



EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

Spring 2007

Vol. 15, No. 2

Contributing Editors

Canon Michael Bourdeaux
Keston Institute, Oxford

Dr. Anita Deyneka
Peter Deyneka Russian
Ministries, Wheaton, Illinois

Father Georgi Edelstein
Russian Orthodox Chuech,
Kostroma Diocese

Miss Sharon Mumper
Magazine Training Institute,
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Rev. Nick Nedelchev
Bulgarian Evangelical
Theological Institute, Sofia

Dr. Peter Penner
International Baptist
Theological Seminary, Prague

Dr. Walter Sawatsky
Associated Mennonite Biblical
Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana

Mrs. Katya Smyslova
Haggai Institute, Moscow

Rev. Larry Thompson
Campus Crusade for Christ,
International, Budapest

Mr. Lawrence Uzzell
International Religious
Freedom Watch, Fishersville,
Virginia

Dr. Alexander Zaichenko
Gazeta Protestant,
Moscow

Russian Protestant Conversions to Orthodoxy

Maria Kainova

Surfing the Internet, visiting different Russian Christian websites and forums, one might be surprised to discover how often Protestant conversions to Orthodoxy occur. Many Orthodox chatroom discussions include former Protestants who have “come home to Orthodoxy,” as they often call it. There they share their new joy and spiritual uplift and their doubts and their struggles. Do these accounts confirm a tendency, or do they just represent isolated cases one can easily ignore? Do they represent a type of revival in the Orthodox Church especially appealing to the Protestant mind, or are they the result of a very aggressive proselytizing campaign? What consequences do such conversions have for Orthodox and various Protestant churches and for ecumenical dialogue, which has never been a success in Russia?

No Firm Statistics

First, it is necessary to say that no firm statistics exist to support or dismiss the phenomenon of Protestant conversions to Orthodoxy. The Russian Orthodox Church is unable to provide a firm accounting of its numbers because it does not register permanent members. Today it includes about 23,000 parishes, which is about 3.5 times more than in 1987 when the process of restitution began. But it does not tell us how many come to the liturgy. Most Orthodox worshippers today come from non-Christian families and are products of the religious revival of the late 1980s and the 1990s. This revival of faith resulted in many new believers for traditional churches. While the majority became Orthodox, many also joined Baptist and a few other Evangelical communities. Some entered churches newly formed and led by American missionaries. While many of these Protestant congregations represented mainstream Evangelical churches in the United States, others, such as the International Church of Christ, are identified as cults even in the West. Interestingly, the majority of the newest Orthodox converts come from these recently formed communities. Today, most new converts come from such bodies as the International Church of Christ; many come from former missionary churches; a few come from those communities that are not so deeply rooted in Russian history and culture (Adventists and Pentecostals); but almost none,

Russian Orthodox Conversions to Protestantism

Geraldine Fagan

In 1998, Aleksandr Cherepanov was so horrified when Yekaterinburg’s Russian Orthodox bishop publicly burned books by liberal-leaning Orthodox theologians Frs. Alexander Schmemmann, John Meyendorff, and Aleksandr Men that he converted to Lutheranism. Previously an Orthodox parishioner for ten years, Cherepanov was ordained pastor in 1999 and now leads a small Lutheran parish in Yekaterinburg. Other cases of practicing Orthodox becoming Protestant must have occurred, but this is the only instance this author can recall in the course of numerous interviews with and study of Orthodox and Protestants across Russia over recent years.

Who Exactly is Russian Orthodox?

Crucial to this issue, however, is the question: Who exactly is Russian Orthodox? Not even the Russian Orthodox Church itself is coherent on this point. Its most extreme position, set out in a February 2002 Synodal statement in response to the establishment of Catholic dioceses in Russia, is that “the Russian [‘rossiisky’, denoting all of Russia’s citizens] people are culturally, spiritually, and historically the flock of the Russian Orthodox Church.” Usually, however, the Church’s recognition of some Russian citizens as ethnic Muslims (Tatars, Chechens), Buddhists (Buryats, Kalmyks), or even Catholics (Poles, Lithuanians), suggests that it regards only ethnic Russians and some other nationalities (such as Ossetians) as Orthodox by default.

The discrepancies do not end there. A 2006 poll conducted by Moscow State University found 50 percent claiming to be Orthodox and a further 33 percent simply Christian – but only 14 percent identified God with the Trinity. Similar polls over the past decade typically find the proportion of active churchgoers, as against those claiming Christian affiliation, to be comparable to figures for Western Europe. Unlike a nominal Catholic or Protestant in the West, however, a nominal Russian Orthodox is less likely to be wholly indifferent towards faith. Theological discussions feature prominently in both private and public discourse, making the distinction between believers and non-believers in Russia less pronounced. Symptomatic of this, a movie examining repentance in an Orthodox monastery in the harsh Russian North,

(continued on page 2)

(continued on page 3)

Russian Protestant Conversions (continued from page 1)

or a very insignificant number, come from Baptist churches.

The phenomenon of migration between churches is not so surprising in itself. What does seem strange is that Christians, evangelized and baptized in Protestant churches, instead of joining another Protestant community that is much closer to them in theology and rite, are turning to the Russian Orthodox Church. This is particularly unexpected given the negative picture of Russian Orthodoxy often drawn by Protestant teachers to the effect that it is pagan, idolatrous (the icon issue), and deeply corrupted in its relationships with the state. Finally, what is difficult to understand is how Protestants become Orthodox in the absence of much effort on the part of Orthodox to bring in new converts. The Orthodox Church apparently is not very interested in evangelization.

Diverse Paths to Orthodoxy

An interesting feature of these conversions is that there seems to be no single or unique path to Orthodoxy. For some it is the end of a long and painful journey through various Christian communities. For others it is the result of an intellectual quest that started in Bible study groups with readings from Church Fathers and Russian theologians. But for many it begins with an unplanned visit to the nearest Orthodox parish or to a monastery, because mothers insist that their children become acquainted with the faith of their ancestors before being baptized in a Protestant community. But what actually leads people to cross this cultural and historical bridge between two Christian confessions? What motivates them to make this decision? Analyzing the testimonies, one can single out three main reasons: culture, ritual, and theology.

The Influence of Culture

The cultural reason is the most obvious. The majority of newly formed Protestant churches have a foreign origin. The style of worship implemented by Western missionaries and further supported by young Russian pastors who have graduated from American, German, or Dutch seminaries, is often seen as too alien to Russian culture. A good example is jokes in sermons. Not that Russians do not like or do not understand jokes. But everything has its time. There is a time to laugh. And there is a time to cry, or just to be serious and solemn. Sadness and sorrow are part of Russian culture, and we are not uncomfortable with it. Modern Western culture, on the other hand, is a smiling culture, emphasizing what is positive and successful. Sorrow is not a welcome feeling. And pastors try to dilute even the gravest moments with jokes. "I remember a sermon," said one friend. "It was wonderful; we were all very moved. And then at the end the pastor said a couple of jokes that spoiled the whole picture. Such a waste!" Unfortunately, it is not just one element that catches the eye. The style of exhortation - the manner of sharing one's

feelings, gestures, and vocabulary - all seem to be an adaptation, just as most Protestant books are translations, not only from a different language, but from a different culture. Of course, those who are driven away from new communities for this reason can end up in the Baptist church, which has much deeper cultural roots in Russia. But many end up turning back to Orthodoxy that has always been associated with old Russia.

The Influence of Ritual

Ritual is another common reason for converting. As one new Orthodox convert shared, "It is not easy to explain because feelings are too weak an argument for Protestants, but my deep conviction is that one can understand Orthodoxy only through FEELINGS." Many speak of a deep upheaval they experienced and of tears they shed when they first came to the Orthodox church: "Then I went to the liturgy for the first time. I was standing there and crying; I don't know why, but in the cathedral I feel so good!" "I felt the same: tears on my first liturgy and a sense of coming home." "I've finally found the church I was looking for. At the liturgy I can hardly hold back my tears. I'm home!" Coming home is a very common leitmotif of Orthodox professions.

There is a sense of recovery, rather than discovery: "It has always been home where the Lord was calling us, standing and waiting at the door." Many speak of a very acute sense of God's presence that they experience in Orthodox churches. "In Protestant churches I saw God's work in people. In the Orthodox church I met God Himself." "At some point I understood that I didn't know God, so I had to look for Him myself until I found a church where there was just me and God and my fellows in faith." This very special experience may be somehow related to what some mention as a time and place for inner prayer: "In an Orthodox cathedral I can pray any time, but in a Protestant church only at the time of thanksgiving/praise (20 minutes) or in a prayer group." "We understood then that no silent time at a Protestant worship could be compared with the profound meaning of Orthodox prayers. We were listening to the words of the liturgy and were amazed at their depth, greatness, and infinity." Some explain this by the fact that Protestant worship is centered on the sermon when hearers are told what to think and whether to give thanks or to lament and worshippers are led in prayer. By way of contrast, in the liturgy the participant has more freedom and more of a sense of being alone, face-to-face with God. "Every time I was sitting and waiting for something to happen, and then worship was over. But it was not over for me. I thought I must have missed something; only at the liturgy was my thirst quenched. I met God."

