

Summary and Closing Remarks at the Mission Eurasia Roundtable Discussion

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Summary Remarks

- Let us not “bear false witness” – let us be honest about what has happened – let us confess the mistakes on all sides
- In the West, we talk a lot about human rights (although we don’t often practice what we preach), but I would like to see us and our government talk more about human responsibility/duty
 - Working for freedom of religion should be our duty as Christians
 - Advocacy for religious freedom even for those religions that don’t conform to our beliefs
- Avoid broad generalizations about the Russian Orthodox Church
 - There are many “orthodoxies” in Russia and in Ukraine, not one!
 - Just like in the United States, where there are many different Christianities!
 - Let us be more nuanced!
 - The ROC is a large tent – much diversity over eleven time zones
 - We can find Orthodox leaders to partner with, as well as Catholic and Protestant leaders
- The church of Jesus Christ is an amazingly complex, multi-national organization with a huge network of locally-based communities
 - This is Track 3 diplomacy (people-to-people relationship building)
 - And NGOs and churches are much better equipped to do this work than government agencies, who work within a narrow political framework
- Let us be courageous and let us commit ourselves to the work of being reconcilers and peacemakers, as Jesus called us to be!

Closing Remarks

Thank you, speakers, for your excellent presentations and your thoughtful response to the questions from our audience. I would like to add a few additional observations.

I would like to see us and our government talk more about human responsibility, human duty, human obligations. I think religious freedom is a primary example of what we understand from our own experience to be an essential component in building a free and just society. Religious freedom is an absolutely key issue, both in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation, and even in our own country, along with advocacy for religious freedom, even for religions that we don't necessarily agree with, if we're going to have integrity in this process. Let's not just talk about human rights – our rights – but also about our responsibility, our duty to work for the common good.

A second thought: The church of Jesus Christ is an amazingly complex, multi-national corporation with a network of institutions all over Ukraine and all over Russia, which has a huge potential to be a reconciling force in these societies. If we can get Christians across denominational lines to begin to work together, it's going to be much more powerful, much more effective, than any government action on the part of the United States government, or even the Ukrainian or Russian government. Those of us who are involved with these NGOs and churches have an enormous opportunity to be used by God to be peacemakers and reconcilers in this part of the world. NGOs, churches, and mission's agencies are much better equipped to be involved in some of these issues than any governmental organizations.

And another observation I want to make, based on my own experience: When you come to the United States for a National Prayer Breakfast, I think you begin to understand that, when you're talking about Evangelical Christianity, that is not a single conglomerate. There are many "Christianities" in the United States. There is a diversity of religious beliefs that go under the label of "Evangelical" or "Christian." This country is extremely diverse, and there is a wide range of groups that operate under that label.

If that's true in the United States, it's also true in Ukraine and it's also true in Russia. In my experience, there are many "Orthodoxies" in Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church is a big organization, a big tent, which covers 11 time zones. And there is a lot of diversity within that church. So, we need to be careful about using stereotypes or making broad generalizations about the close relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Kremlin, for example. There is some of that, obviously, but there are other elements in the Orthodox Church, in my experience, that don't have that relationship, which parallels some experiences we have in the United States. I would just encourage us to recognize that diversity, and to find elements within the Orthodox Church, in the Catholic Church, in the Evangelical Church that can form networks together.

And then one final observation: BEAM (Business and Education as Mission), Inc. is a private foundation committed, along with Mission Eurasia, to working with young people, the next generation. Mission Eurasia has a program called the Next Generation Professional Leaders Initiative. I love that program. It's what our school in Moscow was all about until we were

closed down: Trying to encourage young professionals—lawyers, businessmen, journalists—to understand how their faith can be integrated with their professional life so they can be a witness in society.

School Without Walls is another exciting program that Mission Eurasia runs. In addition to Mission Eurasia's programs, there's Campus Crusade, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and Young Life - many programs that are working with young people. We have an opportunity now to raise up the next generation of young people who are committed to Jesus Christ and who can begin to have a powerful impact on the post-Communist world.

Friends, it's a joy to be with you. We had to work hard to get this all done in two hours, but we did it!