



EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

Fall 2007

Vol. 15, No. 4

An HIV/AIDS Ministry Partnership in Eastern Europe and Russia

Matt Kavgian

Contributing Editors

Canon Michael Bourdeaux
Keston Institute, Oxford

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

Father Georgi Edelstein
Russian Orthodox Church,
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

The spread of HIV/AIDS is the problem that experts increasingly recognize as the single most sweeping global threat. Every day 8,000 people die of HIV/AIDS, the equivalent of 20 fully loaded Boeing 747s crashing to earth daily.

The church, until recently, has been largely absent from engaging this issue, leaving responses to government and secular organizations. Many such efforts have been valiant, but incomplete, as they tend to focus on “fixing” the problem from a purely physical, behavioral, or economic standpoint. Valid issues all, but the Christian worldview informs us that issues such as HIV/AIDS also harbor a deeper spiritual dimension. Communities around the world cannot be restored through personal willpower, government programs, or money alone; transformation of the human heart by the gospel is also needed. It is critical that the church not only take responsibility for HIV/AIDS sufferers in light of God’s command to serve “the least of these,” but, in addition, realize the unprecedented opportunity that exists to draw them into God’s kingdom.

Contrary to what many evangelicals may think, the Great Command (“Love your neighbor as yourself,” Matthew 22:39) and the Great Commission (“Go and make disciples of all nations,” Matthew 28:19) are not mutually exclusive. Believers (typically Western) have often felt they needed to choose between speaking good words and doing good deeds, between what is eternal and that which is merely temporal. This has happened, I believe, because at some point along the way we lost our understanding of what “salvation” means.

The word itself means “wellness,” “cure,” or “wholeness.” Jesus wanted us to minister to the whole person – soul, mind, and body – as He modeled. Matthew 9:35-36 reveals that compassion was at the heart of Jesus’ evangelistic message. He went where people were hurting, had compassion on the harassed and helpless, healed them of every affliction, and preached the eternal hope of the gospel.

Jesus understood that the moment of a person’s deepest human need is also the moment

of greatest openness. To come alongside the needy with the hope, life, and truth of the gospel is the heart of Jesus. This is the central mission of CrossRoads, a ministry strategy of Campus Crusade for Christ.

CrossRoads Defined

CrossRoads develops, trains, and supports national communities and partnering organizations to address societal needs (such as HIV/AIDS, violence, and drug abuse) through education, the development of values and character, and the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. A panel of international experts in adult and youth education, public health, and missiology, created CrossRoads’ centerpiece, a 30-lesson curriculum entitled “Life at the CrossRoads” (LATC), contextualized for an international audience.

Since 1995, CrossRoads has been launched in 70 countries, and has trained 40,000 teachers to use LATC. Fourteen million children and parents have been exposed to the curriculum and other CrossRoads media. In addition to working with national Campus Crusade staff, CrossRoads actively pursues partnerships with other Christian groups to maximize the strategy’s impact. Examples include World Vision, Samaritan’s Purse, the Salvation Army, YMCA, Children’s HopeChest, and local churches. CrossRoads maintains a headquarters staff of 12 based in Orlando, Florida, and a global staff of over 100.

CrossRoads in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia

CrossRoads began work in Central Europe in 1994 at the behest of Dr. Denes Banhegyi, the Director of Sexual Education and HIV/AIDS Prevention in the Hungarian Institute of Health, NEVI being the Hungarian acronym. Dr. Banhegyi recognized that Communism had failed to equip youth with a moral framework by which to make healthy decisions in daily life.

Although HIV/AIDS was not yet a threat, Hungarian leaders, to their credit, recognized that newfound, unchecked freedom was a ripe

(continued on page 2)

Within three years after leaving institutional care at age 16, 30 percent of Russian orphan graduates are homeless and jobless; 35 percent are imprisoned for law violations; 15 percent commit suicide; and 55 percent of girls become involved in prostitution.

environment for an HIV/AIDS invasion, as well as other behavior-related conditions like teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, and suicide. They were also worried about the results of a state-sponsored study that revealed that Hungarian youth at the time had, on average, no close friends. Youth who struggle with loneliness are much more prone to seek out acceptance and love anywhere they can find it, making high-risk decisions in the process. Good, healthy relationships, on the other hand, can create and maintain a positive sense of self. Again, it should be noted that Hungarian officials came to this conclusion— not the church!

Members of the Hungarian government recognized Dr. Banhegyi's leadership, and instructed NEVI to partner with Campus Crusade for Christ in Hungary in order to create a strategy to aid its young people. Out of this affiliation, and particularly Banhegyi's relationship with two Campus Crusade staff members—Dave Robinson and Gábor Grész—came a strategy, "Youth at the Threshold of Life" (YTL). Robinson and Grész became the architects of this national plan. Its main purpose was to help young people develop good character (using Jesus as a role model), from which they could then make healthy decisions, thereby avoid high-risk choices that could lead to destructive and possibly life-threatening behaviors.

Dissemination of the YTL curriculum, introduced into the Hungarian school system in 1994, was quite comprehensive. Over 7,600 Hungarian teachers have been trained to present it. Over one million students have been taught how to make healthy decisions and engage in healthy relationships. Soon after, the YTL strategy was reworked for a global audience, and became CrossRoads.

