

PRESS RELEASE

ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA – On August 29, 2015, Christians from at least three denominations met at what used to be a Jewish temple, Temple Beth Emet, now home to Emanuel Romanian Church of God, marking the first ever conference of the Society For Interdenominational Dialogue (SID).

The event, held under the banner *“The Relevance of God’s Word in a Postmodern Society,”* was also co-organized by Ekklesia Bible College, a practice-based theological seminary founded by several Romanian pastors from the U.S. that now has branches in Romania, Uganda, and Rwanda.

The keynote speaker was Father Stelian Tofana, PhD, New Testament professor from The Orthodox School of Theology at University of Babeş-Bolyai in Cluj Napoca, Romania and member of The Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative (LOI).

Established in 2010, after the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, The Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative is a movement of Orthodox and Evangelical Christians who wish to “respect each other’s beliefs, learn from each other, and support one another.”

Farther Tofana spoke bluntly about the need to tear down literal and figurative walls within the evangelical and orthodox communities. “We live in a time in which denominational (confessional) wars are over,” Tofana said. “Our common fight now is for our Christian identity.”

He encouraged the two historically confrontational communities to live not just “in community but in communion with one another.” The novelty of having an Orthodox priest in full clerical vestments preach the gospel in an evangelical church was not lost on any one. “I was surprised to see how open he was and how similar our interpretation of scripture is,” said John Muntean, an elder in the evangelical church. “I certainly wasn’t expecting that.”

Romania is the most religious country percentage-wise in the European Union and an overwhelming majority of the country's citizens, 81.04%, identified as Eastern Orthodox in the 2011 census. Other Christian denominations include Roman Catholicism (4.33%), the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (0.75%-3.3%), Protestantism -- Reformed, Pentecostal, Baptist, Adventist, Unitarian, Lutheran and other Neoprotestant (6.2%).

Professor Tofana is one of the most prominent figures in the evangelical-orthodox dialogue both inside and outside Romania. At the invitation of Reverend Ovidiu Druhora, founder and president of Ekklesia Bible College and associate bishop of Emanuel Church of God, Father

Tofana held conferences in Atlanta, Detroit and Los Angeles, promoting the vision of The Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative (LOI).

In Anaheim, Father Tofana argued the thesis of the identity and mission of an authentic Christian affirming that: "the time of denominational Christianity has passed." We are now in the time of "missiological" Christianity. He called all believers to regain their identity in Christ and stand together facing the challenges of what he calls a "post-Christian" society. Tofana's talk was followed by a question-and-answer session co-led by Bishop Lazar Gog, PhD, professor at the Institute of Pentecostal Theology in Bucharest and Senior Pastor of Emanuel Church of God.

Tofana also used this opportunity to tour a newly released second edition (Romanian translation) of *"Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicals"* that now includes forewords by Tofana from the orthodox perspective and Danut Manastireanu, PhD, from the evangelical perspective.

Bishop Druhora looks to organize more of these events in the near future. He and Father Tofana affirm their belief that a melding of ideas and conversations is possible with both communities maintaining their unique identities without having to 'abandon their faith', as many view it, in order to step over to the other side.

"This dialogue offers a new frame of mind where all of us can conquer fear, resentments and hopelessness, and eliminates the trust-suspicion polarity," Druhora said. "We pray that these Conferences constitute a new beginning among orthodox and evangelicals, in which we learn to respect and love one other, recognizing the presence and the work of Christ in each other."



Father Stelian Tofana speaking to a congregation of Orthodox and protestant believers in Anaheim, CA



Pictured from
Left to Right:
Bishop Lazar
Gog, Father
Nikodim, Father
Stelian Tofana,
Father Corneliu
Avramescu,
Reverend Ovidiu
Druhora



Father Stealian Tofana and Reverend Ovidiu
Druhora at the first ever conference of the Society
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