**International Initiatives Annual Report 2023**

The goal of the SNTS International Initiatives Program is broaden the footprint of the Society in regions of the world where it is underrepresented by supporting the scholarly study of the Bible and by increasing the Society’s membership in these regions.

***Liaison Committees***

**The** **Asia Pacific Liaison Committee (APLC)** has had to take into account the continuation of COVID 19 policies of quarantine and restriction in many parts of the Asian Pacific creating difficulties for planning regional conferences but looks forward to conducting the pre-conference in Melbourne in 2024. The APLC has been active in encouraging nominations for Associate Membership and full Membership in the region.

**The Latin America Caribbean Liaison Committee (LACLC)** has faced a similar situation but looks forward to hosting the preconference in Vienna jointly with the Eastern European Liaison Committee.

**The African Liaison Committee (ALC)**

In the year, mid 2022–mid 2023, the ALC with IBSA (Institute for Biblical Scholarship in Africa) organized the pre-conference for the SNTS Meeting in 2022 Leuven, 15 July and four online meetings: two for Eastern Africa (29 October, 2022; 6 June, 2023) and two for West Africa (23 November, 2022; 10 June, 2023). The theme of the pre-conference was: “Fullness of Life in John”. The other meetings tackled issues from New Testament, Old Testament, and Translation Studies. See Appendix B for papers presented. Future research might include African religions intercultural and inter-religious studies to address the nexus between these religions and others such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Recent visa processes have been a cause of frustration with it seems a new intensity of scrutiny, both at the point of application an subsequently. The intense scrutiny in effect discriminates against our black African colleagues and reflects the attempts of authorities to counter antidiscrimination movements by ensuring strict border control. SNTS continues to ensure applicants receive official invitations from within the hosting country but is limited beyond urging applicants to seek to make applications as early as possible. It is likely to remain a concern.

**The Eastern European Liaison Committee (EELC)**

During the EELC Business Meeting at the 2022 SNTS Conference in Leuven, a new leadership of the EELC was elected. The new president is Prof. Dr. Tobias Nicklas, University of Regensburg. In addition, two vice-presidents were elected: Prof. Dr. Christos Karakolis, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, and Prof. Dr Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, Friedrich Schiller University of Jena. The EELC is very grateful to the previous President, Prof. Dr. Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, for his extraordinary commitment in leadership since 2009.

A new focus of the EELC’s work will be to work even more intensively with Early Career Scholars. Important steps have already been taken here: In December 2022, a digital postgrad seminar for Early Career Scholars (approx. 30 participants) from various Eastern European countries took place (again). Young exegetes had the opportunity to present their projects, receive feedback from senior scholars and network with each other. Similar initiatives are planned for 2023. In this context, the EELC is especially grateful to Marko Jovanovic, research assistant at the University of Regensburg, for organising the meeting.

In addition, several exegetes from Eastern Europe, financed by project funds from the University of Regensburg, were able to carry out short research stays in Regensburg. In May 2023, a three-day-meeting will take place between Early Career Scholars from Charles University Prague, the University of Prague and Trinity Western University Vancouver (led by David Cielontko, Prague; Tom Hatina, Vancouver; and Tobias Nicklas, Regensburg). A similar meeting is planned for 2024 in Zagreb.

The Ninth East-West Symposium of the EELC was held in Varna from 11–17 September 2022. The (excellent) local organisation was in the hands of Prof. Dr. Ivaylo Naydenov, Dean of the Orthodox Theological Faculty of St. Kliment of Ohrid University of Sofia, Bulgaria. The topic "Apostolicity and Mission of the Church according to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings" proved to be highly exciting and of great ecumenical relevance. Planning is underway for the Tenth East-West Symposium, to be held in North Macedonia.