HIV/AIDS and Orphans

According to a recent USAID report ("Health Profile: Europe and Eurasia," 2006, www.usaid.gov):

- The HIV/AIDS epidemics in Europe and Eurasia continue to increase. The number of people living with HIV in this region reached an estimated 1.7 million in 2006, a 20-fold increase in less than a decade. The overwhelming majority of people living with HIV in this region are young – 75 percent of the reported infections between 2000 and 2004 were in people less than 30 years old, and almost one-third of new infections are in youth aged 15 to 24 years. Unless prevention efforts are stepped up, high levels of risky behavior suggest that HIV could strengthen its presence in the region. Russia has the largest number of people living with AIDS, with 940,000 infected at the end of 2005. Eighty percent of people living with HIV in Russia are aged 15

to 30 years.

- Upon closer investigation we find that many Russian young people are found in public care. From Children's HopeChest (www.hopechest.org) and the CoMission for Children at Risk (www.comission.org) comes a troubling snapshot of the damage being done to this forgotten population:
 - One and a half million children in Central and Eastern Europe and nearly one million in Russia live in public care.
 - In Russia, the annual number of abandoned children has more than doubled over the past decade, despite a falling birth rate.
 - Within three years after leaving institutional care at age 16, 30 percent of Russian orphan graduates are homeless and jobless; 35 percent are imprisoned for law violations; 15 percent commit suicide; and 55 percent of girls become involved in prostitution.

For years missiologists have reported that the overwhelming majority of spiritual decisions are made before the age of 18 (*The Barna Update*, 11 October 2004; <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=172>). That being the case, what can be done to intervene at this key juncture in adolescent development, when critical life choices are being made and worldviews developed? One example may be found in a new partnership between CrossRoads and Children's HopeChest.

CrossRoads and Children's HopeChest

CrossRoads International and Children's HopeChest, known in Russia as Nadezhda Fund, have developed a collaborative partnership to bring the Life at the CrossRoads (LATC) curriculum to children living in Russian orphanages. After being introduced by a supporting foundation, the two organizations spent five months from October 2005 to March 2006 developing a ministry partnership designed to increase the capacity of both organizations through a two-year initiative in Russia.

Nadezhda Fund, counterpart to U.S.-based Children's HopeChest, was founded in 1994 to meet the needs of Russian orphanages. It is a Russian-registered, national-led, charity fund with a federal charter to work in Russian orphanages. The Fund currently works in four regions of Russia (Vladimir, Kostroma, Ivanovo, and Ryazan) and is now expanding into the Kirov and St. Petersburg Regions. Nadezhda Fund is a leading Russian charity specializing in orphan care. Its directors have written transitional living curricula under several USAID grants and trained over 200 other organizations and local governments in Russia in the implementation of family-based forms of orphan care.

The Fund's specialty is the post-institutional adaptation of orphans. This is primarily

HIV/AIDS Ministry Partnership

accomplished through intensive transitional living programs that focus on providing orphan graduates with community-based resources, professional guidance, and peer mentorship. The Fund employs over 80 full- and part-time staff.

Starting in 2006 the partnering agencies combined the curriculum resources and training expertise of CrossRoads with Nadezhda Fund's discipleship staff already working in orphanages. Cooperation focuses primarily on training individuals for greater impact in orphanages using the LATC curriculum as a vehicle to share the gospel and prevent the spread of HIV. Over the past 12 years, Nadezhda Fund's programs have helped over 10,000 orphans in Russia, Romania, and Ukraine. Currently, it has direct access to approximately 2,000 orphans living in 40 state orphanages in Vladimir, Kostroma, Ivanovo, and Ryazan, Russia, with each of these orphanages having a Western church sponsor arranged by Children's HopeChest. Further, Nadezhda Fund works with several hundred orphanage graduates participating in various programs, including the LATC training.

Working together, the two agencies are pursuing four main goals: 1) Teaching the LATC curriculum in orphanages; 2) Developing a new curriculum tool to enhance LATC's implementation among orphans and special needs students in the former Soviet Union and around the world; 3) Launching CrossRoads' LATC curriculum for regular public schools in a minimum of three new regions in Russia; and 4) Conducting two simultaneous research and evaluative studies on the impact of the CrossRoads strategy with Russian orphans. The first study is being spearheaded by social work students of the Russian-American Christian

University in Moscow under the guidance of Dr. Beryl Hugen from Calvin College in the United States. A Russian Ministry of Education evaluator from St. Petersburg University, Dr. Ludmila Shepitsina, is conducting the second study. The studies, planned for completion by fall 2008, should provide a measure of the effectiveness of the educational and faith components of the strategy in comparison to control groups that are not exposed to the same kind of instruction and mentoring.

