



The Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative



The Gospel as Good News

Third Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation of Senior Leaders
Sophia Cultural Centre, Finland : 1-5 September 2015

COMMUNIQUE

As guests of His Beatitude Archbishop Leo of Karelia and All Finland and the Evangelical Alliance of Finland (SEA), 63 Orthodox and Evangelical leaders gathered this week at the Sofia Cultural Centre, Helsinki. The participants, representing Christian communities in twenty-five different countries*, met to focus on 'The Gospel as Good News' examining our common understanding of the meaning and purpose of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, how we communicate this today, and its implications for community transformation and pastoral ministry.

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 healing where wounds exist. Through this process Evangelicals and Orthodox will be mutually enriched and strengthened in the work of mission, working towards mutual respect, support and cooperation. The first two international consultations were held in Albania in 2013 and 2014.

Under the leadership of co-chairs, His Grace Bishop Angaelos (of the Coptic Church in the UK) and Mrs. Grace Mathews (of the Lausanne Board), the consultation responded to eleven major papers by Evangelical and Orthodox theologians and church leaders; reflected on key passages of the Bible together; explored in small groups the issues raised by the papers for co-operation in mission; spent an evening in prayer for contemporary mission contexts globally; visited Orthodox and Evangelical Lutheran communities in Helsinki and participated in a panel discussion led by leaders from challenging mission contexts in Syria, Israel-Palestine, the USA and Greece.

Opening the consultation Fr. Michael Oleksa, from the Orthodox Church in Alaska, reminded those gathered that "if there has been conflict, even hostility between "missions" anywhere, this situation undermines the success of any of them Our divisions undermine our proclamation. Our ignorance of, and indifference towards, each other render our "Gospel" hypocritical at best, unbelievable at worst." In later papers Dr. C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell, of the World Evangelical Alliance, stressed the power of narrative theology whilst Mr. Nathan Hoppe, an Orthodox missionary in Albania, used his scholarship in patristics to emphasize the incarnational heart of the Gospel. Bishop Christopher Cocksworth, of the Church of England, and Fr. Tiran Petrosyan, of the Armenian Orthodox Church, spoke on the last day of the pastoral implications of the Gospel.

Facilitator

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Late one evening almost one third of the participants attended an 'optional' session on theological education and the formation of leaders within our respective communities. The aim was to learn what is being done, and could be done, to build better relationships between our respective communities and to influence a younger generation of leaders.

The critical realities of contemporary mission and the need for Gospel ministry were brought home to the consultation on Wednesday afternoon when an Orthodox youth worker joined the consultation, by Skype, from Aleppo, Syria, and spoke of the tragedy which continues to unfold in his country. This was also the week during which the refugee crisis in Europe escalated, forcing governments to open borders and reconsider their humanitarian responsibilities. Participants endorsed a statement on the refugee crisis in Europe released by His Grace Bishop Angaelos, during the consultation. (This can be read at <http://copticcentre.blogspot.co.uk/2015/09/statement-on-refugee-crisis-in-europe.html>). At the end of her Biblical reflection on the final day Sr. Theoktisti Emsley, of the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner, Greece, reminded participants that "The Spirit alone is the One who can change lives and meet the deepest needs of the 21st century".

During the consultation the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative launched its first book *The Mission of God: Studies in Orthodox and Evangelical Mission* edited by Canon Mark Oxbrow and Dr. Tim Grass, copies of which are available at <http://www.loimission.net/mog/>

Most of the papers from the 2015 consultation, pictures, and more information about the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative are available at <http://www.loimission.net>

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* *The countries represented were: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Brazil, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, India, Israel, Kenya, Lebanon, Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Palestine, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Syria, United Kingdom & the Isle of Man, and USA.*