



The Lausanne-Orthodox
Initiative



Gospel as Good News

The third global consultation of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative



A report



The Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative



Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative Meets for the Third Time:

Gospel as Good News

Having held its first two consultations in Albania members of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative (LOI) this year gathered in Finland to reflect on mission within the context of contemporary relations between the Orthodox and Evangelical communities. Held at the Sophia Cultural Centre near Helsinki the consultation ran from 1 to 5 September 2015. Initially designed as a forum for dialogue between the two traditions and to facilitate mutual understanding in the context of mission, the LOI continues to evolve in both its scope and purpose as levels of support and collaboration have taken root. This development of mutual trust and strength of relationships was reflected in the recent gathering in Finland where we were hosted by Orthodox and Evangelical Communities that straddle many of the historic divides in Europe. Finland is unique in recognising two Christian traditions, Lutheran and Orthodox, as state churches and the Orthodox Church itself bridges the divides of Eastern and Western cultures. Both Churches witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a very challenging secularised European context.



Participants

With 64 participants from over 25 different countries we were a larger gathering than in the two previous years and also more diverse having managed to strengthen our representation of Oriental Orthodox Churches and also welcoming a slightly larger contingent from Africa. In particular we were pleased to see four members (two Orthodox and two Evangelical) from Ethiopia. We were sad to welcome fewer participants from Russia and Romania (two highly significant countries) and no one from Asia beyond India. The full list of participants is provided at the end of this report.

The Gospel as Good News : Tuesday

Most participants having arrived at Sophia Cultural Centre, set on a beautiful wooded coastal isthmus, the consultation began with an informal drinks reception during which we were formally welcomed by His Eminence Metropolitan Ambrosius, Bishop of Helsinki, on behalf of the Orthodox Church of Finland; Bishop Tapio Luoma, Bishop of Espoo, on behalf of the Finnish Lutheran Church and Mr. Timo Keskitalo on behalf of the Evangelical Alliance of Finland and the Finnish Lausanne Committee. They each expressed a desire to see increased understanding between our respective traditions and a commitment to supporting each other as we engage with the complex mission challenges of our modern world. They specifically invited us to reflect on the challenges of mission in Finland during our stay.

Finnish hospitality was then extended as participants enjoyed the high standards of hospitality offered by Sophia Center and then joined the small local Orthodox community for the service of Vespers. Proceedings then continued with a welcome by the co-chairs of LOI, His Grace Bishop Angaelos, of the Coptic Church in the UK, and Mrs. Grace Mathews, vice-chair of the Lausanne Board. In their introduction they also reminded participants of the journey that LOI has already taken and the challenges that remain to be faced.

The Opening Key Note address was delivered by Fr. Michael Oleksa from the Diocese of Alaska (Orthodox Church in America). Speaking on the theme, 'Gospel as Good News', Fr. Michael challenged participants in their understanding of the Gospel and its centrality in mission and the whole life of discipleship. He ended his presentation by saying, "If there has been conflict, even hostility between "missions" anywhere, this situation undermines the success of any of them. Sin is division, a rupture of communion, a break in loving relationships. Salvation then is unity, a restoration of communion, a return to loving relationships."



Fr. Michael Oleksa
with Mr. Timo Keskitalo (left) and Metropolitan Ambrosius (right)

What is the Gospel? : Wednesday

The morning began with a Biblical reflection on Ephesians 1:1-22 led by Dr. Tim Grass in which he addressed the personal and corporate meanings of the Gospel reminding us that the climax of the work of the Gospel is "the church, as the demonstration to the whole cosmos of the grace and power of God. You cannot have the Gospel without the Church." The major presentations this morning were by Dr. Brad Nassif and Dr. Rosalee Velloso Ewell. In his paper "What is 'the Gospel' in Eastern Orthodox Perspective?" Brad stressed that "The gospel begins within the Being of God himself. At the center of creation is a God who exists in an eternal communion of Trinitarian love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is out of God's Trinitarian relationships, and for participation in those relationships, that we humans were created and redeemed." Bringing an Evangelical response Rosalee embraced the Trinitarian foundation and stressed the missional nature of Gospel saying, "If our starting point is the good news of Jesus and our obedience to that we see both gospel and mission from another

perspective. If we start with the fact that mission belongs to God, then we are free not only to learn and to be with one another, but we are also free to allow others and especially to allow God's Spirit to guide and to shape our mission, rather than controlling the outcomes ourselves."