Finally, one of the most important issues raised by converts concerns the Eucharist. "What I like the least is the Eucharist enacted as a symbol and not as

Coming home is a very common leitmotif of Orthodox professions.

Russian Protestant Conversions

a real partaking of the flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.” One recent convert told an especially striking story: “I remember one time when we came to a new [Protestant] church. (We had just moved to this city and were looking for a place to worship.) At the time of the Eucharist the leaders discovered that somebody had forgotten about the bread, so they just ran to the nearest bakery, bought a loaf, and shared it with the congregants, leaving crumbs all over the floor. It did not even look like a decent symbol of the Last Supper. One of the main reasons that brought me to the Orthodox Church is a reverent attitude to Eucharist.”

The Influence of Theology

One more argument in favor of Orthodoxy that is broadly discussed in Internet forums is theology. “In my case, the emotional aspect didn’t play such an important role. What played the major role was the study of church history and theology, and readings from the Church Fathers.” “I discovered Orthodox theology as something so well-founded, perfect, beautiful, and wholesome, that there was no question of choice, or more precisely, of inner struggles.” This issue encompasses several aspects. The first has to do with theological writings. The body of theological literature in Russia is not large, and the share written by Protestants is even smaller and often poorly translated; so anyone on a spiritual quest is sooner or later bound to come across the best of the Orthodox legacy: the Church Fathers, as well as religious philosophers such as Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdyaev, or Mikhail Florensky. To be fair, I have to admit that I know many Baptists who fell in love with these writers and still remained Baptist, but many as a result of this encounter turned to Orthodoxy.

In addition, Russians, on the whole, have a deep respect for their history. They are skeptical when they are told that their religious past counts for nothing, as it is stated even on the official website of the Baptist church. The rich tradition of the lives of the saints seems to openly contradict this position: “We read about the lives of Boris and Gleb – ideals

of humility and resignation. After that, one of the sisters said, ‘So these are the Orthodox that we despise so much!’ ” Many converts testify that after their baptism it was those lives of the saints and the writings of the Fathers that served them as models of spiritual discipline and encouragement in their life in Christ.

In Summary

First, we are not facing a mass conversion. It is only a tendency, but certainly worth being noticed and analyzed. Second, Russian Baptists rarely convert to Orthodoxy. The Russian Baptist Church is in many ways closer to Orthodoxy than to its Western counterparts. For example, regarding the Eucharist, Russian Baptists are much more inclined to see it as a sacrament than are Western Evangelicals. Russian Baptist pastors encourage a very reverent attitude to the ritual and even warn against dropping crumbs.

Finally, I would like to highlight the positive effects of Protestant conversions upon Orthodoxy. First, everyone knows that conflicts often spring from ignorance. As a rural babushka once asked me, “Tell me, daughter, those Protestants, do they believe in Christ?” Former Protestants will certainly know the answer to that question. Knowing the negative aspects of the churches they leave, they also remember the positive. By experience, they are much more open to dialogue than are traditional Orthodox believers. Second, they bring with them an intelligent faith. After coming such a long way in their spiritual search, they often know much more about Orthodoxy than do longstanding Orthodox believers, sometimes even more than priests. Unlike many Orthodox, new converts know what they believe and they know why they are Orthodox. It could be that Protestant converts to Orthodoxy will be a source for Orthodox renewal. ♦

Maria Kainova is a lecturer at the Russian-American Christian University, Moscow, Russia.

Russian Orthodox Conversions (continued from page 1)

The Island, has been showing to packed cinemas across the country in recent months.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that the majority of so-called conversions to Protestantism are by people who are either nominal or only very tentatively Orthodox, even by the Church’s own standards. Parish priests would normally regard church attendance of at least once a month as a serious commitment to Orthodoxy.

Like the Lutheran pastor in Yekaterinburg, some Orthodox become Protestant for theological reasons – just as anywhere else in the world. Referring specifically to Russia, however, Protestantism appears to hold a variety of attractions for nominal Orthodox. Here it is helpful to distinguish, at least loosely, among the most prevalent types of Protestant congregations in Russia.

The Western Connection . . .

Churches planted and run by Western missionaries, or so strongly influenced by them that they are still not recognizable as Russian initiatives, are becoming less common as bureaucratic barriers to foreign missions increase. A few years ago I met an Orthodox priest from southern European Russia who had previously been a pastor in an evangelical church planted and run by American missionaries. In all such churches, he claimed, “There are three groups of people – those who want to emigrate, those who want humanitarian aid, and true believers.” This sounded like familiar propaganda, until I recalled hearing a friend of a friend in southern Siberia admit that his main motivation for attending a similar church for some years was “the possibility of visiting

Unlike many Orthodox, new converts know what they believe and they know why they are Orthodox. It could be that Protestant converts to Orthodoxy will be a source for Orthodox renewal.

The majority of so-called conversions to Protestantism are by people who are either nominal or only very tentatively Orthodox, even by the Church’s own standards.

America.” Perhaps this is what lies behind the Russian Orthodox Church’s allegations that foreign missionaries are here to buy souls. Despite their best intentions, such missionaries can still be an exotic attraction, particularly for those seeking language practice. Even living in apparently very modest circumstances, they may also be regarded mainly as a source of material assistance, especially in areas where the equivalent of \$75 U.S. dollars is considered a good monthly salary.

The hundreds of charismatic congregations founded across Russia since the end of Communism are commonly the result of effective Western missions. Even if they now have little or no foreign involvement, however, their format of worship (electrified music in particular) and their acceptance of material prosperity appeals to those Russians who grew up during the 1990s and who aspire to mainstream Western youth culture. The strong emphasis in such churches upon community activities, as well as their informal atmosphere and demonstrative friendliness, are additional draws for teenagers and young families.

...Versus More Indigenous Protestant Expressions

By contrast, the manner and material culture (as opposed to theology) of many Russian Baptists and some Pentecostals are closer to that of ordinary Orthodox than to their Western Protestant counterparts. Insofar as they were able to function during the Soviet period, such churches developed their own indigenous culture, typically perpetuated through large families over several generations. As they do not have the unfamiliar pre-1917 appendage of Russian Orthodox tradition, the average Sovietized Russian has to make almost no cultural shift in joining such a Baptist or Pentecostal congregation. This is particularly the case in parts of Siberia, where there is little or nothing left of pre-Soviet Russia to support a connection with Orthodoxy. Such areas also typically have strong communities of Ukrainian or Belarusian Protestants, whose original forbears were exiled from their homelands. One stark example is that of the Pacific island of Sakhalin, where the Russian Orthodox Church had a negligible presence during the brief period in the nineteenth century when it was part of the Russian Empire. Today, the oldest surviving religious building on the island is a Baptist church.

This fact – that the Soviet regime largely succeeded in severing Russians from their Orthodox beliefs and culture, thus making an indigenous Soviet-era Baptist church at least as accessible to the average nominal Orthodox – is something the Russian Orthodox Church finds difficult to accept. This might account for the oversimplified “Protestant equals foreign” versus “Orthodox equals Russian” strain in its official rhetoric. The charge is in fact doubly artificial because, even though some vocal elements in the Russian Orthodox Church

might give the impression that their national identity is foremost among their allegiances, most serious Orthodox are not so *because* they are Russian, and some of the most revered saints – St. Nicholas and St. George – are not, and are known not to be, Russian.

The Language of Worship

Perhaps the most common reason assumed to be behind a preference for Protestant worship is the incomprehensibility of Church Slavonic. While certainly a factor, it is given undue emphasis. The texts of the major Orthodox services vary little, and although understanding New Testament readings – which differ at every service – can prove problematic, priests will often explain elusive points in their sermons, which are delivered in modern Russian.

A Negative Experience with Orthodoxy

More commonly, nominal Orthodox turn to Protestant churches after some negative experience in an Orthodox church, such as criticism of their dress or uninitiated behavior. Yekaterinburg’s book-burning bishop was eventually demoted and sent to a distant monastery “to repent,” but pastoral impropriety is rarely dealt with in this way. Partly as a result of Soviet influence upon its affairs, the institutional culture of the Russian Orthodox Church suffers from authoritarianism, arbitrariness, and a shortage of effective missionaries. Consequently, whether or not nominal Orthodox are discouraged from a deeper commitment to their baptismal faith depends greatly upon which priest or parish they encounter. For example, in describing to me a series of talks given to university students in a northern Russian city, a young local Baptist drew a very sharp distinction between two Orthodox presentations. While he thought the local Orthodox bishop’s address was “hopeless,” he was most enthusiastic about one delivered by Deacon Andrei Kurayev, even though this Moscow-based professor of theology is renowned for his opposition to Protestantism.

