authority of Scripture and the deity of Christ, bringing confusion to people in need of Christ—concerns that are held by many national leaders and Bible societies;

Whereas; some PCA churches have knowingly or unknowingly financially supported these Bible translations;

Whereas; Muslims should not be denied a full and faithful witness;

Therefore be it resolved that the 39th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America:

- Affirms that biblical motivations of all those who seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have never heard or responded to the gospel should be encouraged;
- Repents of complacency or comfort that keep us from a faithful witness;
- Declares as unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider Movement or any other translations of the Bible that remove from the text references to God as “Father” (*pater*) or Jesus as “Son” (*huios*), because such removals compromise doctrines of the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture;

- Encourages PCA congregations to assess whether the missionaries and agencies they support use or promote Bible translations that remove familial language in reference to persons of the Trinity, and if so, to pursue correction, and failing that, to withdraw their support;
- Encourages PCA congregations to support biblically sound and appropriately contextualized efforts to see Christ's Church established among resistant peoples;
- Calls PCA churches and agencies to collaborate with each other and the broader Church to discern and implement biblical authority in gospel contextualization.
- Authorizes the Moderator, as an aid to greater gospel faithfulness throughout the PCA and the broader Church, to appoint a study committee to report to the 40th General Assembly concerning Insider Movements, including but not limited to:
 - A summary and biblical assessment of Insider Movements' history, philosophies, and practices;
 - A biblical response to interpretations of Scripture used in defense of Insider Movements;
 - An examination of the theological impact of removing familial language for the Trinity from Bible translations;
 - An assessment of PCA missions partners regarding the influence of Insider Movement within them, including assessment of their theology of religion, ecclesiology, Scripture, and relationship to the Emergent Church;
 - An explanation of the relevance and importance of this issue for the PCA;
 - Suggestions for identifying and assessing the influence of Insider Movements among mission agencies, missionaries and organizations;
 - Recommended resources for faithfully training and equipping congregations to reach Muslims locally and internationally.
- Set the budget for the study committee at \$15,000/year and that funds be derived from gifts to the AC designated for that purpose.