After group discussions the main part of the afternoon was taken with a panel discussion which addressed contextual understanding of the Gospel. Mr. Safir Salim (presenting from Syria by Skype because he had been refused a visa to enter Finland) spoke passionately about the power of the lived gospel in the midst of destruction and human torment in his home city of Aleppo. Lisa Loden (a Messianic Jew from Israel) and Shadia Qubti (a Palestinian) spoke together of the centrality of the ministry of reconciliation to the

meaning of the Gospel in their shared context of violence and division. Finally Fr. Gregory Edwards, who serves a parish in Greece who also teaches missiology in the USA, spoke of the different challenges facing the Gospel in the economic collapse of Greece and the rampant materialism of the USA. In the lengthy discussion that followed one of the most poignant moments of the whole consultation occurred when Fr. Alexi Chedhadeh, a Syrian Orthodox priest from Lebanon stepped forward to talk personally with his brother, Safir Salim, in Aleppo – a conversation we were all privileged to eavesdrop. Their conversation made tangible the pain of Christians who are forced to decide to stay or flee during conflict.

During the evening of our first full day seven participants from contexts as diverse as Russia, Egypt, India, Slovenia, the UK, Ethiopia and the USA shared their own story and passion for mission whilst the rest of the participants prayed for each situation. This evening of prayer provided a fitting end to a very full day.

During this consultation LOI launched its first publication, *The Mission of God: Studies in Orthodox and Evangelical Mission* (edited by Canon Mark Oxbrow and Dr. Tim Grass) which contains most of the papers from the first two LOI consultations.



What makes the Gospel Good News? : Thursday



With a reflection on 1 Peter 2:4-14 Fr. Daniel Seifemichael Feleke of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church began our second full day and orientated us towards our consideration of what makes the Gospel good news.

The main papers this morning were delivered by Dr. Valdir Steuernagel from Brazil, an evangelical, and Mr. Nathan Hoppe of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania. In his paper, "Gospel Incarnate and its Missional Implications", Valdir began with the Lausanne Commitment and drew out of this a Christology 'from above' and 'from below', the implication of which is that the Gospel is never neutral to context, it always engages with the reality of the human condition. The incarnation

of Jesus, an act of the Trinity, he maintained is the primary example of this engagement of the divine with the human and so must provide the pattern for our mission. Valdir ended with the confession that, “The movement from evangelization as very much taught and understood as being the verbal proclamation of the Gospel to *mission* is a long and difficult one within the circles of Lausanne itself.” Nathan’s paper took up the theme of incarnation from his firm grounding in Patristic theology. Having explored particular insights on the incarnation that come from Orthodox and evangelical sources he went on to reflect on the interconnection between the incarnation and Christian mission in three related areas: Sacrament, church, person. Nathan then moved on to explore the incarnational process for the Christian missionary through the personal story of his family and particularly his parents’ work in Latin America. His paper ends with a consideration of contemporary challenges to incarnate mission and how Orthodox and evangelical communities are respectively responding and can learn from each other.



A shorter session after lunch invited Fr. Evangelos Thiani, from the Orthodox Church in Kenya, and Pastor Alfred Gollosi, an evangelical pastor from Albania, to reflect on what makes the Gospel Good News in their own contexts. Fr. Evangelos suggested that the Gospel, or at least the Church, was not initially perceived as ‘good news’ in Africa because it was seen to be against culture, destroying the traditions of the ancestors and closely allied with colonial power. It was only as Christians began to live the Gospel in prayer and action that its character as good news was perceived and evoked a response. It is often through its diaconal ministries, its engagement with liberation, injustice and ecology that Church in Africa is most missional. Drawing on the work of Alan Hirsch, Pastor Alfred began his paper by stressing the missional imperative of “going deep down into the culture”. Building on this he pointed to the way of incarnational discipleship empowered by the Holy Spirit. He concluded with a warning to those evangelicals tempted to ‘worship the Bible’ saying, “Worshipping the Scriptures is putting the book in place of a living relationship with God and gospel cannot be incarnated without relationship. Worship of scripture leads to fundamentalism, legalism and religiosity. This generates a “pseudo-Christianity” and a corrupted and a degenerated tradition, denying the living Lord and refusing his source of life.”

The Context of Finland

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in Helsinki where participants were welcomed at both the Orthodox and Lutheran Cathedrals. In each place we heard something of the life of the Christian community in that city and its missional challenges. At the Lutheran Cathedral we shared in a brief prayer service.



Theological Formation

An optional session was offered on Thursday evening to look at Orthodox-Evangelical relations in ministerial formation and theological education. This session, despite its late hour, attracted also half the participants present. Carefully chaired by Prof. Anne-Marie Kool the wide-ranging discussion surveyed some of the current exchanges that take place and the many other opportunities that exist for collaboration in the formation of Christian leaders. All present recognised that stereotypes adopted and prejudices formed during initial ministerial formation often shape, and indeed jeopardise, inter-tradition relationships in later ministry so making a positive impact at an early stage is important. The group plan to meet again in future and will be exploring such practical steps as faculty and student exchanges.