Conclusion

Looking into the HIV/AIDS abyss can be overwhelming. But working together as a body, serving in the power of the Spirit, much can be accomplished in His name. Dr. Robert Reccord, former President of the Southern Baptist Convention North American Mission Board, once said, "It is time for us to leave our logos and egos at the door and get about the business of fulfilling the Great Commission." By applying this charge to HIV/AIDS ministry efforts in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia, CrossRoads and Children's HopeChest have covenanted together to reclaim this enemy stronghold and advance God's kingdom. ♦

Matt Kavgian is Deputy Director of CrossRoads, a ministry strategy of Campus Crusade for Christ. In 2006, he produced a documentary, "HOPE Positive: Surviving the Sentence of HIV/AIDS" (www.HopePositive.com). He also has co-authored, with E. Bailey Marks, Jr., and Brent Larson, The Great Omission: How the Church is Waking up to the HIV/AIDS Pandemic, set for release in early 2008.

"It is time for us to leave our logos and egos at the door and get about the business of fulfilling the Great Commission."

The Modernity of a "Backward Sect": Evangelicals in Dniepropetrovsk under Khrushchev and Brezhnev

Sergei Ivanovich Zhuk

In the early 1960s, KGB officials and Communist party ideologists became increasingly concerned over the growth of religion in the Dniepropetrovsk Region of Ukraine. In 1962, 15,890 of the region's children received Orthodox baptism, while in 1966 the number of baptized infants was 17,022. Some KGB officials estimated that between a third and a half of the entire region's newborn infant population received church baptisms in the 1960s.¹

During 1963, 120 Evangelical Christian-Baptist (ECB) preachers delivered sermons in 40 congregations of the region. Three years later, despite the forcible closing of meeting houses, 300 ECB pastors were preaching in 35 Baptist congregations. In 1959 at the beginning of the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign, only a few ECB congregations had an orchestra or band with

guitar, but by 1966 every congregation had one performing during every service.²

Khrushchev's anti-religious measures led in August 1961 to the creation of the Initiative Group among Evangelical Christian-Baptist congregations. Dissent came as a reaction to new concessions made by church leaders to Soviet authorities, especially after 1959. While the officially recognized Evangelical Christians-Baptists followed Soviet laws and demonstrated their loyalty to state authorities, dissident Baptists confronted Soviet officials and cut their ties to the Soviet state. Dissenters provoked debates among the region's evangelicals and sparked an evangelical awakening in the years 1961-1965.

KGB Concern Over Religious Youth

According to KGB reports, the main problem for the local police in Dniepropetrovsk was

(continued on page 4)

The Modernity of a “Backward Sect” (continued from page 3)

the proselytizing efforts of different churches among local youth. KGB operatives were surprised by the effective use of radio, musical instruments, record-players, and tape recorders, by missionary-minded Christian groups. The most active and successful in their missionary activities among Dnepropetrovsk youth were Pentecostals and Baptists. During one year alone, 1961, Pentecostals involved 20 of the best local middle and high school students in their activities. These students had become Pentecostal activists by 1962 and later took an active part in various public ceremonies such as funerals and weddings, playing musical instruments and singing.³

“Backward” Believers and New Technology

A 1963 KGB report identified unexpected forms of cultural adaptation among local Pentecostals: “Leaders of the Pentecostal sect recommend their co-religionists buy tape-recorders to record their religious ceremonies, and then, during their leaders’ absence, to use the recorded tapes for worship. After these recommendations, more than 12 sectarians immediately bought tape recorders.”⁴ During 1962-63, more young Christians in the region were buying tape recorders than were Komsomol youth. Tape recorders were still considered expensive, but Pentecostals in the region bought more of them than did non-religious persons. As some contemporary observers noted, sectarians became real pioneers in tape-recording technology, inviting young specialist engineers to help, and using various advanced techniques (including Western ones) in their recording of religious services and performances.⁵ During 1964-67, more than half of all new tape recorders in the region were bought by members of various religious communities.⁶

Another popular item among sectarians was television. As one KGB officer reported, “To conceal their worship meetings from persecution (especially in the evenings), leaders of illegal sectarian groups advised their co-religionists to buy television sets to hold services using the pretext of collective watching of TV shows.”⁷ Ironically, during the 1960s and 1970s Soviet evangelicals were always associated in the Communist ideologists’ imagination with anti-modern behavior. According to official Soviet propaganda, Christian believers were outdated, backward people who always rejected cultural and technological progress. But suddenly, KGB operatives had to admit that Christian evangelicals had become the most active participants in socialist cultural consumption.⁸

Dissident Believers and Modern Music

Dissident Baptists not only used tape recorders but different combinations of musical instruments with amplifiers in new forms of outreach. Their non-compromising attitude toward Soviet

authorities, their appeal to youth, and their organization of bands and choirs for children all attracted hundreds of registered Baptist church members to new unregistered congregations.

