



The Lausanne-Orthodox
Initiative



Witness, Peace and Unity



**A regional consultation of the Lausanne-
Orthodox Initiative**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 11-14 October 2016

Origins of the Consultation

Present at the LOI consultation in Finland in 2015 were two Evangelicals and two Orthodox from Ethiopia. During the week they met and formulated a proposal to invite LOI to convene a regional gathering. This was welcomed with alacrity by the Steering Committee, and the four became a local organizing committee, with which LOI worked closely. Ethiopia, with its population of 96 million, is a strategic location because, as well as the large Orthodox community there is a strong and growing Evangelical movement. Our two traditions encounter one another constantly here. Addis Ababa is becoming a hub for sub-Saharan Africa. The current situation in the country lent unexpected urgency to our deliberations.

Participants

Orthodox and Evangelicals were approximately equal in numbers. Most of the participants (about 60 in number) were from Ethiopia or have worked in Ethiopia for a number of years. Other countries in the region which were represented included Egypt, Eritrea and Kenya. We had anticipated participants from South Sudan and Ghana but in the event they were unable to attend. Several Indian delegates were present from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, part of the Oriental Orthodox family alongside the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church. Evangelical participants came from the Mekane Yesus Church, the Kale Heywet Church, the Meserete Kristos Church and the Mulu Wongel Betekristian, as well as Anglicans, Baptists, Independent Evangelicals, Methodists and Presbyterians from other parts of the region and the world. Participants included bishops and other church leaders, seminary teachers and mission workers. Several were younger leaders, including two about to commence post-graduate research in the UK. Although not an official delegate, my wife Ann accompanied me and provided invaluable logistical and pastoral support.



In spite of the declaration of a state of emergency by the prime minister of Ethiopia on the Sunday before we convened, the great majority of those who had booked were able to attend. However, a few had been unable to obtain visas. The visa issue is increasingly challenging, and we shall be asking invitees to the 2017 consultation (which will be in Cambridge) to liaise with us much further in advance.

Tuesday

The venue for our consultation was the Ghion Hotel, in the centre of Addis. This had been recommended by the local organizers, and had been a guest house for foreign visitors during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie. It proved a good choice, being a surprisingly peaceful location, and the catering was excellent.

Having gathered in time for lunch, we moved to the Hilton Hotel for the opening reception, followed by dinner together. We were officially welcomed by His Grace Abune Daniel, an archbishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, on behalf of His Holiness Abune Mathias I, Patriarch and Catholicos of Ethiopia. The work of LOI and its missional focus was introduced by the co-chairs, His Grace Bishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the UK and Mrs Leslie Doll of the Lausanne Movement (deputizing for Mrs Grace Mathews who was unable to attend).



Presentations about Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in Ethiopia were given by Rev Dr Waqseyoum Edosa, (Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus) and Komos Abba kaleTsdig Mulugeta. Both stressed the commitment of their tradition to working as closely as possible with other Christians. Dr Tim Grass, who has succeeded Revd Canon Mark Oxbrow as LOI facilitator, then outlined the structure and programme for the consultation.

For the evening session we returned to the Ghion Hotel to hear two historical papers which set the scene for our deliberations. Fr Daniel Seifemichael Feleke spoke on 'Orthodox Mission from St Mark until today' and Revd Dr Eyasu Ferenj (Kale Heywet Church) on 'Evangelical Mission in Ethiopia'. Both papers provided valuable outlines and did not shirk the difficult issues which bedevil relationships between the two traditions. In particular, very different perspectives on the nineteenth-century Protestant missionary movement were evident. A valuable discussion session followed. A metaphor drawn from the Scriptures was suggested as appropriate in the Ethiopian context, of raising the child from the dead and handing it back to its mother. The point was also made that there is a difference between saying that our hearers are not living as Christians should, and saying that they are not Christians.

Witness: Wednesday

The day began with a Bible reflection from Dr Ralph Lee, exploring the day's topic of witness from John's Gospel and exhorting us to let Christ be seen in and through us.

The morning's presentations included an introduction to the work of the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia, and a longer session looking at the realities of Christian-Muslim relations in Egypt. This was presented jointly by Ramez Atallah of the Bible Society of Egypt and Bishop Angaelos. Whilst not glossing over the terrible problems faced by the Christian community, especially during the last few years, they told of how God is at work in that country. Most notable has been the refusal of Christians to retaliate when attacked. Even so, they expressed the conviction that Christians need to be reconciled to one another if they are to be effective instruments of reconciliation in the nation – hence the importance of the work which LOI seeks to do. The Bible Society thus offers a unique opportunity for Christians to work together. Group discussions later in the day gave scope for participants to reflect on what it means to bear witness as Christians in Muslim contexts.



