



The Arlington Statement

ON BIBLE TRANSLATION

PREAMBLE

We affirm that the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible, which were originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, are the written Word of God. As such, they are without error in the original manuscripts, and infallible in all that they affirm. Although the original manuscripts probably no longer exist, the Word of God has been extraordinarily well-preserved in the multitude of copies that we have access to today.

We affirm that because the Bible is God’s own flawless Word, and because God created all human minds as well as language itself, the meaning of God’s Word can be faithfully expressed in every human language through Bible translation.

We affirm that grammatical structures, as well as the semantic range of words or phrases, vary from language to language. Therefore, translators must understand these linguistic differences in order to accurately express God’s truth as clearly as the original-language texts do.

We affirm that the Bible belongs to God, and that “with many counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14). We therefore encourage translation organizations and Bible societies to make their translations freely available online whenever feasible, so that everyone can benefit from their work and provide helpful feedback for consideration in future revisions.

We affirm that the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is essential for understanding the Word of God correctly (1 Corinthians 2:14). Furthermore, God has made His Church the “pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Therefore, God has given the Church responsibility to ensure fidelity in the translation of His Word. Both global and local expressions of the Church have valuable, relevant knowledge (such as knowledge of the source or receptor languages or theological knowledge) which is beneficial in

producing faithful translations, as believers work humbly together as one body in the unity of the Spirit. Translations should be produced in such a way that they faithfully express God’s self-revelation, honor the local congregations who will use the translation, and maintain the bond of peace in the global Church.

In light of the above affirmations, we propose the following guiding principles to address certain problematic practices in some recent Bible translations.

ARTICLE I

Translators should not translate in a way that explicitly or implicitly affirms the theology of other religions at the expense of the meaning, context, and theological implications of the original-language texts.

- For example, the first words of the Islamic profession of faith (لا إله إلا الله “There is no god but Allah/God”) should not be used in any Bible translation, because this is a distinctly Islamic phrase which brings Islamic meaning and connotations that interfere with a faithful understanding of the biblical text. For Muslims, the first half of the Islamic profession of faith naturally calls to mind the *second* half, namely, “and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah/God.” It also carries with it the Islamic concept of the absolute oneness of God that explicitly denies the Trinity. In contrast, the biblical affirmations of monotheism teach that there is no God besides the LORD—that is, YHWH, the faithful God of Israel, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (e.g. 1 Kings 18:39, Psalm 18:31, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, Ephesians 4:4-6).

ARTICLE II

Because every person in every culture needs to know God’s truth in all of its fullness, Bible translations should not avoid confronting sin or falsehood that the original-language texts confront, whether among believers or unbelievers.

- For example, if any Hindus are offended by the prodigal son’s father calling, “Quick! Bring the fattened calf and slaughter it!” (Luke 15:22-23), translators cannot “fix” this by instead having the father only make a generic call for a feast of celebration and eliminating reference to the calf. To do so would remove important evidence that Jesus did not consider slaughtering cattle to be a sin, which people need to know in order to think biblically.

- Likewise, even if idol worshippers are offended by Isaiah’s strong polemic against idols in passages such as Isaiah 44:9-20, translators must not soften his tone, because the tone itself is part of its God-breathed message that idolatry is detestable to God.

ARTICLE III

The Holy Spirit has created an intricately woven tapestry of truth, containing a number of key terms connected across multiple passages that all contribute to the meaning of the whole. Translators should strive for a high degree of consistency in translating these key terms in order to preserve this interwoven meaning in translation as much as possible.

- For example, the Greek word κύριος (“Lord”) should not be translated differently based on whether translators determine that it refers to God the Father or God the Son. Rendering κύριος as “Allah/God” for God the Father (e.g. 1 Peter 3:12; see Psalm 34:15-16), but as “Master” or “Lord” for Jesus (e.g. 1 Peter 3:14-15; see Isaiah 8:12-13), obscures the equality of Jesus with the Father, for the Father and the Son are equally Master, equally Lord, and equally God.
- Likewise, the term “Son of God”, and the terms “Father” and “Son” when referring to God, should be translated using the same terms that are normally used to express the human father-son relationship. Adding qualifiers to the familial terms (such as in “spiritual son”) or using terms that are not primarily familial (such as “Messiah,” “beloved,” “prince,” or “guardian”) inevitably causes loss of divinely intended meaning. Terms that directly express the human father-son relationship are necessary for readers to link together key concepts such as Jesus being the only natural heir to God’s kingdom, enjoying a unique relationship to the Father, being the exact image of the Father, and being the firstborn of all creation (Matthew 21:37-38, Hebrews 1:2-3, Colossians 1:13-18). Such terms are also necessary for readers to understand our adoption as children of God (John 1:12-13, Romans 8:14-29, Galatians 4:1-7), Abraham’s offering up of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18), the parable of the wicked tenants (Matthew 21:33-46, etc.), the father in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), and many other important connections in Scripture. Potential misunderstandings can be addressed through Christian teaching or through paratextual material, such as book introductions, footnotes, or a glossary.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we affirm that all Scripture and Scripture-based products should adhere to each of the above principles. To the degree that any do not, we urge that they be revised.

We as signers commit to following these principles in all our Bible translation work, and we call on all translators and translation organizations to do the same.