In May 1965, a bus with 30 dissident Baptists from Krivoi Rog arrived in a village near Dnepropetrovsk where local Baptists were holding worship. When the local minister denied their request to preach, the dissenters began an improvised worship service, preaching that conformist Christians had to remove themselves from “communities of traitors whose meetings were sanctioned by the state, and as a result, were transformed into loyal elements of the state machine.” The dissident Baptists had brought violins, guitars, mandolins, and some electrical equipment, including amplifiers. Their improvised meeting became an interesting religious concert with spiritual songs, the recitation of religious poems, and collective prayer. In addition to local Baptists, the music attracted non-religious neighbors who joined a growing crowd of people around the bus of these “musical guests.” A local Baptist minister sent for the police to arrest the “uninvited guests,” but it was too late. The damage to his congregation already had been done. Before the police arrived, the dissenters left, but some local Baptists quit their old community to join a new unregistered congregation. They later explained to their minister that dissenters’ preaching was “closer to them and corresponded better to their ideal of Christianity than their own community’s cautious traditional style of worship.” Three young preachers, Ivan Gorkusha, Anna Chaban, and Pavel Malyi, formed new dissident Baptist and Pentecostal congregations in Dnepropetrovsk.⁹

The popularity of new technology and musical forms used by dissidents had a strong impact on registered evangelical congregations as well. Young members now asked for more music and more singing during worship, referring to the success of dissenters to justify their request. In December 1965, young activists of registered Baptist congregations in Dnepropetrovsk prevailed upon church leadership to allow them to organize special rehearsals each Saturday to prepare new hymns, play new musical instruments, and use new equipment and recording technology. Young activists argued that incorporation of modern musical forms in services would attract young people who loved modern music, as well as bring back young Baptists who were visiting dissident meetings. Registered Baptist leaders finally permitted these musical rehearsals. However, under pressure from Soviet officials who interpreted this as a violation of Soviet laws on religion, the ministers had to cancel these rehearsals. As a result, many young Baptists attended dissident meetings.¹⁰

During 1964-67, more than half of all new tape recorders in the region were bought by members of various religious communities.

KGB Concern Over Western Radio Broadcasts

In 1968 KGB officers reported that Christian believers of different denominations also listened to foreign radio broadcasts. As a result, more than 300 local Christians tried to “establish written correspondence with leaders of foreign religious centers and their radio stations.” What especially bothered KGB officials were letters to the World Council of Churches and the United Nations describing religious persecution in the region.¹¹

In 1972, one Baptist dissident, Nikolai Iarko, played audio tapes of foreign radio broadcast sermons on Dnepropetrovsk commuter trains. Also in the early 1970s, Venedikt Galenko, the new head of regional registered Baptists, following the example of dissident evangelicals, used modern music, guitar bands, and youth choirs to attract more visitors to services. On New Year’s Eve, 1973, he organized a dinner with live music and taped sermons, including recordings of foreign radio programs. Galenko also invited other evangelicals, especially dissident Baptists, to attend this dinner meeting. Loud music and a free dinner, including sausages, cheese, buns, lemonade, tea, and sweets, attracted many young people. Soviet officials opposed “these new methods, because they included elements of Western modernization.”¹² On 22 June 1973, Soviet authorities ordered Galenko to “stop this transformation of houses of worship into cafés” and banned “special music parties with dinners and concerts.” The order required that Baptist leaders remove all radio, music, and tape-recording equipment from their meeting houses, and to remove from the yards of their meeting houses amplifiers, musical instruments, benches, and concert equipment. The city of Dnepropetrovsk banned all religious concerts

and forbade children from attending religious meetings.¹³ ♦

Sergei Zhuk is assistant professor of history at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.

Editor’s note: The concluding section of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church & Ministry Report.

Published with permission from Sergei Ivanovich Zhuk, “The West in the Closed City: Cultural Consumption, Identities and Ideology in Soviet Ukraine during the Brezhnev Era, 1964-1984,” forthcoming.

Notes:

- ¹ State Archive of the Dnepropetrovsk Region [Derzhavnyi arkhiv Dnepropetrovsk oblasti], hereafter, DADO, f. 22, op.19, d. 2, 1. 143.
- ² DADO, f.19, op. 51, d. 74, 1. 6-7.
- ³ DADO, f. 9870, op. 1, d. 48, 1. 21-22.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 1. 22.
- ⁵ Interview with Eduard Svichar, 20 June 2002.
- ⁶ Author interview with Igor T., KGB officer, Dnepropetrovsk, 15 May 1991.
- ⁷ DADO, f. 9870, op. 1, d. 48, 1. 23. See also Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Media and the Russian Public* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 18-40, 73-74; Kristin Roth-Ey, “Mass Media and the Remaking of Soviet Culture, 1950s-1960s,” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2003; Kristin Roth-Ey, “Finding a Home for Television in the USSR, 1950-1970,” *Slavic Review* 66 (Summer 2007), 278-306.
- ⁸ Author interview with Igor T., KGB officer, Dnepropetrovsk, 15 May 1991.
- ⁹ DADO, f. 19, op. 48, d. 146, and 202.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 203-04.
- ¹¹ DADO, f. 6465, op. 2, d.2, 1. 174-75.
- ¹² DADO, f. 6465, op. 2, d. 4, 1. 4.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

In 1972, one Baptist dissident, Nikolai Iarko, played audio tapes of foreign radio broadcast sermons on Dnepropetrovsk commuter trains.

Church Statistics for Dnepropetrovsk Region, Ukraine, U.S.S.R.

