

WEA Weighs In on Translating ‘God the Father’ and ‘Son of God’

In light of various controversies about Bible translation, Wycliffe Global Alliance and SIL International approached the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) in March 2012 to independently review their best practices in the translation of “God the Father” and “Son of God.” The WEA formed an independent panel that has now concluded its work and issued its report with recommendations for Wycliffe and SIL.

“The WEA agreed to facilitate this independent review because of the vital importance of Bible translation,” said Geoff Tunnicliffe, CEO and secretary general of the WEA. “We are delighted that this intense review has now been concluded.”

The independent panel’s mandate was to “review SIL’s translation practices, setting boundaries for theologically acceptable translation methodology, particularly in Muslim contexts, and suggesting how to practically implement these recommendations.

The mandate was therefore very focused, excluding intense wider debates about contextualization, Bible translation in majority languages or any Bible translation by other agencies, churches or groups. Wycliffe and SIL agreed to abide by any recommendations the panel made.

In May 2012, the WEA announced that Dr. Robert E. Cooley would chair the panel. The WEA and Cooley listed 86 possible panel members, recommended by the WEA’s Mission Commission, Theological Commission and others. From this pool of scholars, a panel of 12 was formed at the end of September. The selection criteria included expertise, geographical diversity, gender and availability.

Meeting in person for the first time in Toronto in November, the panel began its work by identifying translation issues to be studied and translation practices that needed to be reviewed. The panel divided into three working groups to focus for the next few months on biblical theology, cross-cultural communication and reader-reception processes.

At a second meeting in Istanbul in early April, the panel completed its work, which includes 10 recommendations to Wycliffe and SIL about translation methodology, use of additional literature in ministry to Muslims and processes for ensuring accuracy and accountability in Bible translation. The 33-page report is available to the public and can be viewed [here](#).

The WEA, having received the report, has now delivered it to Wycliffe and SIL. The WEA and the panel have therefore now concluded the agreed review, and it is the WEA's expectation that Wycliffe and SIL will implement the report's recommendations over the coming months. The WEA also challenges Wycliffe and SIL to seek to engage other mission agencies in the global missiological issues raised by the report's recommendations.

"We would like to thank Wycliffe and SIL for their willingness to submit their practice to this independent jury of experts and for their commitment to implementing the recommendations of the panel," Tunncliffe says. "We are also very grateful to Dr. Cooley and all the panel members for their exemplary work on this important task. We pray that the outcomes of the review will contribute to many people hearing and understanding the Bible's trinitarian message of deliverance in their heart language."