How do we communicate the Gospel? : Friday

The final full day began with a reflection on Acts 13:13-44 by Sr. Theoktisi Emsley, from Greece, in which she reminded us that in the post-resurrection witness of the early church verbal proclamation, good deeds and holy living all came together in a comprehensive sharing of good news. She concluded with words from Archbishop Anastasios of Albania, *"The Church is not the Church when it is not actively engaged in mission. Mission will always remain the central ecclesiastical matter; an expression of the life and vitality of the Church. Unthinkable as it is to have a Church without liturgical life, it would be even more unthinkable to have a Church without missionary life."*



That morning we benefited from two major presentations by Bishop Angaelos, of the Coptic Church in the UK, and Mr. Femi Adeleye from Ghana. Bishop Angaelos began by sharing some of his own experience of communicating the gospel in the increasingly secularised UK and of finding 'points of contact' with contemporary culture, especially with young people. Femi took up this theme of pastoral approaches to

mission reminding us at first that we cannot neglect the context in which we live where up to 100,000 people a year are killed because they have chosen to identify themselves with Christ. He then drew on Biblical material to stress the 'pastoral heart' of the Father, Son and Spirit. Drawing on contemporary evangelical missiologists he then suggested that appropriate communication of the Gospel today demands a context of reconciliation, life-style choices, suffering and hope. He concluded with the words of Ian Maclaren *"Be gentle with each person you meet, for each of them is fighting a great battle."*

After lunch Bishop Christopher Cocksworth, of the Church of England, and Fr. Artur Petrosyan, of the Armenian Apostolic Church, took us into our final session on Applied Pastoral Approaches to Mission. Bishop Christopher, speaking of his experience as an Anglican evangelical, spoke of needing to re-engage both with an holistic understanding of the gospel and ecclesiology. He said, "the rediscovery of the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit and the coming of the Kingdom of God has led to a renewed energy for

the sort of Spirit-inspired ministry that we see in the life of Jesus and the New Testament Church.” He then gave a number of practical examples of how this process is coming alive in the church, including ‘Natural Church Development’, ‘Alpha Course’, and ‘Fresh Expressions’. Fr. Artur in his paper painted a wide canvas for mission saying, “As Jesus’ proclamation of God’s Kingdom, so also does the Church’s mission serves Life – that is, the transformation and the renewal of the earth in the perspective of God’s New World.” He went onto describe the Bible as “the Holy Spirit’s tool” for the “schooling of believers” and gave a critique of those who use marketing tools in mission. “God will abide by His word and bless it.”, he said, “The success however – whether and how many listeners repent – is not within our power to determine. Therefore we pray to God, that He will in His mercy open the doors for His Word (Col. 4:3) and let it flow in (2 Thess. 3:1)”



Next Steps : Friday night/Saturday

The final formal session of the consultation, which was followed by a reception for local leaders, gave space for an open discussion about the future of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative. Many issues were raised and discussed and the more significant of these were taken up by the LOI Steering Committee which met at the close of the consultation. Some of these were:

- Appreciation of the increased sense of trust, openness and honest discussion at this, our third consultation. As one participant observed, “This is the first consultation at which I have heard people more ready to critique their own tradition than to criticise other traditions”;
- A concern to see more active mission collaboration between consultations;
- A desire for more young people to be engaged in the vision and work of LOI;
- Concern about the inadequate representation of two significant Orthodox communities (in Russia and Romania);
- A commitment to take forward the discussion regarding theological education;
- A call for solidarity with, and prayer for, our sister and brother Christians caught in situations of conflict and violence;
- A request for more regionalisation and the enabling of regional consultations or conversations;
- A suggestion that the next global consultation might take place in 2017 or 2018.

Outcomes and Future Plans

The Lausanne Orthodox Initiative continues to be an inspiring and unique ecumenical dialogue. It is not on any official level nor does the dialogue have any direct institutional impact. Instead the impact is on a personal level; person to person, community to community, two different Christian traditions reconciling with each other after years of mistrust and misunderstanding. It is on this level that common ground is discovered and conflicts can be resolved; each acknowledging their genuine differences but each also acknowledging their common faith in Christ.

The Steering Committee have put in place firm plans for (a) a Regional Consultation to be held in Ethiopia at the invitation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the second half of 2016, and (b) a Theological Educators' Consultation to be hosted in the UK during 2016. They also stand ready to support and encourage other regional consultations and will take responsibility for planning a further global consultation in 2017 or 2018. The Steering Committee have also solicited and received feedback from participants since the consultation and will be giving this further consideration in January 2016.



CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

Revd Dr Femi B Adeleye, World Vision International, Ghana

His Grace Bishop Angaelos, Coptic Church of Egypt, UK

Bishop Mathews Mor Aphrem, Syrian Orthodox Church, India

Melake Selam Abba Kelatsadike Mulugeta Argaw, Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Dr Bruk Asale, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Mr Ramez Atallah, The Bible Society of Egypt

Mr John Baxter-Brown, World Evangelical Alliance, UK

Revd Richard Brewis, The Evangelical Free Church of Finland (EFCF) & The Finnish Bible Society (FiBS)

Fr Alexi Chehadeh, Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and the All East, Lebanon

The Rt Revd Dr Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry, Church of England (Anglican Communion)

Mr Matjaž Črnivec, Bible Society of Slovenia

Mrs Leslie Doll, Lausanne Movement, USA

The Revd Dr Gregory Edwards, Holy Metropolis of Demetrias, Orthodox Church of Greece

Dr Mark R Elliott, Editor of East-West Church and Ministry Report, Asbury University, USA

Sr Theoktisti Emsley, Monastery of St John the Forerunner, Greece

Dr C Rosalee Velloso Ewell, Theological Commission, World Evangelical Alliance, UK

Revd Daniel Seifemichael Feleke, Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Pastor Alfred Gollosi, Baptist Union of Albania, Albanian Evangelical Brotherhood

Dr Tim Grass, Senior Research Fellow, Spurgeon's College, London, UK

Mr Nathan Hoppe, Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania

Mr W Taylor Hostetter, Orthodox Church in America & The Navigators

Fr Heikki Huttunen, Orthodox Church of Finland, Ecumenical Council of Church of Finland

Metropolitan Ambrosius Jaaskelainen, Metropolitan Bishop of Helsinki, Orthodox Church of Finland

Revd Dr Risto Jukko, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Revd Timo Keskitalo, Evangelical Alliance of Finland, International Evangelical Church

Revd Geoff Kimber, Church Mission Society, UK

Prof Dr Anne-Marie Kool, Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies, Hungary

Mr Sergey Koryakin, Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary, Russia

Mr Nikos Kosmidis, Centre for Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies "Metropolitan

Panteleimon Papageorgiou" (CEMES), Greece

Revd Dr Markku Kotila, Finnish Bible Society / United Bible Societies

Dr James M Kushiner, Antiochian Orthodox Church, USA, The Fellowship of St James (ecumenical)

Dr Peter Kuzmič, Evangelical Theological Seminary, Croatia *(Did not attend due to family sickness)*

Dr Ralph Lee, The Navigators, UK

Ms Lisa Loden, Musalaha Reconciliation Ministries, Israel

Archbishop Leo Makkonen, Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland *(Host but was not able to attend)*

Dr Danut Manastireanu, Anglican, World Vision International, Romania

Mrs Grace Mathews, Delhi Bible Fellowship, India

Revd Esko Matikainen, Pentecostal Church of Finland

Priest George Maximov, Russian Orthodox Church

Dr Kostake Milkov, Evangelical Church in Macedonia

Prof Bradley Louis Nassif, Antiochian Orthodox Church, USA

Mrs Aino Nenola, Orthodox Church of Finland, Orthodox Church Aid and Missions Filantropia

Mr Tekletsadik Belachew Nigru, Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Ms Olga Oleinik, Church Mission Society, Orthodox Mission Network, Belarus

Fr Michael Oleksa, Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of Alaska

Revd Canon Mark Oxbrow, Faith2Share, UK

Dr Peter Penner, TCM International, Mennonite, Austria

Revd Fr Artur Petrosyan, Armenian Apostolic Church

Archpriest Stephen Platt, Russian Orthodox Church in Great Britain /

Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius

Mr Anton Ponomarev, Faith2Share, UK

Ms Shadia Qubti, Musalaha, Palestine / Israel

Revd Dr Seppo Rissanen, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission

Revd Dr Cecil M Robeck, Jr (Mel), Assemblies of God, USA

Mr Safir Salim, Syrian Orthodox Church, Aleppo

Fr. Ioan Sauca, Romanian Orthodox Church / World Council of Churches

Mr Artem Sharafutdinov, Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow

Revd Dr James Stamoolis, Evangelical, USA

Dr Valdir Steuernagel, World Evangelical Alliance, Brazil

The Very Revd Protopresbyter Evangelos Thiani, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria

and All Africa, Kenya

Archpriest Eric G Tosi, Orthodox Church in America

Dr Ekaterini Tsalampouni, Hellenic Bible Society, Greece

Dr Vladimir Ubeivolc, Missiological Research Center, Moldova

Dr Grant White, Filantropia, Orthodox Church of Finland

Metropolitan Dr Geevarghese Yulios, The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, India

