



# Evangelicals and Orthodox Working Together

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Studies



## Encounters between Evangelicals and Orthodox have a long history

- Luther met an Ethiopian Orthodox monk and they agreed on their understanding of the Trinity!
- Probably the most significant contacts started in the 19<sup>th</sup> and then 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with western missionary movements
- CMS always sought to work with churches that they found, rather than plant new ones: positive initial encounters across the Middle East, Ethiopia, and India (They considered Indian Orthodox better missionary candidates for Asia than westerners (initially))





# Former USSR nations

- Russians were well received in Europe after the Revolution – the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius (still active today) in the UK is a good example of this
- But generally, western mission and missionaries has been poorly informed about the Orthodox Church
- The opening up of Eastern Europe following the fall of the USSR brought significant tension with Evangelical (and other) mission seeing an open opportunity





## Outlooks

- Western understanding of 'nominal' Christianity has influenced outlooks
  - Framed around the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century when many were still attending church out of habit, but without any real belief mistakenly mapped on to many other Christian expressions – especially the Orthodox
  - Also, the individualisation of belief has left an attitude that it doesn't matter where people attend church – just that they are 'saved' – something which maps poorly on to Orthodox outlooks
  - Many long-standing differences: the canon of scripture, St Mary and the saints, how we think about good works (in my experience generally misunderstood and discussed poorly)
- Eastern Understanding of secularisation and globalisation
  - Orthodox scholars often conflate these two ideas, and frame especially Evangelicals (who can be strongly individualistic) as buying in to these values





# Significant Dialogue

- Thomas F Torrance (Evangelical Church of Scotland) and Georges Florovsky entered into a long correspondence and reached a formal joint declaration on the Trinity – very much a theological one
- Other theological schools have been part of such conversations (although not always the Evangelical ones)
- Some groups, for example Michael Harper
- Langham Trust and students – Middle East context diversity and need to work together – Lebanon, Egypt, etc.
- Many others....
- LOI has promoted interaction in different ways since 2010





# Key components

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- LOI is not a theological dialogue – not that we don't talk about theology but our aim is not to resolve the theological differences between traditions
- Our aim is to build meaningful relationships across the traditions, building respect, mutual learning, and spiritual growth through encounters across the traditions





## Where is LOI Working?

We have had participants from:

- Albania, Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria / UK, Cyprus, Czech Rep., Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Greece, India, Ireland, Jordan, Kenya, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Palestine, Romania, Switzerland, Russia, Serbia, Scotland, Swizerland, The Netherlands, UK, Brazil



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## Where is LOI Working?

We have had consultations in:

- Albania (international)
- Finland (international)
- Ethiopia (regional)
- UK (theological educators)
- USA (Holy Cross Seminary Boston, international)
- Egypt (regional)
- Salzburg (international)



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## Outcomes

- Strategic thinking about mission, including from major Evangelical missionary organizations
- Spiritual enrichment – especially in Salzburg through Evangelicals engaging with the Syriac Christian tradition
- Deep friendships that change outlooks
- The theology will come.....