In some cases, the very presence of a dynamic Protestant church generates interest, but the flexibility of Protestant structures is often tempered in Russia by the extent to which local state officials restrict their activity. In neighboring Belarus, where the government’s anti-Protestant policy is more marked, several charismatic churches have told Forum 18 News Service of significant reductions in their congregations after state restrictions forced them to meet in less accessible premises or as house groups. Some nominal Orthodox are certainly put off by Protestantism because of fear: The ordinary Russian receives practically no information about Protestant churches other than newspaper reports, where Evangelicals are routinely branded as members of destructive, totalitarian sects. Ignorance about different doctrines may even be encountered within Protestant churches themselves. A member of a Siberian Pentecostal congregation planted by

The manner and material culture of many Russian Baptists and some Pentecostals are closer to that of ordinary Orthodox than to their Western Protestant counterparts.

Russian Orthodox Conversions

a Western missionary once asked me to explain the difference between the Russian Orthodox Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and his own church.

Of a minority Siberian, rather than Russian, ethnicity, this young Pentecostal was, however, perfectly clear in one respect: Why he attended this church. He had previously been involved in petty crime. But while his old friends had ended up in prison, members of the church had helped him

straighten out his life. In the end, the reasons why people turn to Protestantism in Russia remain highly individual. ♦

Geraldine Fagan is Moscow correspondent for Forum 18 News Service (www.forum18.org), which monitors religious freedom in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The Role of Evangelicals in Spiritual Reformation in Russia

Igor Petrov

It is becoming evident that Protestant believers will not be able to bring large sectors of the Russian populace to faith in Christ. Russia's long history of distrust of the West underscores the improbability of a massive shift of the Russian people toward Protestantism. Conversely, attempts to reform Eastern Orthodoxy by enriching it with certain progressive ideas and approaches borrowed from the West have especially borne good fruit. The following points are illustrative examples:

- Evangelical Christians initiated and have been actively developing Christian summer camp ministries. Now **Orthodox** sponsor a significant number of **summer camps**. For example, Kursk area authorities have given the Kursk Orthodox Eparchy (for free) well-developed summer camp facilities. The Kursk area Government Social Fund covers most camp expenses.
- Following the example of Evangelicals, some **Orthodox** churches now arrange a few **pews** for those parishioners who cannot stand through the whole worship service. Even Korrennaya Pustyn', one of the most venerated ancient Orthodox monasteries, has such pews in its main church.
- Upon the request of congregation members, some **Orthodox** ministers now spend more time **preaching**, explaining Scripture, and teaching about Christian life and church structure. The Moscow Patriarchate and its Missionary Department pay close attention to increasing preaching and evangelism. Using a number of TV programs broadcast nationwide, they introduce new ways of sharing the Gospel via contemporary music concerts and youth congresses followed by well-prepared preaching.
- Since the 1990s Evangelical Christians have been employing mass media – radio, television, printed literature, and the Internet. The **Orthodox** are now utilizing **mass media** more extensively, at times even forcing Protestants out of the market. For example, in 1998 an Orthodox radio program took the place of a weekly Evangelical program, which had been broadcast on a Kursk area government station since 1990. Moreover, Orthodox believers have largely adopted the format of Protestant radio and television programs and design.
- Reflecting the model of evangelically produced television programs, nowadays Orthodox television programs not only offer worship services, but also interesting sermons, topical programs, and discussions produced by Orthodox believers. These programs tend to focus more on Christ and salvation by His grace and less on Orthodox traditions. The present head of the Kursk Orthodox Eparchy Mission Department is a former charismatic believer. During his five years in a fiery charismatic church he learned many good things. Now his preaching and weekly **Sunday morning TV programs are focused on Christ, salvation by grace, genuine faith, and true Christian life.**
- Additional ideas originating with Protestants, but now often borrowed by Orthodox, include **Sunday schools, adult small groups, and youth ministry**. The Moscow Patriarchate strongly encourages all parishes to establish and develop a Sunday school in each church and to cultivate community life within each church. A number of Orthodox youth organizations and youth groups were established. Their format, and even music, clearly resemble Evangelical youth work practices.
- Orthodox readers and schools now have access to an increasing number of books and educational materials. It is not uncommon to find **Protestant resources revised and rewritten by Orthodox writers**, then published under an Orthodox "cover." For example, the Orthodox biology school textbook, developed for Orthodox schools as well as for state schools, utilizes many materials borrowed from Western Christianity. Orthodox priest Sergiy Rasskazovsky developed systematic theology for use in 36 Orthodox seminaries and many colleges in Russia. This is notable because for almost 20 centuries Orthodoxy did not produce such work, because developing systematic theology was felt to be an improper approach to the "mystery of God."
- Since the beginning of *perestroika*, Evangelical believers have focused their greatest evangelistic efforts on schools, army bases, prisons, public transportation, and other public places, and producing evangelistic literature. Such practices are gaining wider popularity among Orthodox.

Attempts to reform Eastern Orthodoxy by enriching it with certain progressive ideas and approaches borrowed from the West have especially borne good fruit.

(continued on page 6)

Evangelical churches and ministries function as a channel for new methods originating in Western Christianity. This is a gift and blessing which Russian Orthodoxy may find beneficial.

E. Klimchuk, a member of the Russian Academy of Military Science, expressed the opinion that Jesus looked Slavic and spoke ancient Russian.

The Role of Evangelicals in Spiritual Reformation (continued from page 5)

They have launched special programs in secondary schools, opened new departments in universities and colleges, and arranged army, prison, and highway travelers' chapels. Orthodox have also developed and **broadened literature distribution.**

- Orthodox believers employ **Protestant methodology in ministering to drug addicts, alcoholics (Twelve Step programs), and women considering abortion.** They tend to be more effective than Protestants because of the culturally ingrained trust Russians place in the Orthodox Church. Orthodox are no strangers to the Russian people, while Protestants are perceived as foreign and therefore untrustworthy.

In Summary

Despite their small numbers, Evangelical Christians play an important role in Russia's

spiritual life. Therefore, Evangelical churches and ministries must be viewed as more than a place where people hear the Good News of Jesus, receive salvation, and grow spiritually. Of greater significance is their function as a channel for new ideas, experiences, methods, and forms of ministry originating in Western Christianity. This is a gift and blessing which Russian Orthodoxy may find beneficial as it seeks to develop and further expand the Kingdom of God in Russia. ♦

Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Igor Petrov, "Spiritual Reformation in Russia: The Roles of Domestic and Foreign Evangelicals," Common Ground Journal 4 (Fall 2006): 28-36; www.commongroundjournal.org.

Igor Petrov, a Ph.D. candidate at Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, teaches at Kursk Trinity Bible College, Kursk, Russia.

Russian Nationalist Orthodox Theology

Julia Sudo

A Russian Jesus

The power of Russian nationalist Orthodox theology is in its underlying motive expressed in the identity of the Savior. Any hint at His Jewish roots is deleted, and a new image, the image of a Russian Jesus, is constructed. These efforts led to publications such as the article, "On Jesus Christ's Ethnic Origin," published in the *Duel*, a weekly newspaper. This article was widely referred to in other periodicals, including *Russkiy poradok* [*Russian Order*] of the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity. The author, E. Klimchuk, a member of the Russian Academy of Military Science, expressed the opinion that Jesus looked Slavic and spoke ancient Russian. The level of Klimchuk's scholarly awareness can be revealed by this opening phrase, "There is practically no problem concerning the racial affiliation of our Savior. No one ever painted Him as an African or Chinese." Evidently, he was exposed neither to portraits of the Black Messiah by Ronnie Harrison, Janet MacKenzi, Gulis Mavruk, or N.E. Hailes, to name just a few, nor to the exquisite ink images of an Asian Jesus painted on silk by He Qi, Li Wei San, and many others.

Non-Jewish Disciples

Klimchuk also states that all the apostles except Judas were non-Jewish, and the proof of that is that all of them were killed by Jews except Judas. It was St. Paul who, according to Klimchuk, distorted the teaching of Jesus and convinced everyone that Jesus and the Twelve were Jews.

The title *Christ*, traditionally understood as a Greek translation of the Jewish term *messiah*, is given a new meaning in Klimchuk's article: It turns out to be a Greek, somewhat distorted, transliteration of Jesus' patronymic. Like all Russian people, Jesus has a patronymic added after his first name; for example, *Ilyich* in *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*

is "son of Ilya." Thus *Christ* means nothing else but "Son of the Creator," which comes from an ancient Russian name for God the Creator, *Kryshen*.

Jesus' Russian ethnicity can also be proved, Klimchuk believes, by Jesus' last words on the cross, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani" (Mark 15:33). These are, contrary to the traditional understanding, uttered not in Aramaic but in Sanskrit/Ancient Russian (the latter two languages Klimchuk believes to be identical) and must be translated, "O God the Creator, Your representative on Earth offers Himself as a sacrifice."