Apart from the first evening, we avoided holding sessions after dinner. Local participants all travelled in each day, and they would not have felt safe travelling at night. However, this allowed others to spend time together informally over dinner and afterwards, and for members of the steering committee to meet in order to respond to the way the consultation was developing.

Peace: Thursday

Dr Bruk Asale of the ECMY Seminary began our day by leading a time of Bible reflection and prayer. His passionate appeal to us to pray for Ethiopia will not be forgotten.

We then welcomed Dr Priscilla Adoyo, a Kenyan who has taught at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology and Fuller Seminary, to speak about 'The Role of Religion in Peace-Building'. Her presentation highlighted the importance of identity: conflicts are frequently rooted in differing identities, and religion plays a powerful role in giving people their sense of identity. Religious leaders thus have a crucial part to play in resolving conflict. Dr Adoyo drew on her research to illustrate this by outlining the origins and work of the Interfaith Mediation Centre in Nigeria. In conclusion, she stressed that peace-building is an integral part of our Christian calling, and that there is no alternative to working with leaders of other faiths.



An Orthodox view of the subject was offered by Metropolitan Dr Geevarghese Yulios from India, a member of the LOI steering committee. He began by exploring what the peace is which Christ leaves with us (John 14:27). Arguing strongly that religious traditions all promote peace, he reminded us that Orthodox in the Liturgy pray for the peace of the whole world. But in conflict resolution, close attention is required to the specific dynamics at work in each situation if religious leaders are to fulfil their calling to promote peace.

After lunch we were all bussed to the Patriarchate. An imposing gateway framed by two doves of peace led the way to a building housing a museum of religious art, vestments and other church requisites. During our guided tour, the steering committee were received by His Holiness in audience. We discussed the work of LOI and were delighted by His Holiness's evident warm interest and blessing. During the audience we presented him with a copy of the first LOI book, *The Mission of God* (Regnum, 2015), which contains papers from the two consultations in Albania.



Afterwards there was time for us to explore the market near the Patriarchate. As a Westerner, it was fascinating to see Orthodox Christian literature on sale there, along with blessing crosses and icons.

On our return to the hotel we spent time in discussion groups sharing our own experiences of the role played by religion in situations of conflict and attempts at resolution.

Unity: Friday

Our Bible reflection and prayer this morning were led by Fr Evangelos Thiani from Kenya. Basing his comments on Mark 9:38-41, he posed a series of questions about relationships between our two traditions, which stimulated lively discussion in a subsequent group session.

A plenary session considered how we can promote the priority of dialogue between our Christian traditions. Tekletsadik Belachew from the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology explored the subject by way of examining the future of African Theology. He argued that this lies in returning together to the ancient African Christian theological tradition, and that Evangelicals and Orthodox in Africa share significant commonalities.



Metropolitan Coorilos, moderator of the Council for World Mission and Evangelism, then reported on the recent Global Christian Forum consultation on proselytism. The work being undertaken is highly relevant to what LOI seeks to do, and this underlines the importance of our maintaining good relationships with other agencies.

After lunch we approved the draft of a statement of intent in our final sessions. It expresses what as participants we hope to do in applying what we have gained from our time together, and is quoted below.

We also reviewed the consultation process, participants having opportunity to suggest improvements. In fact, given the challenges of organizing this week, there was much less than might have been

expected, and many testified to the benefit which it had been to them personally and in their ministry.

Outcomes and Future Plans

In the statement of intent, participants committed themselves to working at relationships between Christian traditions for the sake of the mission of God.

Our time together reinforced our desire to co-ordinate our activities and co-operate with one another in a deeper way, and we wish to renew our commitment to doing so as Evangelical and Orthodox Christians. The Churches in Ethiopia look forward to continuing to work together in this way.

As participants in this historic gathering, and in response to the evident moving of the Holy Spirit amongst us, we go forward from this consultation with a clear commitment to pray for, encourage and empower a deeper fellowship in mission between our respective traditions.

To fulfil this commitment we will endeavour, in the strength of the Holy Trinity, to:

- bear witness daily, in word and deed, to the reconciling love of the Gospel;
- be patient, forgiving, generous and humble towards one another as we struggle with theological, cultural, historical and personal differences that divide us, as well as the historical context of our relationships, always seeking the mercy of God.
- support those in Ethiopia whose vision is to explore and express more deeply our respective, and joint, participation in the Mission of God for the sake of His glory in this land;
- foster continuing engagement between our traditions within the whole region of the Horn of Africa, as in other regions, for the sake of the Kingdom of God – using, where appropriate, the insights, resources and experience of the LOI;
- encourage the formation of mission-minded leaders within our respective traditions, and hold in prayer the 2017 LOI consultation on this theme.