	1962	1984
Orthodox churches	31	25
Orthodox priests	35	43
Orthodox baptisms	15,890	5,611
Registered Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches	38	32
Registered Evangelical Christian-Baptist members	Almost 5,000	5,374
Unregistered Evangelical Christian-Baptist members	80	301
Registered Pentecostal members	0	242
Unregistered Pentecostal members	1,197	755
Registered Seventh-day Adventist members	105	299
Unregistered Seventh-day Adventist members	30	125

Source: DADO, f.9870, op.1, d.48, 1.19-20; f.22, op.19, d.2, 1.143; f.6465, op.2, d.42, 1.52.

Religious Conversions in Ajaria, Georgia

Mathijs Pelkmans

The Ajarian Autonomous Republic is a small triangle of land in the southwestern corner of Georgia, rising up from the Black Sea and sharing a border with Turkey. It has an overall territory of 1,798 square miles (2,900 square kilometers) and a population of approximately 400,000. Lower Ajaria, including its capital, Batumi, with its seaport and oil refineries, is subtropical, while Upper Ajaria is mountainous.

In the late 1980s, when restrictions on religion were lifted, Ajarians seemed to be converting en masse to Christianity. A local newspaper of that time reported that 5,000 people had been baptized in Batumi in a single day, and that recently opened churches were unable to seat all the worshippers who had finally been able to “return to their ancestral faith,” Georgian Orthodoxy (*Sovetskaia Adzhariia*, 29 May 1989). These mass baptisms were not only taking place in Lower Ajaria, with its heterogeneous population, but also in Upper Ajaria, where the position of Islam was much stronger.

Although the church may have interpreted the numerous baptisms as a confirmation of its hope that Ajarians would rapidly “return” to Christianity, it was difficult not to see these baptisms as opportunistic adaptations to the time or as symbolic gestures toward the nationalist movement. In subsequent years, however, it became clear that there was another current, a slower but more permanent process of conversion to Christianity. This process of conversion proceeded steadily in the lowland – sometimes including the population of entire villages – but was much slower and less predictable in Upper Ajaria, where Islam retained an important role in social life.

Factors in Christian Conversions

Basic factors that made the adoption of Christianity understandable included the amalgamation of Georgian religious and ethnic identity and the difficulties of observing Islam while living in a state that privileged Christianity, both through state policies and through the dissemination of Georgian “high” culture. Conversion to Christianity in Upper Ajaria in the 1990s can largely be understood as converts pursuing a restoration of perceived unity between Georgianness and Christianity that also held the promise of a “modern” future.

Merging Georgian Orthodoxy and Georgian Nationalism

The start of my fieldwork in Upper Ajaria in May 2000 coincided with nationwide festivities celebrating famous moments in Georgian history. It had been approximately three millennia since the first Georgian state was established and two millennia since Christianity made its entrance into Georgian territory. The Autonomous Republic

of Ajaria played a special role in these events because of its unique history. Although the inhabitants of Ajaria are (or were) predominantly Sunni Muslim, the province is believed to be the site where Christianity first took hold. The memorable year 2000, then, was an excellent occasion for the Georgian Orthodox Church to raise awareness of Ajaria’s presumed deep Christian roots and, moreover, to reinforce its missionary work among the region’s Muslim population. One of the celebrations was a procession to the small Muslim village of Didach’ara, the place where the first church in Georgia was supposed to have been built. According to the story, the Apostle Andrew built a church in the heart of present-day Upper Ajaria in the first century AD.¹

The central tenet of undisrupted Christian-Georgian continuity, as propagated by the clergy and the intelligentsia since the 1980s, gives weight to the missionary activities of the Georgian Orthodox Church in Ajaria. According to this myth, Ajarians had never really been Muslim, but rather had always, if only subconsciously, perceived themselves as Georgians and thus, implicitly, as Christians.² The advancement of this myth did not only write off the Communist period, it obliterated the three centuries preceding 1878, when Ajaria was part of the Ottoman Empire. Although Ajaria had been part of the Ottoman Empire since the end of the 16th century, adoption of Islam occurred much later.

When the Georgian nationalist movement gained influence in the 1980s, one of its major concerns was to defend the interests of the Church along the imagined geographical, historical, and ethnic lines of the republic.³ The nationalist movement and the first leaders of the independent Georgian republic presented Georgian nationality and Georgian Orthodoxy as an indivisible composite. Speeches by the Orthodox Christian establishment as well as the new government were permeated with expressions like a “Georgian is Orthodox by nature and way of life” and “Georgia means Orthodox.”⁴

Politicians and Religion

Georgia’s first president, ultra-nationalist Zviqad Gamsakhurdia, employed a theocratic image of dominion and envisioned a future for Georgia that would be ethnically pure and closely linked to Christianity.⁵ The Church was successful in gaining numerous privileges and significant power in local politics and issues such as public education.⁶ Though Orthodox Christianity did not become the official state religion, the Church was granted special status in the constitution in 2001 for its “significant role in the history of the nation.”⁷

When the Georgian nationalist movement gained influence in the 1980s, one of its major concerns was to defend the interests of the Church. The nationalist movement and the first leaders of the independent Georgian republic presented Georgian nationality and Georgian Orthodoxy as an indivisible composite.