Blond Hair and Blue Eyes

To prove that Jesus' appearance was also non-Jewish, Klimchuk presents "irrefutable" evidence: The icons allegedly made on the basis of the mystical imprint of the features of the suffering Savior on a piece of cloth given to him to wipe his face. Evidently, that must have been a colored imprint of high quality, as Klimchuk mentions blond hair, blue eyes, and very white skin.¹

A year later *Sekretnye materialy*, one of the most-read tabloids, gave floor to a Hermitage Museum employee, B. Sapunov, who used police investigative methods to prove that Jesus was "almost Russian." Sapunov related to a reporter a long account of his collection of different descriptions of Jesus from unspecified apocryphal and historical sources, sorted according to facial features. Then Sapunov gave this material to his "friends and colleagues" who, luckily, were no less than experts from the Federal Security Service (FSB, former KGB). They, in turn, constructed "the first identikit picture" of the Savior. Jesus turned out to have brown hair, yellow eyes, a thin nose, and an indisputable non-Jewish origin. According to an unidentified anthropologist friend of Sapunov, Jesus must have been of Greek-Syrian descent, which is

The Role of Evangelicals in Spiritual Reformation

close to the Russian ethnic group.²

Jesus: A Jew or a Galilean?

Even an American movie may become a source of inspiration for Russian nationalists. *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, a Communist daily newspaper, published a review of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. The author, E. Badyakina, is not a movie critic but a journalist best known for her reports about the violated rights of Russian Cossacks in Chechnya. In her review Badyakina casually mentions, "Many mistakenly believe that Christ was a Jew . . . while He was a Galilean, and the Jews and the Galileans were completely unrelated nations, both ethnically and politically. This is why in Gibson's movie Christ always preaches in Aramaic."

Apparently, Badyakina sees Aramaic as less Jewish than Klimchuk does in the above-mentioned article. Her review concludes with this passage:

Gibson's film manifests the victory of the human spirit over the powers of evil. Today this battle is still going on, and Russia is at the forefront of this unseen warfare. Our goal is to bring closer the joyful day of our Fatherland's renewal, and to this end let us add to the Easter greeting "Christ is Risen," a phrase "Russia, arise!"³

Badyakina's review clearly shows the purpose of the "research" carried out by Klimchuk, Sapunov, and other nationalists. While many of them claim total objectivity, they do not labor for the sake of scholarly interest only. Thanks to their efforts, the non-Jewish origin of Jesus today appears to be "common knowledge" in patriotic circles and may be used as the foundation for radical appeals such as "Russia, arise!" The importance of the Russian-Jesus Christology cannot be overestimated. The Savior's Slavic identity not only makes him "one of us" for Russians, but also allows for his followers' anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

An Ethnic Definition of Orthodoxy

The missionary policy of the official Russian Orthodox Church appears to support the exclusion of non-Russians from the privilege of salvation, contrary to the international appeal of Matthew 28:19. Archbishop Cyril, head of the Smolensk and Kaliningrad Diocese, states it plainly:

There are instances in Western Europe when local people come to a Russian Orthodox parish [intending to join it], but we give very strict orders to our clergy in Western Europe: "Do not Proselytize!" Practically, we forbid our priests to convert people.⁴

Yet, while Orthodox do not aspire to teach and baptize *all* nations, they are determined to completely convert one: All Russian people are seen by church authorities as their "own," in fact (by virtue of their baptism), or in potential (by virtue of their ethnic origin). Any evangelism carried out by Catholic or Protestant preachers is bitterly resented and labeled proselytism. In the same interview, Archbishop Cyril expresses the view of the Moscow Patriarchy:

We believe that our unfortunate nation, which was 80 per cent baptized Orthodox but forcefully separated from Orthodoxy in the 1920s and 30s, has a right to return to its spiritual roots. Therefore, we consider any religious preaching aimed at our people, some of whom are formally baptized and some godless or far from religion, unacceptable. We do not want our people to be converted to any other faith.⁵

With the help of nationalist theologians, some Orthodox parishes become even more chauvinistic than the Moscow Patriarchy. For example, in Novosibirsk, a Japanese student tried to buy an audiocassette of Orthodox music at the All Russian Saints Orthodox Church, but the saleswoman asked him to leave the shop. Also, in Novosibirsk, two Italian priests came to the Virgin Mary's Miraculous Birth Orthodox Church to pray before the icon of the Virgin Mary of Kazan, but were rudely escorted out of the sanctuary by a deacon. The attitude to aliens is so unwelcome that non-Orthodox and non-Russians are cast out like demons.

Conclusion

Russian nationalist Orthodox theology is a cynical approach to Christianity which creates the image of the Savior as a Russian Jesus who comes to save the Russian Orthodox people from their non-Russian and non-Orthodox oppressors. The danger of Russian nationalist Orthodox theology is in its extreme intolerance. The authors of Russian nationalist Orthodox theology have intentionally chosen to manipulate the masses for the purpose of achieving their own political and economic goals.

Four actions may be taken to prevent Russian nationalist Orthodox theology from gaining popularity. The first must be carried out by the current president and the other three by Russian Christians. First, measures should be taken by the Russian government to improve the economic status of the poor majority. It appears that Putin is already moving toward this goal. Second, Russian nationalist Orthodox theology should be discredited in the eyes of the poor majority, that is, in the eyes of potential nationalist voters. Third, a wholesome theology needs to be formulated and offered to the Russian people as a viable alternative to militarized, xenophobic Christianity. The Russian Orthodox Church should face the challenge of ethnocentrism and revive the spirit of the Great Commission, both in the Patriarchy and in the parishes.

Finally, faithful Christians ought to become involved in politics to improve the quality of life for the working population and to provide social security for disadvantaged groups through legislative means. While there seems to be no direct biblical reference that commands Christians to be involved in social and political action, John Stott rightly asserts, "Political action (which could be defined as love seeking justice for the oppressed) is

(continued on page 8)

Russian nationalist Orthodox theology is a cynical approach to Christianity which creates the image of the Savior as a Russian Jesus who comes to save the Russian Orthodox people from their non-Russian and non-Orthodox oppressors.

Russian Nationalist Orthodox Theology (continued from page 7)

a legitimate extrapolation from the biblical emphasis on the practical priorities of love.”⁶

In Russia’s move toward both a renewed national identity and a strengthened democracy, theology ought to become an expression of the true religious consciousness of a multi-ethnic Russia; it should promote self-esteem based on God’s likeness rather than a shaky notion of ethnic superiority; and it should encourage active participation in political life, thereby serving as an effective instrument of social change in Russia. ♦

Notes:

¹ E.A. Klimchuk, “On Jesus Christ’s Ethnic Origin,” *Duel* 3 (2000), 8.

² I. Cherkasov, “The Identikit Picture of a Well-Known Defendant,” *Sekretnye materialy* 17 (2002). *The Duel*

immediately reprinted Saprunov’s interview in *Duel* 44 (2002).

³ E. Badyakina, “Passionate Discussion of *The Passion*,” *Sovietskaya Rossiya* 47/48 (10 April 2004), 6.

⁴ A. Venediktov, “Interview with Archbishop Cyril on ‘Moscow Echo’ Radio Station,” 22 March 2001, *Orthodox Covenant*, www.zavet.ru/news/news-s010322.htm.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ John R.W. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 350.

Julia Sudo has an M.A. from Wesley Biblical Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, U.S., and is a doctoral student at Novosibirsk State University, Novosibirsk, Russia.

Mainstream Christian History: Missing Its Second World Chapters

Walter Sawatsky

Missiologists Todd Johnson and Sandra Kim have noted that the “European colonial system . . . gave rise to the idea that the Christian faith is exclusively Western,” and that, in contrast, the shift to a global view of Christianity was largely a twentieth-century story.¹ Although offering powerful quotations from other scholars on what must constitute “a Church in which all races are at home,” nevertheless the “Europe” they mean refers essentially to Anglo and Spanish colonialism, not the Europe of the Ottomans, the Slavs, or even the Germans and Scandinavians. The “one stream” within which so much current Christian historiography and missiology proceeds toward the global is the stream of the western side of Europe. How can our thinking become more inclusive?

For nearly a millennium the four patriarchates of the Eastern Church remained in communion, and all eyes looked to the splendor that was Byzantium and to Constantinople, the seat of the ecumenical patriarch. The latter’s efforts at assisting the other churches as they became persecuted minorities under Islam is instructive, both negatively and positively.² Most of the modern community of church historians and missiologists, however, know little of that history.

Modern mission history has been seen as a two-part story: First, the expansion of Roman Catholicism worldwide, now claiming somewhat over one-fourth of the world’s population (1.1 billion) to become by far the largest Christian confessional body; and second, the development of Protestantism and the rise of Protestant missionary movements, thanks to the spiritual renewal of European Pietism and the Evangelical Awakenings in Britain and America. Today when we add together what missiologist David Barrett refers to as Independents (426.6 million), Protestants (375.8 million), and Anglicans (nearly 80 million), we can speak of 882.4 million believers generally linked to the influence of the Reformation.³ In 1900,

according to Barrett, Orthodox churches were still statistically larger than Protestants and Independents combined, and Roman Catholic numbers were only twice as large. By 2005, however, the Orthodox total of nearly 220 million was only fourth or fifth in size to the other categories. To pay more attention to their story would automatically draw attention to the theme of Christian survival in hostile environments, since that was the setting for much of Oriental and Eastern Orthodoxy’s recent history.

