

Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative



A short introduction

The Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative (LOI) was born of informal conversations between leaders of the Lausanne Movement and Orthodox observers at the 2010 Lausanne III Congress in Cape Town. These conversations led to a desire to explore what our two quite different Christian traditions might have in common as we engage in mission. A core group was formed in 2011 of five Orthodox and five Evangelical leaders with an Anglican facilitator. In 2013 they organized the first consultation on 'The Mission of God', which brought together in Albania 46 Evangelical and Orthodox leaders from across the world with a focus on mission. Subsequent consultations in Albania (2014), Finland (2015), and Ethiopia (2016) developed this exploration and built on relationships established. A specialist consultation for theological educators took place in Cambridge (2017). The LOI Board (the successor body to the core group) is now exploring further regional consultations, as well as investigating possibilities for other joint actions.

The LOI Commitment

The goal of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative is to reflect constructively on the history of relationships between Orthodox and Evangelicals in order to work towards better understanding, and encourage reconciliation and healing where wounds exist. Through this process Evangelicals and Orthodox are mutually enriched and strengthened in the work of mission, working towards mutual respect, support and cooperation in the spirit of our Lord's prayer for His Church in John 17.

To achieve this goal the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative is committed to encouraging members of its two traditions to: pray for each other and study Scripture together; encourage mutual understanding, respect and appreciation of one another's tradition and practice; promote collaboration in mission wherever this is possible; build short-term and long-term mission partnerships; and facilitate the exchange and sharing of resources for mission.

Why this work is important today

A historical perspective

The LOI undertakes its work in a particular historical context, one which requires repentance, forgiveness, healing and generosity in the life of the Spirit. Over many centuries, and particularly during the twentieth century, we have seen both the persecution of Evangelical Christians by Orthodox communities and the demonization of the Orthodox faith by Evangelical missionaries. There has been suffering and hurt on both sides and much of this continues today. But this is not the whole story. Particularly during periods of Communist persecution, Christians of different traditions have stood side by side, as indeed they do in Egypt and Syria today, maintaining a common witness for the Gospel. LOI seeks to mediate reconciliation and healing and build constructive relationships of trust and respect.



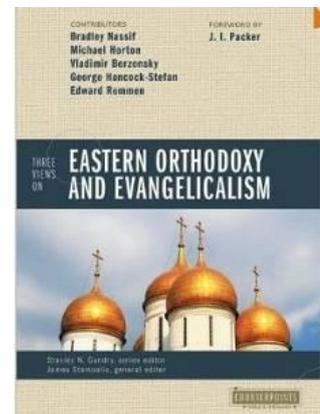
Common commitments



As we build more positive relationships we recognize that we have a common mission agenda. Orthodox Christians have worshipped as a missionary community for two millennia. Nina of Georgia (left), Cyril and Methodius, Stephen of Perm, Nicholas Ilminski, Innocent and Herman of Alaska, Isaias Polikin of China and Nicholas of Japan stand in a long line of cross-cultural mission leaders. Evangelicals have a shorter history but no less of a heritage of mission leaders, including William Carey, Johann Ludwig Krapf, Amy Carmichael, Samuel Crowther, Abdul Masih, Jim and Elisabeth Elliot, and Wang Ming Tao. Both communities take seriously the missionary imperative of the gospel and long to see people of all nations, tribes and languages gathered round God's throne (Rev.7:9). The Lausanne Movement, with its strong focus on Evangelization and the Mission of the People of God, provides a suitable meeting place for those from different Christian traditions who have a heart for mission.

Theological honesty

The LOI do not seek to gloss over the very real theological differences which exist between us as Evangelical and Orthodox believers. However, we believe that we can only move forward if we work hard and honestly at theological issues and to this end we seek to draw on much of the good work which has already been done by others, particularly through the theological dialogues in Europe and North America. Our Board includes some who have been involved in this work. At our international consultations we have also invited scholars from both traditions to help us in such areas as the theological concepts of justification, salvation and *theosis*, practical issues related to the pastoral outworking of mission and the missional formation of leaders, and the challenging topics of proselytism and canonical territory.