Religious Conversions in Ajaria, Georgia

The close connection of religious and national identity in Georgia implied that even people without strong religious convictions had to take sides. This was true of political leaders in many post-Soviet countries, who were quick to adopt religious rhetoric in political speech. Georgia's President Eduard Shevardnadze was no exception to this trend. After this former Communist was appointed head of the new Georgian republic in 1992, not only did he become a "democrat," but he also became "a son of the Georgian Church." Whether or not his baptism was motivated by personal conviction, it was certainly a strategic move that cleverly responded to the dominant mood in the country and showed appreciation for the new role of the Georgian Orthodox Church.⁸

Whereas Shevardnadze's turn to Christianity paralleled religious sentiment in Georgia proper, in Ajaria the situation was more complex. Aslan Abashidze, leader of the Ajarian Autonomous Republic from 1992 until 2004, was one of the few political leaders in the former Soviet Union who did not openly express loyalty to a singular faith and avoided answering questions concerning his personal convictions.

Muslims stressed that Abashidze was of Ajarian – Muslim – descent and that he therefore took the problems of the Muslim community to heart. Christian supporters, however, pointed out that Abashidze's grandchildren were baptized and, thus, that he himself was predisposed toward Christianity.

Islam and Christianity in Competition

Although during the late 1980s and early 1990s some 60 mosques had been reopened or were newly constructed, ten years later a number of them were no longer being used. In coastal settlements rumors circulated about the misuse of community funds by "fake" mullahs and the disappearance of grants from Turkish benefactors. Jokes were made about the fact that several of the newly constructed mosques remained virtually empty. During this same period the Georgian Orthodox Church increased its scope of activity. In the early 1990s churches were mainly opened in Batumi and other coastal towns, but in the second half of the 1990s churches were constructed inland as well. In 2001, some 15 churches were functioning in the lowlands and five new churches had been constructed in Upper Ajaria. A new geographical pattern between Islam and Christianity was taking shape, which roughly corresponded to the locally employed distinction between Lower and Upper Ajaria.

Lower Ajaria

In Lower Ajaria the population had become tightly integrated into Soviet Georgian society as a result of its proximity to urban centers. Intermarriage with "Christian" Georgians and a continuing influx of non-Muslim Georgians

added to a gradual adoption of Soviet Georgian lifestyles, which, although atheistic in outlook, later came to be identified with Christianity. Accordingly, in Lower Ajaria the process of conversion to Christianity went relatively unchallenged and the Georgian Orthodox Church rapidly expanded its influence. Besides the construction of new churches, Christian schools were opened, and a significant portion (possibly the majority) of the population was baptized during the first decade after socialism. The influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church was particularly evident in Batumi. In the 1990s, old churches were renovated and new ones constructed, often in prominent locations: along the boulevard, in the historical center of the city, and next to the main market. Priests showed up at official meetings and were invited to be on television shows, and many of Batumi's youth wore Georgian crosses. But while Christianity made a rapid advance, the desire of Muslims to reconstruct the former Sultan Mosque, which was demolished in the 1930s, was ignored by Ajarian authorities. The call to prayer from the only mosque in town was reintroduced in the early 1990s, but it was stopped by authorities shortly thereafter when residents complained about the noise.

Upper Ajaria

In Upper Ajaria, Islam had continued to play an important role in domestic life during socialism. In the 1980s, when Soviet policies toward religion were softened, local networks were activated to restore Islam. However, this Islamic renewal was severely handicapped because it lacked financial resources and an educated clergy. Moreover, it also lacked links to the economic and political power holders of Ajaria who could have supported its growth. When I conducted my research, Islam was influential only in small mountain communities. Here, villagers participated in the reconstruction of mosques and sent their children to the local madrassas (Muslim schools).

The situation was different in the administrative centers of the highlands. In the 1990s the Georgian Orthodox Church selected these towns as prime locations to start their missionary activity. Their activities frequently collided with the aspirations of Muslim leaders, which made the encounter between Islam and Christianity particularly visible in these towns. For example, Khulo, located 50 miles (80 kilometers) east of Batumi, was an important center for both Muslims and Christians. The convergence of two religious traditions in Khulo was mirrored in the close proximity of the mosque and the church.

Oral sources said that the first mosque in

Although during the late 1980s and early 1990s some 60 mosques had been reopened or were newly constructed, ten years later a number of them were no longer being used.

(continued on page 8)

Religious Conversions in Ajaria, Georgia (continued from page 7)

Khulo dates from 1829. After a fire destroyed the original wooden building in the 1890s, a new mosque was constructed of stone. This mosque and the attached madrassa made up the largest Islamic complex in Upper Ajaria. Soviet authorities closed the mosque in 1938.

Paradoxically, post-Soviet “religious freedom” led to a further marginalization of Islam in Ajaria. Increased expectations of what being a Muslim entailed ran counter to increased demands for displaying loyalty to the Georgian nation. Thus, it was often difficult for Muslims to observe Islamic requirements.