Global History and the Recognition of Christianity Moving South

It was historians doing mission history who drew attention to the New [non-Western] Christendom, now popularized in Philip Jenkins’ book.⁴ Those working and teaching in Africa, Latin America, and Asia had become profoundly troubled by church history taught in their schools which said little about Christianity in the Third World, or about theology or ethics except from a Western perspective.

Graduate study in Russian religious history became for me a time of asking questions that reflected increased astonishment. We were, after all, examining a quite fascinating part of Europe, where the social/Communist vision of a German, Karl Marx, was informed by the moral vision for social justice of the Judeo-Christian tradition, even though it dismissed Christian pretensions to social teaching and practice in favor of a humanism without God. The twentieth-century history of Marxism in power included an increasingly thorough program of bringing Christian history to an end.

Many of the best analyses of Russian and Soviet history in the 1970s contained a line in the preface stating that it was impossible to understand Russian history without acknowledging how deeply it was permeated with religion. But, because the writer was not a theologian, that aspect of the story would not be covered. I recall reading with respect and appreciation Marc Raeff’s careful biography of

The “one stream” within which so much current Christian historiography and missiology proceeds toward the global is the stream of the western side of Europe. How can our thinking become more inclusive?

Mainstream Christian History

Mikhail Speransky, an official during the reign of Tsar Alexander I, who began the process of collating Russian laws, and who initiated a serious reform of state administration that fostered the rule of law. But this biography had Speransky drawing his ideas from the French Enlightenment and British common-law traditions. As I dug into my dissertation research on a close colleague of Speransky, I discovered that Speransky had translated the *Imitation of Christ* into Russian, and that he had worked in partnership with Alexander Golitsyn to design a major reform of the church school system, including introducing theological academies. From those beginnings around 1808, Russian Orthodoxy reached a point around 1900 when 85 percent of its priests were seminary graduates and the professors in the theological academies were reading and reviewing the current literature from Western Europe.

My growing astonishment at the inability of the majority of Western historians of Russia and the Soviet Union to take the religious factor seriously was compounded when I searched for good critical histories of Russian Orthodoxy and failed. Nineteenth-century scholars had done yeoman work in gathering data, but neither church nor state would then tolerate critical integration. It meant that when believers faced attacks by Soviet atheist activists, they lacked good resources for defending Christian history. That lack was soon compounded by the physical destruction of much literature, the forbidding of religious publications, and a massive circulation of primitive anti-religious literature.

Better conditions for religious studies have emerged since 1989. Serious scholars are at work, but the available publications too often consist of reprints of books which first appeared in the 1890s. That has been particularly harmful for non-Orthodox Christian churches, for in the 1890s, the reigning social science from which the then-new Russian Orthodox mission society drew its theories was speaking of sectarians in the idiom of mental illness and pathological personality types.

So I approached my students in St. Petersburg in 1998 with excitement and deep distress. I was to teach a course on Christian history in the twentieth century from a Russian perspective. How would one structure a course if one were looking at the development of the twentieth century from St. Petersburg, Russia? One set of questions involved asking which were the central topics – were they the work of the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Association through various stages? How had they affected church life in Russia? What would be the appropriate way of approaching the Holocaust? How had the Gulag experience shaped the churches? And was there now a consciously post-Gulag theology? What was the value and purpose for working our way through Owen Chadwick's very British approach to *The Churches in the Cold War*, or Alec Vidler's *Church*

in the Revolutionary Era, in which Russians are largely absent? I also had to determine what had been published in Russian that I could assign to read? Since then there have been attempts to write and think globally. One enterprising Evangelical scholar was able to publish a massive two-volume Russian-language tome on two millennia of Christianity, filling it with paintings, icons, and photos, and deliberately adjusting text space so photos of Patriarch Alexei II, Pope John Paul II, and Billy Graham shared a page, for example.⁵

The New Global Christian Histories

The launching of a new century spawned numerous books that consciously attempted a global perspective. Generally speaking, the new global Christian histories have brought us more from the Third World, sometimes at the expense of downsizing the space devoted to the Reformation, and mostly by describing the reception of Christianity in the regions, rather than the stories of mission accomplishments. Comparing the still widely used two-volume *Story of Christianity* by Justo Gonzalez with his earlier work reveals the mentality shift, with more attention to Latin America and Asia in the second volume.

Now the choice of newer textbooks for a survey include a single-author volume by Jakob Balling of Aarhus, Denmark,⁶ and another by Frederick Norris who consciously highlights Asia, Africa, and South America.⁷ The choices also include a multiple-author volume edited by Adrian Hastings⁸ and, best of all, Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist's *History of the World Christian Movement*, in two volumes, and its companion set, *Readings in World Christian History*, edited by John W. Coakley and Andrea Sterk.⁹

Astonishing in the new histories is the superficial treatment of the eastern half of Europe and Russia. At my query on who the experts were from the Second World on their consulting team, Sunquist indicated they lacked the connections to bring such on board. We too often fail to ask key questions. How big is the Europe referred to? Which Asia do they mean? And which Africa is getting the church historian's attention? Thus it is rare, for example, to find in the Africa volumes noted above an indication of current publications on Ethiopian and Coptic Christian history, or the latter's rather far-reaching mission efforts into East Africa.

More Digging for What Matters Most

No Christian leader had a bigger funeral than the late Pope John Paul II in April 2005. It was not the grandeur of Rome that attracted the millions, nor the power of the papacy claiming supremacy in triumphalist tones. Rather, it was the authenticity of this man of faith. He left an unfinished agenda that historians and missiologists must pursue further. For example, when John Paul II issued a renewed call for the evangelization of Europe, it included instructions to the clergy to go out of their way to

(continued on page 10)

Astonishing in the new histories is the superficial treatment of the eastern half of Europe and Russia.

Mainstream Christian History (continued from page 9)

assist the Orthodox Church in strengthening its own pastoral, evangelical outreach, rather than proselytize in the neighbor's territory. He called for a deliberate attempt to renew the faith by acknowledging the shortcomings of the church's history, to be taught by the faith of the martyrs, in particular to make an effort to incorporate the martyrs from other churches into one's telling of the faith story.¹⁰

Let me offer hints of what deeper exploration of the Second World's story and of its integration with the whole can provide. The mission of Cyril and Methodius to the Slavs caught the attention of the West when the Slavic pope integrated it into an anniversary celebration for Catholics in Slovakia. The conversion of Rus registered internationally when its millennial year in 1988 became the year when *perestroika* turned to religion, and by 1989 Soviet citizens by the thousands were attending evangelization events. It was not really the forced baptism of all the people in the Dnepr River on order of Grand Prince Vladimir in 988 that caused Christianity to grow and take over the language and heart of the Russians within the next 500 years. It was much more the witness of missionary monks. Their story of a mission of patience – long years of faithful prayer, watched carefully by the people before the converting started – has been told by Johannes Reimer, a Protestant student of missiologist David Bosch.¹¹ The classic strategy of vernacular texts for worship, rapid training and ordination of local clergy, and self-organization not only shaped Orthodox beginnings but its work in Siberia in the seventeenth-century and in Alaska in the eighteenth century.¹²

The most recent flurry of mission to the former Soviet Union turned out to be a sad harvest. Many missionaries who came, especially Evangelical Protestants, suffered from profound historical amnesia. Not understanding what Christian witness and suffering for faith there had been during the Communist years, the Americanized and Westernized gospel they presented or incarnated triggered a xenophobic reaction. Today missionary visas are again difficult to obtain. Evangelical missionaries from America too easily assumed that Baptists are the same everywhere; too late many noticed these were Slavic Evangelicals, living alongside Orthodoxy; and too late they noticed the new converts from a highly secularized world, who were seeking faith, looking for signs of authenticity, not necessarily for a health-and-wealth theology.¹³

Throughout the mission flurry, little attention was paid to the local believers – the Gulag survivors, the ones who had learned to adapt to Soviet culture, and who now found ways to adapt to new contexts and to new poverty. There were new congregations in the Caucasus learning what they could about their own language and culture that pointed back to a time before Islam came, when books and script were Christian. There were indigenously organized

congregations in the multi-lingual/ethnic worlds of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Would their nearest ties be to the Russians and Ukrainians of Europe? Or when and how would the relationship to the Christians of China and Afghanistan, and even nearby India, emerge? And as prison camp archives open, to whom will its many millions of martyrs speak?

Essential to Christian mission is the claim that there is an overarching narrative of the Incarnation placed in time and history. The church universal started at Pentecost and has been guided by the Holy Spirit ever since. That its story is so compromised and convoluted has to do with the flawed humans on whom the Spirit relied, and it has to do with the many particular cultures and moments in time that shaped the expression of Christianity. The pressing challenge is to grasp the grand narrative as something other than Western Christendom gone global. For David Bosch and Hans Küng the Western, Hellenistic paradigm served to highlight a shift from Hebraic thought worlds to Greek philosophy. But the Slavic and Greek Christian worlds never fit that paradigm, nor did the Oriental Christians of Syria and farther east. Their two-thousand-year story requires more conceptual refinement than staying stuck in Hellenism.¹⁴ Therefore, for Second World Christian history to converge with First and Third requires reassessing that history outside the reigning paradigms that now shape missiology. ♦

Notes:

¹ Todd M. Johnson and Sandra S. Kim, "Describing the Worldwide Christian Phenomenon," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29 (April 2005), 80.

