

Translation Liaison Committee

Floor Committee #2

Our calling

The Translation Liaison Committee (TLC) was established in November 2013 by the Conference of Presidents to carry out a resolution of the 2013 WELS convention. Four professors and three parish pastors were appointed, and the TLC held its first meeting in December 2013. The purpose of the TLC, according to the convention resolution, is “to evaluate major Bible translations; to communicate with their editors and publishers; to offer, when appropriate, suggestions to improve such translations; and to share its findings with the synod at large” (2013 *Proceedings*, p. 68).

Our current situation

Contacts with the HCSB

The first activity of the TLC was to contact the publishers of the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), because we heard that a revision of the HCSB was going forward. This inquiry blossomed into a number of personal contacts with HCSB representatives over the following months:

- In January 2014, two members of the TLC (Pastor Geoffrey Kieta and Prof. Thomas Nass) met with leaders of the HCSB at the LifeWay headquarters in Nashville, Tenn., to learn about the plans of the HCSB.
- In May 2014, three members of the TLC (Pastors Brett Brauer and Geoffrey Kieta and Prof. Thomas Nass) shared the TLC recommendations on “global issues” with the translation in person with HCSB leaders in Nashville.
- In November 2014, two members of the TLC (Pastor Geoffrey Kieta and Prof. Paul Zell) had extended visits with HCSB representatives at the convention of the Evangelical Theological Society in San Diego, Calif.
- E-mail exchanges took place throughout the year.

Throughout all of these contacts, we have been impressed with the hospitality of the HCSB leaders and their willingness to spend time with us and to welcome input from us.

HCSB plans

What we have learned about the HCSB is that Broadman & Holman Publishers is taking a top-to-bottom look at the HCSB with a view toward improving it in whatever way it can. An oversight committee is at work and, though dates cannot be shared, a revision will be coming sometime in the next few years.

What is especially noteworthy is that the publishers have stressed that they want the HCSB to be a Bible translation that serves Christians of many denominations, including Lutherans. They want to remove barriers to widespread use. As proof of their interest in Lutheranism, they have put two confessional Lutherans on the nine-person oversight committee—Prof. Andrew Steinmann of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and Prof. Andrew Das of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Input on “global issues” in the HCSB

Upon the invitation of HCSB leaders, the TLC first wrote up recommendations dealing with “global issues” in the HCSB—issues that are not limited to one passage or context. In May we shared 56 pages of recommendations on such topics, commenting on the plan of salvation page, the Tetragrammaton, the use of “slave” and “Messiah,” and other things. Our work is available for anyone to view on the WELS website at www.wels.net/tlc.

Of course, we don't know to what extent the HCSB oversight committee will follow our recommendations, but we can say that the HCSB overseers received our recommendations graciously—even eagerly. We got the impression that they have heard some of the same concerns from others, and there is a good possibility that some changes will be made that will make the translation more suitable to use in WELS.

Input on individual passages in the HCSB

Following the writing and delivery of our recommendations on “global issues,” the TLC was invited to share translation suggestions also on individual passages of the HCSB. We have been working as zealously as we can to do that since May 2014. As of the writing of this report, the TLC has drafted about 600 translation recommendations on individual passages, and we expect to prepare many more before the April 30, 2015, deadline for all submissions.

It should be said that most of our suggestions are minor matters, the sorts of things that a committee like ours could come up with for any translation. But since the HCSB is serious about trying to improve its translation and has been open to our input, we have been trying to cover the entire HCSB with a careful reading and to write up whatever we think could be improved, even if it amounts to minor polishing.

In order to help in this effort, the TLC has employed the assistance of a number of others. We would like to thank publicly the following for reading a portion of the HCSB and writing up translation suggestions for the TLC: Pastor Phil Arnold, Prof. Forrest Bivens, Pastor Aaron Dolan, Pastor Paul Janke, Pastor Robert Meiselwitz, Prof. Mark Paustian, Prof. John Schmidt, Pastor Daniel Witte, Prof. Paul Wendland, and Pastor James Westendorf.

When we are finished with our recommendations on individual passages, we intend to make them available for all who are interested, as we did with the global recommendations. You may look for something on our website later in the year.

When the revised HCSB appears

It remains to be seen what the revised HCSB will look like when it is published. It is the opinion of the TLC that WELS should plan on taking a good look at the revised HCSB when it appears.

When the HCSB was scrutinized in the “Review of the 102” in 2012–13, there were many positive comments about the HCSB. There were also negative comments, with numerous reviewers suggesting that the HCSB needed a good editing or revision. Maybe if a good revision is accomplished, the HCSB will be a translation that can see wide use in WELS. Perhaps it could be a translation that WELS could coalesce around in the future. Time will tell.

The 50th anniversary of the New International Version

As part of its assignment, the TLC plans to interact, when appropriate, with publishers of any Bible translation that is of interest to WELS. Because of the prominent use of the New International Version (NIV) in our midst, the TLC sent two members (Pastor Geoffrey Kieta and Prof. Paul Zell) to attend the 50th anniversary banquet and program for the NIV, held in San Diego at the convention of the Evangelical Theological Society in November. (The publishing of the NIV started in 1973, but the first translation conference that laid plans for the NIV took place 50 years ago, in August 1965.)

It turns out that there was no major news about the NIV shared at this gathering. The chairman of the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), Douglas Moo, said that the CBT continues to receive input on the translation decisions they have made and to meet regularly, but they have not set a date to begin another revision. Though electronic media are ideally suited for continuous updates, Moo stated that most people still buy paper Bibles. Consequently there is a need for “stability” in the existing text of the NIV, and it is important not to publish revisions too frequently.

Since there has not been any pressing need, the TLC has not given any special attention to the NIV to this point.

The English Standard Version

In addition to making contact with HCSB and NIV representatives in San Diego in November, our TLC members also searched out representatives of the English Standard Version (ESV). A representative of Crossway Books indicated that there may be a further revision of the ESV undertaken in a few years, but if so, it would not even be as extensive as the revision published in 2011, which was very modest. A consistent message has been given by ESV leaders that they do not want to “destabilize the text.”

As with the NIV, the TLC has not devoted any time so far to the ESV.

A look ahead

With all of our HCSB recommendations, the first 16 months of the TLC have been intensely busy. We have held more than 30 meetings in that time. Thankfully, we have been able to meet with Google Hangouts at no cost to the synod, so our only expense has been our travel to meet translation representatives.

We would like to believe that giving recommendations to the HCSB is the sort of work that WELS intended with the establishment of the TLC. During our translation discussion from 2011–13, we as a synod wrung our hands over some of the changes we saw appearing in the published Bible translations. The TLC was formed to see if WELS could have some input with Bible publishers. Even if the HCSB does not see widespread use in WELS, we hope that we may have done something to make it a better vehicle for communicating God’s Word.

After our recommendations to the HCSB are completed, we are not sure what should occupy our attention next. As a new committee, we welcome the advice and input of others. Please share your ideas with any member of the committee about how we may be as useful as possible.

Prof. Thomas Nass, reporter

Prof. Thomas Nass, chairman

Rev. Glenn Schwanke, secretary

Rev. Brett Brauer

Prof. Kenneth Cherney Jr.

Prof. Joel Fredrich

Rev. Geoffrey Kieta

Prof. Paul Zell