The initial upswing of Islam in Ajaria, as shaped by elderly Muslim men, was informed by images of a “pre-Soviet Islam.” The portrayal of Muslim life advanced by these elders involved a rejection of the inclusive language of Georgian nationalism. They held on to a distinction between Georgian (Kartveli) and Ajarian (Ach’areli) on the basis that Georgians were Christian and Ajarians were Muslim. This narrative of difference was difficult to accept for those young Muslims who saw themselves as Georgians and whose careers were tightly interwoven with the Georgian state. Young males with more moderate views of Islam displayed a preference for a de-politicized and de-ethnicized version of Islam. They claimed that religion and nation were different things and that therefore there was no problem in being simultaneously Muslim and Georgian.

The tragedy of Islam in the first decade after socialism was that it did not manage to advance a worldview powerful enough to function as an acceptable alternative to Georgian nationalist ideology. The view of the elders was contrary to ideas of Georgian nationality, but it did not offer an acceptable alternative.

Four Conversion Case Studies

By way of contrast, insight into the complex motivations and effects of Christian conversion can be gained in four personal accounts I recorded in Khulo, the administrative center of Upper Ajaria. The town had important functions for Muslims in the region: It hosted one of the largest mosques in Ajaria, and the deputy mufti and several influential families of Muslim teachers lived there. At the same time, Khulo also functioned as a bridgehead for Christian missionary work. In the 1990s the Georgian Orthodox Church regarded Khulo as a prime location for its missionary activity in Upper Ajaria. In 2000 and 2001 the Christian community was still only a fraction of the town’s total population. The church had 300 members or five percent of the population. ♦

Editor’s Note: The second portion of this article, including the four conversion case studies, will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church & Ministry Report.

*Edited excerpts reprinted from Mathijs Pelkmans, *Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). Used by permission of the author and the publisher.*

Mathijs Pelkmans is Lecturer in Anthropology at the London School of Economics, London, England.

Notes:

¹ I. Bibileishvili and N. Mgeladze, “Pirvelad didach’arashi,” *Ach’ara* (Batumi), 24-30 August 2000; Batumi and Skhalta Diocese website, <http://eparchy.batumi.net/>.

² This view is based on conclusions of Georgian publisher Zaharia Ch’ich’inadze, who collected oral testimonies of conversions during the 1890s: *Kartvelebis gamakhmadianeba any kartvelt gatareba* (Tbilisi: n.p., 1915). See also Ekatherina Meiring Mikadze, “L’Islam en Adjarie: Trajectoire historique et implications contemporaines,” *Cahiers d’etudes sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien* 27 (1999): 241-61.

³ Fairy von Lilienfeld, “Reflections on the Current State of the Georgian State and Nation” in *Seeking God: The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia*, ed. by Stephen Batalden (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 224-26.

⁴ Zaza Shatirishvili, “Stalinist Orthodoxy and Religious Indifference,” *Profile* (Tbilisi), 2000, p. 2.

⁵ Paul Crego, “Wende zum Gottesstaat: Religiöser Nationalismus in Georgien nach 1989,” *Glaube 2 Welt* 24 (no. 2, 1996), 26; Rafik Osman-Ogly Kurbanov and Erjan Rafik-Ogly Kurbanov, “Religion and Politics in the Caucasus,” in *Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. by Michael Bourdeaux (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), 237.

⁶ Ghia Nodia, “Georgian Orthodoxy Revisited: Is Georgia Threatened by Religious Fundamentalism?,” *Profile* (Tbilisi), 2000, p. 3.

⁷ Tamaz Papuashvili, “K voprosu o printsipakh vzaimootnoshenii mezhdou gosudarstvom i pravoslavnoi Tserkov’iu Gruzii,” *Tsentrāl’naia Aziia i Kavkaz* 3 (no. 15, 2001), 164-72.

⁸ Shatirishvili, “Stalinist Orthodoxy,” 2.

Islam in the first decade after socialism did not manage to advance a worldview powerful enough to function as an acceptable alternative to Georgian nationalist ideology.

The Russian YMCA Press: Preserver and Patron of Russian Orthodox Culture

Matt Miller

Editor's note: The first half of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church & Ministry Report 15 (Summer 2007): 2-4.

By 1939, the Russian YMCA Press in Paris served as the principle publisher of philosophical and religious books in the Russian language, with 274 titles to its credit. Unfortunately, World War II interrupted publication and European distribution. The 1940s brought additional trials to the Press with the deaths of its two chief authors: Sergei Bulgakov in 1944 and Nikolai Berdyaev in 1948. With Paul Anderson supervising all American YMCA work in Europe, D. A. Lowrie served as director of the Press from 1947 to 1955.