² This comes through well in the two volumes published so far of an inclusive Eastern and Western Christian history: John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity*; and Aristeides Papadakis and John Meyendorff, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy*, Vol. 4: *The Church 1071-1453* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994).

³ David Barrett, "Status of Global Mission, 2005, in Context of 20th and 21st Centuries," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29 (January 2005), 29.

⁴ *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵ Sergei Sannikov, *Dvadsat vekov Khristianstva [Twenty Centuries of Christianity]*, 2 vols. (Odessa: Bogomysl, 2002).

⁶ Jakob Balling, *The Story of Christianity from Birth to Global Presence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003; original Danish: 1986, 1996).

⁷ Frederick W. Norris, *Christianity: A Short Global History* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002).

⁸ Adrian Hastings, ed., *A World History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). Thirteen authors, nearly all British.

⁹ Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001); Vol. 2, forthcoming; John W. Coakley

The pressing challenge is to grasp the grand narrative as something other than Western Christendom gone global. For David Bosch and Hans Küng the Western, Hellenistic paradigm served to highlight a shift from Hebraic thought worlds to Greek philosophy. But the Slavic and Greek Christian worlds never fit that paradigm.

Mainstream Christian History (continued from page 10)

and Andrea Sterk, eds., *Readings in World Christian History*, Vol. 1, *Earliest Christianity to 1453* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004); Vol. 2, forthcoming.

¹⁰ Most of the agenda mentioned is discussed in John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995).

¹¹ Johannes Reimer, *Missionerskaia deiatel'nost' drevnerusskogo monashstva [The Missionary Activity of Old Russian Monasticism]* (Lage, Germany: Logos, 1996).

¹² For example, Andrei A. Znamenski, *Shamanism and Christianity: Native Encounters with Russian Orthodox Missions in Siberia and Alaska, 1820-1917* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

¹³ There is extensive literature on Russian and Soviet Evangelicals, to which this writer has also contributed, even a massive volume by Albert Wardin describing sources in English. So it was all the more astonishing to observe in Donald M. Lewis, ed., *Christianity Reborn: The Global Expansion of*

Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) neither an article on Slavic Evangelicals, nor even a note in the general essays about their existence! They do number in the millions.¹⁴ Going beyond Bosch's paradigms produced a fruitful conference for Asian theologians held in Elkhart, IN., July, 2003. Conference papers were published as a special supplement to *Mission Focus; Annual Review* (2003). ♦

Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Walter Sawatsky, "What if the Three Worlds of Christian History Converged?" in Evangelical, Ecumenical, and Anabaptist Missiologies in Conversation, Essays in Honor of Wilbert R. Shenk, ed. by James R. Krabill et al. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006.

Walter Sawatsky is professor of mission and church history at Associated Mennonite Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.

Russian Public Opinion: Increasingly at Odds with Its Protestants

Evgeniy Yur'evich Knyazev

In the beginning of the 1990s, when the Communist Party of the Soviet Union collapsed, Evangelical Christians received freedom to do missions. The tremendous growth in the number of churches was overwhelming, and new financial opportunities led to a distorted impression of Evangelical might. Now that more than 15 years have passed, it is time to take a new look at Protestant churches in Russia today.

At the end of 2006, the Institute for European Studies of the Russian Academy of Science published "Religious Situation in Russia in the 1990s of the 20th Century – Beginning of the 21st Century" (Report 173). D.E. Furman and K. Kaariaynen researched the attitudes of the masses toward religion after the collapse of the Communist system. Their work was based upon the results of sociological polls of the attitudes of Russians toward religion, conducted jointly by the Russian Academy of Science and the Academy of Science of Finland from 1991 to 2005.

Democracy Discredited

The results of this research should not be ignored by the Protestant community in Russia. Furman and Kaariaynen come to the conclusion that democratic tendencies in the country have been totally discredited, and that society is moving toward a stable symphony between the state and the Orthodox Church, which serves as its ideological base. The Byzantine model of Christianity can be seen as dominant throughout Russian history. Tsarist Russia was always ideologically connected to the Orthodox Church. But even under Communism the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) still remained a significant element in the conscience of the people. With the democratic reforms following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia found itself in a very interesting situation. The Duma passed

democratic legislation for the sake of public opinion (to please Europe and the United States). But in practice, local bureaucrats acted otherwise.

In 2005-2006 Protestant attention was drawn to discussions over the introduction of the course, "Basics of Orthodox Culture," in public schools. In addition, the Ministry of Justice sought to amend the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience to limit missionary activity. In the end, to the relief of Protestants, the amendments were not passed, and Russian Minister of Education Andrei Fursenko proposed an alternative course, "History of World Religions," for public schools.

Growing Negative Attitudes Toward Protestants

Yet if lawmakers were concerned with the will of the people, they would have rewritten the Constitution, and the Law on Freedom of Conscience would have been changed significantly. In this case, Protestants in Russia would have faced greater hardships because Russians' positive attitude toward the Orthodox Church grows from year to year. Looking at some of the figures from the polls, 88 percent of respondents in 1996 said that they had a "good" or "very good" attitude toward the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). In 2005, that number increased to 95 percent. At the same time the percentage of people with a positive attitude toward Baptists was 23 percent in 1996 and 25 percent in 2005. In contrast, the negative attitude toward Orthodoxy decreased from 4 percent to 1 percent, while more than half of respondents had a negative attitude toward Baptists (45 percent in 1996 and 53 percent in 2005).

In educational matters Russian public opinion also gives preference to Orthodoxy. More than 80 percent of respondents approved the introduction of

(continued on page 12)

More than half of respondents had a negative attitude toward Baptists (45 percent in 1996 and 53 percent in 2005).

Orthodox-oriented radio and TV broadcasts. At the same time, 51 percent oppose while only 21 percent would allow, Baptists to produce such broadcasts. Still, Baptists are five points ahead of other Protestants in the issue of trust among Russians. The number of Russians who favor mandatory teaching of the basics of Orthodox faith in public schools is on the increase. In 1996, 11 percent of Russians favored mandatory study of Orthodoxy compared to 24 percent in 2005.

Declining Support for Freedom of Conscience

The attitude toward freedom of conscience is quite alarming. In 1996, 70 percent of respondents believed all religious groups in Russia should have equal rights, but in 2005 this number was down to 53 percent. And we should not forget that support for the idea that the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) should have certain privileges in Russia is on the rise with alarming speed. In 1996, 51 percent of respondents agreed with this idea, but by 2005 this number had grown to 72 percent.

In 2005, 55 percent of Russians thought that new religious groups in Russia should not be allowed to buy or construct buildings for religious purposes, and 66 percent said that they should be banned from preaching in public places. Sixty percent said that they should not publish their own printed materials. And 62 percent said that they should neither be allowed to start religious schools nor run TV broadcasts.

Furman and Kaariaynen concluded the following: "Church and State have joined forces to strengthen each other. Serious religiosity demonstrated by Vladimir Putin, without doubt, boosts his popularity. The Church confers its authority upon Putin. On the other hand, the religiosity of the President helps to strengthen the 'Orthodox consensus' and the role of

religion as the symbol of unity because the President confers his authority upon the Church."

This situation is a dead-end for Russian Protestants. At first it seems as if there is no way out, yet there is an assurance that Evangelical Christians should be active citizens of their own country to earn the sympathy of the masses. Here there is no talk about hypocrisy. Quite often Protestant churches are self-centered. They do not want to express their views regarding questions asked by the society. Such an approach hinders the growth of popularity of Evangelical Christians in the country. At the same time, it is evident that the current president of the Russian Evangelical Christian-Baptist Union, Yuri Kirillovich Sipko, has taken a more active position in the life of Russia. "Theos" Radio Station and Credo.Ru Internet site, initiated the broadcast of his addresses. Obviously, it is not enough, but such good beginnings should be noticed. I hope that we will be able to reach a new level of quality in the communication of our Protestant position.

In conclusion, I would like to note that Jesus did not promise his disciples that they would not face difficulties in spreading the good news. Leaving his disciples on earth, He said that all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him. Therefore we can respond with great courage and stand fast to face this new challenge. ♦

Translated from the Russian by Oleg P. Turlac, and published with the author's permission. Originally posted on the Russian-language website of Kuban Evangelical Christian University: (<http://www.kecu.ru/rpint.php?doc=270>) and Portal-Credo (www.portal-credo.ru).

Evgeniy Yur'evich Knyazev is director of public relations at Kuban Evangelical Christian University, Krasnodar, Russia.

In 1996, 70 percent of respondents believed all religious groups in Russia should have equal rights, but in 2005 this number was down to 53 percent.