In making this commitment we, as participants in this consultation and members of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative, draw strength from the prayer of our Lord that we might ‘be one’ in life and in witness, in the spirit of John 17. We draw hope from the experience of divine grace which we have enjoyed together this week in the fellowship of the saints of all ages.

Of course, it is easy for such commitments to evaporate within a short time. LOI is therefore in ongoing contact with the local organizing group, encouraging them to build on the impact of this gathering and offering whatever support is appropriate.



The local organizers have been considering how to do this, and have requested advice and support regarding the formation of an Orthodox-Evangelical group for theological study and prayer. The plan is that an invited group meet to build friendships and study Orthodox texts together, in the process modelling the Christian virtues which are needed for sharing in God's mission. Ultimately the group hopes to go public through publication. This sort of venture is encouraging, and LOI will offer ongoing support as requested.

But it is probable that for many participants, it was the opportunity to make the personal acquaintance of Christians from the other tradition which was of most immediate significance. In this way, prejudices are broken down, preconceptions challenged, and elements of a common faith uncovered. LOI remains committed to facilitating dialogues which are not only theological but also relational and missional.



Looking ahead, a consultation for theological educators is planned for 5-8 September 2017 in Cambridge. Under the theme of 'Theological Formation for Mission', we shall be exploring how our traditions can collaborate in theological education. We intend to involve younger and potential theological educators as well as experts in the field, and hope to have both Evangelical and Orthodox participants from a range of countries, providing a space where they can consult together about how to co-operate in their own context.

Further ahead, we are exploring the possibility of holding another regional consultation in 2018, this time in the USA; Boston is a venue which is being actively considered. LOI has strong American input from both traditions. Relationships between the two are sometimes fraught, yet there is much which each can learn from, and contribute to, the other.

The LOI steering committee wish, finally, to express their warm gratitude to the American Bible Society for sharing their vision of a mission-focused dialogue, and in particular for the financial support which made it possible for us to respond to the invitation to hold a consultation in such a strategic location without placing a financial burden on local invitees. The consultation was left with a surplus of £2,883.46. This will be used to bring Ethiopian leaders to the Cambridge consultation.



Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative Consultation 2016: Accounts

Income	£	\$	Birr	Expenditure	£	\$	Birr
ABS grant (\$22000)	16527.68			Hilton Hotel for reception and dinner	3132.69		
Consultation fees paid	1433.1	1999	18359	Ghion Hotel: accommodation, catering, room / equipment hire	8979.36	114	1847
Donations		440		Transport to patriarchate / airport transfers		450	4500
Refund on unused air ticket	85.68			ABS delegate expenses	1231.31		
				Facilitator travel (part)	320.49		
				Travel bursaries / tickets purchased by LOI	1819.59	1100	3300
				Mission of God books distributed	479.68		
				Stationery, postage, photocopying etc	17.01		3834
	18046.46				15980.13		
Amounts expressed in £	1999.18	2439			1363.93	1664	
	684.53		18359		502.65		13481
TOTAL IN £	20730.17			TOTAL IN £	17846.71		
SURPLUS IN £	2883.46						

Conversion rates used: 26.82 Birr = £1; 22.08 Birr = \$1; £1 = \$1.22

1. No account has been taken in these accounts of staff time and admin support. This is estimated at approx. £3,000.
2. The travel fund budget was set at US\$10,000 (approx. £8,000). The actual spend totalled £2870.69 (approx. £3,500) for 8 people.

CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

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Qes Solomon Mekonen Addis, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Ethiopia
Dr Priscilla Adoyo-Maritim, Africa International University, Kenya
Rev Teshome Amenu, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Ethiopia
HG Bishop Angaelos, Coptic Church of Egypt, UK
Dr Bruk Ayele Asale, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Seminary, Ethiopia
Megbi beluy Aemer Ashebir, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Ethiopia
Ramez Atallah, Bible Society of Egypt, Egypt
Mrs Rebecca Atallah, Sudanese Displaced Children's Learning Center, Egypt
Memihir Girma Batu, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Ethiopia
Mrs Seblewongel Belachew, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Ethiopia
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Rt Rev Dr Grant LeMarquand, Assistant Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia
Dr Wendy LeMarquand, Anglican, Ethiopia
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