Recent publications of the EELC or in connection with the EELC include:

A. Sizikov (ed.), *Fons Sapientiae Verbum Dei* (FS A. A. Alexeev), Sankt Petersburg 2022.

I. Naydenov (ed.), *Novum Testamentum in Vetero latet, Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet*. НОВИЯТ ЗАВЕТ Е СКРИТ В СТАРИЯ, СТАРИЯТ ЗАВЕТ СЕ РАЗКРИВА ЧРЕЗ НОВИЯ. 20 ГОДИНИ БИБЛЕЙСКА БИБЛИОТЕКА, Bibleiska Biblioteka 12, Sofia 2023.

T. Nicklas, C. Karakolis & C. Pricop (ed.), *Aufsätze zur Bibel und ihrer Auslegung. Festschrift für Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr* (= Extra Volume of Sacra Scripta 19 [2021]) [published 09/2022].

In 2023, the Orthodox Theological Faculty of St. Kliment of Ohrid University Sofia is celebrating its centennial jubilee. In November 2023, the Bibliotheca Biblica Sofia will be 25 years old. On this occasion, a conference will be held in Sofia, organised by Prof. Dr. Ivaylo Naydenov.

The Biblioteca Biblica Sofia received the offer of taking over important books from the Swiss Bibelwerk (Winfried Bader) and from the private library of Prof. Dr. Urs von Arx (Bern, Switzerland). We are extremely grateful for these donations which help the Bulgarian library to remain up to date.

The 2023 pre-conference will be run jointly with the LACLC, with participation from ten EELC scholars from eight countries, including three female scholars.

***Pre-Conference***

This year there have been two linked pre-conferences, run by the Eastern European LC and the Latin America Caribbean LC.. Presenters come from a wide range of countries: Puerto Rico, Colombia, Spain, USA, Chile, Paraguay, Northern Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Czech Republic, Armenia, Ukraine, Poland, and Russia.

***Sponsorships***

For the Vienna SNTS Meeting we have offered part sponsorships. These have taken the form of covering cost of registration and in some instances air fares or a cash contribution towards costs and sometimes both. In this way we have been able to offer some assistance to 16 scholars from a range of countries (Kenya, DR Congo, Ghana, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Poland, Russia, Romania, and Northern Macedonia). In addition, the Eastern European Liaison Committee has been able to secure additional support through Project Canon, administered by the Chair, Tobias Nicklas, to offer assistance to its participants to contribute to the pre-conference.

The current allocation of GBP 1200, which had remained unchanged for 10 years, for each of twelve full sponsorships, designed to cover registration, accommodation, an excursion and travel, is no longer adequate to meet these costs. In part this is as a result of the effective devaluation of the pound since Brexit by ca 15%, but also by significantly higher costs of travel, and the meeting costs (registration, accommodation, excursion).

In effect, while remaining committed to its core value of providing support for the disadvantaged, the value of our contribution has been reducing over the past decade. If we are to sustain the same level of commitment to support scholars in disadvantaged contexts and not, effectively, reduce it, there needs to be an increase in the allocation per sponsorship. The recommendations which follow this report include a proposal to move towards an allocation of GBP 1800 per sponsorship. The Appendix C below gives more detail about the history of sponsorships as a part of the Society’s commitment to International Initiatives.

***Looking to the Future***

The contribution of individual members who offer support, encouragement and collegiality to scholars working in challenging circumstances continues to be essential. Such support includes helping provide bibliographical resources but also through donations to the SNTS International Fund. The International Initiatives Program, itself, has achieved much in meeting its goal of promoting and supporting New Testament scholars in the regions, but there is much still to be achieved.

That also includes ensuring that inclusivity means support also for women scholars from the regions. Current financial pressures can sometimes lead to retreat from these commitments, but it cannot be that we meet our financial needs at the cost of the disadvantaged. Inclusion of scholars from the regions, men and women, have greatly enriched our Society, and, ultimately, have also enriched thousands through their contribution to producing educated leaders who as informed preachers and teachers, in turn, benefit huge numbers of men and women in areas of great need where the church despite all odds is thriving and where such leadership is essential for healthy growth.

William Loader – Assistant Secretary for International Initiatives