Letters to the Editor

I thought that the article about missionary stress in Moscow and Russia [Christine Currie, "Exposure to Trauma and Stress Among Missionaries in Moscow," 14 (Summer 2006): 9-11] was outstanding! I believe that the author hit the nail on the head. So many missionaries in Moldova deal with the same problems. Just a month or so ago I learned that two missionaries had to wait in Budapest for 40 days before they were granted Moldovan visas.

I am so glad that you publish the *Report*. I like the work you are doing, and I believe that the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* can bless many people in former Soviet states as well as those interested in Eastern Europe.

Oleg Turlac, College of Theology and Education, Kishinev, Moldova

I have been a missionary in and out of Russia since 1990. EXCELLENT COMMENTS on your *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 13 (Fall 2005). My thoughts: I see fewer Westerners, but more Western money going from West to East. I think this is in part due to a growing understanding on the part of the church leadership in the former Soviet Union in obtaining funds from Western sources. Internet websites and personal visits from East to West have created the flow of finances. Also, the tremendous number of emigrants from the former Soviet Union adds to funds going back to family and church.

Anonymous Missionary

Estonia's Singing Revolution

Steven Pierson

Editor's Note: The author's dissertation, from which this article is excerpted, identifies sources by code only. Therefore, citations to these sources are omitted.

Singing has both expressed and supported Estonian national identity, especially during the Soviet era. One musician stated, "We Estonians think that music saved our nation." A Tallinn pastor, commenting on the nation's song festivals held every five years, added, "I remember from my childhood there was an official program – songs about Lenin and things – but when this was over, people did not leave. Tens of thousands of people just stood there and started to sing their own songs. No police could do anything."

The Estonian Song Festival

In 1988, during the first post-Soviet song festival, one full day of the two-day program was devoted to Christian songs. A pastor recalled, "There was a special part for singing Christian songs, and a new mass by an Estonian composer was performed. Also, people from the government were present. Some parliament members said later: 'It was great that we could hear Christian songs at the song festival; it felt like we had been in church.'" In 1988, the huge crowds that gathered at the song festival grounds served as a metaphor, symbolizing a powerful yet peaceful movement of freedom from Soviet dominance. The song festivals reflect foundational Estonian values by means of peaceful artistic expression. Immense yet quiet crowds, listening and singing together in harmony, may suggest deeper values at work, including a deep longing for peace.

In the midst of incessant war, destruction, and foreign dominance, Estonian peasants seemed to have developed a longing for peace that became a cherished value, treasured especially during the Soviet years. When the political atmosphere turned favorable, Estonians used song to express peacefully their desire for independence. Other Soviet republics resorted to armed conflicts of one kind or another. In Estonia, songs successfully carried the message and crystallized the movement. Soviet occupation, and particularly the policy of Russification, jeopardized Estonian ethnic identity. In this context, music became a special symbol, a means of survival and a movement for independence. In the "Singing Revolution," beginning in 1988, choirs became the main symbol for political efforts to separate Estonia from the Soviet Union. One pastor explained, "There is no doubt about the importance of music. [Independence] would not have been possible without the help of music. The singing revolution has become a symbol of freedom."

An Entire Nation in Song

The size of the movement in proportion to the ethnic Estonian population is significant. In the midst of the first steps toward independence, the

rally in September 1988 attracted large numbers of Estonians. A Tallinn pastor gave this eyewitness account: "At the same square where the song festival is held, there were 600,000 Estonian people, two-thirds of the Estonian nation. The place was so completely filled that nobody could actually sit." A revival of Christian choir music also resulted from the singing revolution. "Especially during the five years after that explosion you couldn't even hear other music, it was just Estonian Christian music."

Growing Western Influences

Before independence, little contact with Christians outside Estonia was possible. Since independence, Estonian churches have been open to non-Estonian influence. Music from the West has influenced worship since 1991. Of the Western countries, those interviewed named England, Finland, Sweden, and America as having the most influence. Western styles of music included American worship songs, the music of the Taize Movement, and English worship songs by Graham Kendrick.

A pastor outside Tallinn stated that Western music is artificial. Others surveyed felt that the new styles do not relate well with Estonian culture. One pastor contended that expressions of truth from different cultures often create tension. "You have this very lively way of expressing Christian truths, and sometimes when it comes into our culture, it can be a little painful." Two pastors and one musician cited translation problems. The musician noted, "It has been easier to translate than to create our own." A different pastor expressed the concern, "We are losing part of our uniqueness."

One Tallinn pastor believed his congregation was approaching equilibrium. "Young people were singing a new repertoire from the West, and classical music was pushed more into the background. But by now, they have got[ten] over this time period and again, classical music is loved. So there are different kinds of music: classical, chorales, and worship songs."

Estonians highly value choir music and festivals. The sense of unity, joy, and openness that comes through participation in choral festivals breaks down patterns of atomization, isolation, and mistrust created by Soviet policies. Those surveyed valued the national song festivals and affirmed the strength and character produced by these festivals, especially during the late 1980s. Those surveyed also understood the movement for political independence as a singing movement.

Music as a Means of Discipleship

Those interviewed spoke in detail concerning the role of music in Christian development. Themes such as courage, fellowship, support, purification, community, problem solving, resolving doubt, and developing personal convictions were said to find

(continued on page 14)

In the "Singing Revolution," beginning in 1988, choirs became the main symbol for political efforts to separate Estonia from the Soviet Union.

Estonia's Singing Revolution (continued from page 13)

clarity in music. In addition, Estonian Christians spoke of the ability of music to amplify and integrate truth, aid in recall, broaden perspectives, and aid in learning theology. As may be expected, singing and worship appeared inseparable. According to those surveyed, youth work, in particular, centered in music, especially during Soviet times when traditional Western forms of youth ministry were prohibited.

Those surveyed confirmed that Soviet repression created a situation in which survival depended on the ministry of music. Professional musicians provided leadership and high standards for church music. The Oleviste Baptist Church in Tallinn functioned as an example in the performance of major Christian works, influencing many of those surveyed. Music ministry existed at this level because authorities allowed Christian young people to attend the Tallinn Academy of Music. Christian parents also encouraged children in the study of music because it was free of Soviet ideology and provided the opportunity to serve in the church.

Threats to Estonia's Musical Tradition

Estonian Christians appeared unprepared for the freedom they suddenly experienced in the early 1990s. Financial pressures on families required increased personal income. Today, many Christians work several jobs and experience fatigue that results in decreased musical activities. Consequently, diminished involvement in and apathy toward music seem on the rise. In addition, powerful cultural and financial influences from abroad threaten to overwhelm traditional Estonian approaches to life and music. Estonian choir traditions may be jeopardized. In spite of these concerns, those surveyed believe that this period of transition will end with some sort of return to traditional forms and values.

Song festivals feature distinct rituals and traditions that reflect the characteristics of a sacred event. One of the more obvious characteristics is the ceremonial lighting of the festival torch, similar to the Olympic ceremony. The torch is borne from Tartu to Tallinn by ceremonial horse-drawn carriage. The general behavior of the crowds and the enormous popularity of the event easily suggest a departure from profane (normal) time to sacred time in which national identity is celebrated and renewed.

The invasion of Western worship music into Estonia's deep and prophetic music culture alarms some observers. Many feel powerless to stop the process, however, because of overwhelming financial need. Musicians who spent copious amounts of time serving the church for little if any pay, now find themselves forced to maintain several jobs to survive financially. In this situation, compromising with powerful musical patterns from abroad easily becomes the path of least resistance. Many express concerns, but few can actually do

anything at this point. Some even feel that the great Estonian Christian choir tradition may not survive the pressure of transition and change, and that participatory music may be eclipsed by the Western pattern of music "consumption."

Recommendations

Significant efforts must be made to ensure the preservation and future development of Estonia's singing culture. These efforts must include conscious resistance to the invasion of Western musical forms, which detach listeners from traditional, national singing. Perhaps one way to resist is to focus on the continued creation of Estonian music with traditional high standards, which will then be exported to the international community.

In Summary

In the midst of a chaotic transition, the Estonian church stands in a place of unique service. In a situation in which many Estonians suffer from economic and emotional pressure, the church provides a place of rest and peace from the demands of the world. The Estonian church not only can provide refuge. It also can preserve the national singing culture.

Estonia's singing revolution was a rare, if not altogether unique, phenomenon. The capacity of Estonia's singing culture to bring about significant political change in the face of armed occupation provides the international community with a remarkable example of peaceful change. The role of Christianity in the process also gives the universal church a unique testimony. ♦

Edited excerpt published with permission from Steven James Pierson, "We Sang Ourselves Free: Developmental Uses of Music Among Estonian Christians from Repression to Independence." Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity International University, 1998. See also, Steve Pierson, "We Sang Ourselves Free: Music Lessons From Estonia," Evangelical Missions Quarterly 38 (April 2002), 314-22.

Steven Pierson teaches at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, and College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, Illinois. He plays the French horn in the DuPage Symphony Orchestra, Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

Estonia's singing revolution was a rare, if not altogether unique, phenomenon.

Zoe Knox. *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005. Reviewed by Matt Miller.