Missiological focus



Whilst recognizing the importance of theology, our focus is on mission. Our first two consultations were on 'The Mission of God', and the third on 'The Gospel as Good News'. Most of the leaders attending were mission practitioners, missiologists or church leaders with a deep commitment to mission. In addition to our consultations, we seek to sponsor joint mission initiatives and activities. In 2013 we reached out to children in Egypt through a team of Orthodox and Evangelical workers from Egypt and the USA. In 2014 we sponsored a consultation for students from both traditions that ran in parallel with our main consultation. *The Mission of God: Studies in Orthodox and Evangelical Mission*, edited by Mark Oxbrow and Tim Grass, drawing together papers from the first two consultations, and with a clear mission focus, was published by Regnum in July 2015.

Relational praxis

Our primary methodology is to build relationships of understanding, respect and trust. We are not looking for superficial working relationships that gloss over real differences and difficulties. Rather, we believe that we demonstrate respect when we take difference and disagreement seriously and work to overcome them. During the first five years the members of our Board have developed a close relationship of trust and each of us feels enriched by the Christian traditions the others bring to the table.

Why the Lausanne Movement is a sponsor of this initiative



In one sense this initiative could have been sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) or some other body such as Call2All. However, sometimes it is important to let movements grow organically, especially when they are at their very heart relational. LOI was born when one evangelical leader met one Oriental Orthodox leader in Cape Town and asked him, 'Who are you, what are you, what are you doing here?' Several years later the initiative remains relational. Few who attend our consultations or work with us in other

ways have been officially appointed by their churches, and there is no 'reporting back' to ecclesial structures. We remain a group of individuals who share a passion for reconciliation as a foundation for mission.

The Global Christian Forum (GCF) convened a parallel group looking at issues of proselytism, but each member of that group clearly represented a particular ecclesial constituency. Their work is important but very different from that of the LOI. If this initiative had been sponsored by the WEA it might have faced similar challenges to the GCF, with legitimate demands for 'representation'. Hosted by Lausanne, the LOI is free to be a movement of like-minded people who do not represent others but seek to be catalysts, advocates and influences within their own constituency.

It is very important to note that Lausanne is not the sole sponsor of this movement but one of two sponsors – the other being 'the Orthodox Churches'. We have two co-chairs, one Orthodox

and the other evangelical. The Global Christian Forum, WEA, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate have had participants at our consultations and we keep in contact with all three.

The Board

Co-Chairs

Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox, UK

Grace Mathews, Evangelical, India / USA

Members

Femi Adeleye, Evangelical, Ghana

Leslie Doll, Evangelical, Lausanne Movement, USA

Nathan Hoppe, Albanian Orthodox

Danut Manastireanu, Evangelical, Romania

Mark Oxbrow, Evangelical, Faith2Share, UK

Stephen Platt, Russian Orthodox, UK

Anton Ponomarev, Russian Orthodox, Faith2Share, UK

Jim Stamoolis, Evangelical, USA

Metropolitan Yulios, Syrian Orthodox, India

Advisors

Ralph Lee, Ethiopian Orthodox, UK

Kosta Milkov, Evangelical, Macedonia

Tiran Petrosyan, Armenian Apostolic, Austria

Doug Birdsall, Evangelical, Lausanne Movement, USA

Brad Nassif, Antiochian Orthodox, USA

Martin Ritsi, Orthodox Christian Mission Center, USA

Facilitator

Tim Grass, Evangelical, Isle of Man,

lausanneorthodox@gmail.com



What the LOI is currently working on

- Following up our regional consultation in Ethiopia in October 2016;
- A North American Regional Consultation in Boston in June 2018;
- A Middle East Regional Consultation in Autumn 2019’;
- Exploring possibilities for ‘listening visits’ by small groups to areas where relationships are particularly difficult;
- Developing closer relationships with the Lausanne Movement as a whole, the WEA, the GCF, and other bodies who share our concerns;
- Expanding a collection of resources for Orthodox and Evangelical mission leaders on our website: www.loimission.net;
- Extending our prayer and support network (you can sign up to receive updates on the website).

Follow us at:

www.loimission.net