What are the social and political ambitions of the Russian Orthodox Church? What is the current relationship between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Kremlin? Is the church contributing to the development of an open society? How has the hierarchy been addressing anti-Semitism within its own ranks? Why have some reformist priests been disciplined, but others, with apparently more controversial points of view, have continued to work unhindered? Those who have asked these questions will certainly want to read this monograph on the contemporary interaction of the Russian Orthodox Church with the surrounding society, authored by Zoe Knox, a lecturer at the University of Leicester, England. This is an ambitious project which addresses several significant topics based on published research and web pages.

Knox examines the church by means of the concept of “civil society.” The author utilizes this phrase to describe three necessary conditions: 1) “a society that accommodates social self-organization independent of the state;” 2) “a state of affairs in the religious sphere characterized by interaction between different denominations and religions;” and 3) “a particular kind of dynamism within Church structures” (16). The thesis of the book is that the “unofficial Church” of reformist clergy and laypeople has contributed substantially to the development of Russia’s civil society, while Patriarch Aleksii II and the hierarchy, the “official Church,” have usually obstructed this process. For this reason Knox suggests that the Russian Orthodox Church is a “pseudo-state church” (131). The evidence she compiles makes a compelling case for this idea.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of the book is its interweaving of accounts of noteworthy events from the past 20 years that support its thesis. These events include the adoption and implementation of the 1997 law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations,” the building of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, the canonization and reburial of Nicholas II and his family, Metropolitan Ioann’s xenophobia, the growth of anti-Semitism, closer ties between Patriarch Aleksii and Putin’s government, Orthodox jurisdictional conflicts in Ukraine and Estonia, and the adoption in 2000 of the “Bases of the Social

Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church.” Many readers will appreciate the concise summaries of the activities of a wide range of leaders, such as Gleb Iakunin, Nikolai Eshliman, Georgii Kochetkov, Georgii Chistiakov, Veniamin Novik, Aleksandr Borisov, Dmitrii Dudko, and Aleksandr Dvorkin.

Through these accounts, Knox illustrates unexpected contradictions in religious life in Russia: “The paradoxes of the Russian Orthodox Church’s post-Soviet position are multifarious: the Patriarchate’s transition from suppressed to suppressor; the incongruity of the reformist and traditionalist agendas; Orthodoxy’s privileged position in a secular state; [and] the susceptibility of the authoritative Patriarchate to exploitation by antidemocratic forces” (184).

The book does have its limitations. First, it primarily is an in-depth synthesis of others’ research (English and Russian), offering few original insights. Conducting additional interviews, surveys, and archival research would have been very useful in strengthening the book’s arguments. Knox writes clearly, but this clarity occasionally lapses into oversimplification. For example, in summarizing the impact of Western missionaries, the author itemizes “five reasons why these nontraditional groups . . . were so attractive to Russians” (100), but leaves little room for other, more complex, explanations. Knox later suggests, incorrectly, that all Protestants reject infant baptism (159-60). Also, her work provides little insight into *why* the Orthodox hierarchy and reformist priests developed different views and approaches to ministry. For example, many reformist priests have drawn on the writings and experiences of émigré clergy, who had first-hand experience with the Western world. For a work addressing the development of civil society, surprisingly little attention is paid to the activities of ordinary Orthodox parishioners in philanthropic and other community-building activities. Nevertheless, this significant work deserves the careful attention of those concerned with the development of society and religion in Russia. Unfortunately, the list price for this volume is high (\$145 U.S. dollars), so finding a library or used copy may be necessary. ♦

Matt Miller works in Moscow with the *Evangelical Free Church*.

The thesis of the book is that the “unofficial Church” of reformist clergy and laypeople has contributed substantially to the development of Russia’s civil society, while Patriarch Aleksii II and the hierarchy, the “official Church,” have usually obstructed this process.

Sacred Space Reclaimed

Alexander Smirnov

In the summer of 1989 I was drafted into military service. By the end of July that year I found myself in an Air Force boot camp in the city of Vyshni Volochek, between Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Our camp was located on the territory of a former Orthodox convent. Much later I learned that more than 1,000 nuns resided there prior to the Bolshevik Revolution.

By the time of my service, pride in the military was all but lost. My company was stationed on the second floor of the former living quarters of the nuns, opposite the skeleton of the main cathedral. And just to the right stood another, once magnificent, church. Both the church and the cathedral had lost their bells and were stripped of paint and plaster to the bare red brick. Heavy, ancient wooden church doors hung somewhat loosely, which tempted me to sneak a look inside through the cracks. The courtyard between the buildings was turned into a parade ground where we draftees spent endless hours under the watchful eye of a perpetually angry drill sergeant.

The purpose of boot camp, it seemed to me, was to occupy any given soldier every minute of every day. Our rare moments of rest were usually spent smoking in a little hut right next to the main cathedral. The fall of 1989 was warm, long, and particularly beautiful. The former convent occupied the top of a hill from which one could see for miles. I remember feeling almost pain that I had to turn away from the beauty of the forests on fire with every fall color and the endless blue of the sky to the grim reality of boot camp life, which was manifestly bleak and dull. I was, however, in for a surprise.

Once, a sergeant ordered several of us to retrieve items from storage in the nearby church. After unlocking the church doors to let us in, the sergeant left us to ourselves in the semi-darkness of the former sanctuary. Once we found what we were looking for, we decided not to hurry back. Instead, we began to explore this unfamiliar terrain with mixed feelings

of awe and adventure. A few narrow rays of daylight worked their way through holes in the roof. In the odd silence of the vacant, despoiled church, we tried to joke, but the echoes of our words actually frightened us. We next came across a very thick iron chain hanging from the roof. Its far end disappeared in the thick darkness somewhere under the cupolas. I thought that perhaps a huge chandelier once hung from this chain. We could think of nothing better to do than to swing from this chain. As I climbed up, a fellow soldier grabbed the free end and pulled it as far toward the door as he could before letting go. I was flying through the darkness, breaking the silence only with the squeaking noise of the chain. When my eyes finally adjusted to the dim light, I began to see vague images on the frescoed walls, still visible if one was close enough. I cannot explain it, but suddenly I felt a strong urge to exit the church as soon as I could. We bolted out almost in a panic. Afterwards, we completed boot camp and received orders to redeploy.

In May 2006, my wife and I accompanied a friend from Moscow to Saint Petersburg for a long holiday weekend. On the way, our conversation turned to our days in the military. Since we were making good progress, we decided to make a stop at the site of my boot camp in Vyshni Volochek. As we drove up, I could not recognize the place, now restored by Orthodox nuns. On top of the hill, gleaming in the sun, stood a beautiful ensemble. As we entered, with no people in sight, I saw that our parade ground had reverted to a beautiful courtyard with attractive landscaping. And a picturesque little chapel now stands on the very spot of our former "smoking hut." The main cathedral and the adjacent church were freshly painted. As we continued to explore the grounds on this beautiful, sunny day, we came across several nuns on horseback plowing a small field. They invited us to take the plow, but we politely declined. I did not add to my popularity when I explained that I had served in the military there. An older nun pulled out a set of keys with a sorrowful sigh and waived us toward the chapel. She opened the door and allowed us to enter. I was struck by the beautiful work of restoration. Our escort suggested that repentance was in order, as she commented on the chaos the military had left after returning the convent to the church in the 1990s. Inside the chapel we found two tombs of nuns who had glorified God with miracles and healings. We bought candles, made a contribution, and prayed. As we left, I continued to turn back to look at the restored convent's beautiful domes set against a backdrop of blue sky. It was a wonderful feeling.

I did not have the opportunity to enter the church in which I had seen frescoes of the saints and of the Lord. Still, they may have had something to do with the way I felt as we departed my boot camp, restored to its sacred purpose. ♦

Alexander Smirnov is assistant to the president of the Russian-American Christian University, Moscow, Russia.

In the odd silence of the vacant, despoiled church, we tried to joke, but the echoes of our words actually frightened us.

EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT, published quarterly, seeks to encourage Western Christian ministry in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that is effective, culturally relevant, and cooperative. It also serves as a forum for the exploration of a variety of issues relating to Christianity's presence in Europe's formerly Marxist states. Letters to the editor are welcomed. Subscription rates are \$44.95 per year. (U.S. and Canada); \$54.95 (international); and \$19.95 (E-mail). Reprint and photocopy policy: 1) Quantity photocopies or reprints of up to three articles from a single issue may be distributed or reprinted with no royalty charge, 2) Written permission is to be secured for each distribution or reprinting, 3) The following statement is to be carried on each photocopied article reproduced and each article reprinted: **Reproduced (or Reprinted) with permission of EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT.** Currently indexed by Christian Periodical Index, OCLC Public Affairs Information Service (formerly PAIS), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), and Zeller Dietrich (formerly Zeller Verlag).

Editor Mark R. Elliott
Editorial Assistant..... Billie Faye Harvey

EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT
Southern Wesleyan University
Box 1020
Central, SC 29630
Tel: 864-644-5221
Fax: 864-644-5902
E-mail: melliott@swu.edu
Website: www.eastwestreport.org

**SOUTHERN
WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY**

©2007

ISSN 1069-5644