In 1946, the Press began sending copies of all its published works to the Russian Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union. A small number of copies were sent to the Patriarchate or one of the leading bishops for use in theological schools.¹ After the war, the Press also published the complete works of Dostoevsky – at a time when they were not available in the USSR. In addition, the Press expanded its publication of contemporary fiction, including the works of A. Akhmatova, M. Tsvetaeva, A. Platonov, and V. Voinovich.²

New Leadership; New Facilities

By 1955 the YMCA Press had published 126,342 copies of 400 titles.³ Nevertheless, the current editor, Nikita Struve, appointed in 1955, had to weather a difficult time of transition. By 1955, Americans responsible for the Russian work did not share an appreciation for the religious-philosophical approach of the Press; for them, this emphasis seemed alien and irrelevant. With Lowrie's retirement, and recognizing the changed circumstances, Anderson oversaw the disengagement process of the Y's International Committee from its Russian work in Paris. In 1955, he arranged the transfer of ownership of the YMCA Press to the Russian Student Christian Movement (RSCM), at which point the Association's Paris office closed. Anderson apparently worked very carefully to cover every detail of the transition, especially issues concerning finances and support personnel.⁴ For decades Anderson was the strongest connection between the American YMCA and the publishing house. According to Struve, Anderson's death in 1985 severed the strongest personal link that had existed between the two organizations.⁵

When in 1961 the YMCA Press acquired a new facility, including a bookshop, on rue-de-la-Montagne-Sainte-Genievieve in Paris, a new era for the Press began.⁶ A variety of readers frequented the Paris bookshop, including students

of a Catholic college in Rome where priests were trained for undercover religious work in the USSR.⁷ Metropolitan Nikolai, Exarch for Western Europe for the Moscow Patriarch, and Bishop Nikodim, head of the Foreign Office of the Moscow Patriarchate, visited the bookstore and purchased many books. Anderson commented, "This is evidence of the interest of the Moscow Patriarchate in our publications. They do not get [to] publish theological or other religious works in [the] U.S.S.R., except for the monthly Journal and the [Almanac]."⁸

Interest in YMCA Press publications grew inside the USSR during the 1960s. Sources inside the country reported that 500 copies of Vasily Zenkovsky's *History of Russian Philosophy*, published by the Press, were mimeographed and distributed to the intellectual leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church and some members of the Academy of Sciences. Joel Nystrom of the YMCA interpreted this event as "part and parcel of the struggle *within* the Soviet Union to turn Russian culture into creative Christian channels."⁹

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

The Press received a great deal of publicity in the late 1960s and 1970s because of the publication of several works by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In 1968 it published the first full-length Russian edition of his novel *Cancer Ward*.¹⁰ Then in 1973 it published Solzhenitsyn's *Arkhipelag Gulag*, which for the first time brought the publishing house worldwide attention. In a few weeks the Press sold 50,000 copies of *Gulag* – a record for Russian émigré publishing. The release of *Gulag* generated controversy around the globe. Journalist David Remnick has noted, "In Europe, and especially in France, the publication of 'Gulag' and [Solzhenitsyn's] exile in 1974 immediately changed the intellectual landscape. Suddenly, a generation who had grown up under the spell of Jean-Paul Sartre's brand of leftism and a powerful Stalinist Communist Party now turned to the avatar of anti-Communism."¹¹

Although the YMCA Press published Solzhenitsyn's bitter attacks on the Soviet Union, Anderson consistently downplayed the Y's political goals:

As regards political stance, from the beginning we have taken the line that is expressed in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which even the Soviet government has accepted. Consequently, where we do have a quarrel is that the Soviet Government in practice denies the exercise of many of these rights, and the Communist Party, especially in the provinces, blatantly says that it rejects them and persecutes those who claim them. We only

(continued on page 10)

In a few weeks the Press sold 50,000 copies of *Gulag* – a record for Russian émigré publishing.

desire that the Soviet [government] should live up to its constitution and law on matters of religion and free expression of ideas.¹²

In his autobiography, Solzhenitsyn referred to his YMCA publishers as “selfless.”¹³ When he first met Paul Anderson, he exclaimed, “Otets IMKI! [Father of the YMCA Press!].”¹⁴ On 9 April 1975, the Nobel laureate, on a visit to the YMCA Press office in Paris, gave Anderson a book with the inscription, “To Paul Anderson with thanks and respect, remembering how much he has done for Russian culture.” Anderson commented, “This ties in with the whole and express purpose of the world-wide YMCA movement – Christian culture.”¹⁵

The Press also supported Solzhenitsyn in a less obvious manner. By publishing the writings of Berdyaev and Bulgakov, the Press indirectly inspired Solzhenitsyn to continue their critique of materialism and atheism. In 1974, the Press published *Iz pod glyb [From Under the Rubble]*, a collection of essays by Solzhenitsyn and others, which stressed the need for a moral and ethical revolution in Soviet Russia. *From Under the Rubble* followed the path of *Landmarks* and *Out of the Depths*, for the philosophical positions and literary forms of the 1974 publication followed the models of the earlier collections.¹⁶ These essays called for a return to the ideas held by Berdyaev and Bulgakov.

In 1980, Press director Nikita Struve commented on the developments of the 1960s and 1970s: “For all the previous years of emigration, the activity of the publishing house was forced to be a monologue. Now it is becoming a dialogue, a cooperation in the moral recovery of the country.”¹⁷ And in 1990 Struve observed:

For almost 70 years the YMCA Press stood almost alone in guarding Russian culture. Today, when the emancipation of Russia is beginning, it will become one of its centers, equally with domestic publishing houses. In a common work of grandfathers, fathers, and grandsons, here, abroad, and there, in Russia, the YMCA Press, looking back, not without justifiable pride in the long path it has traveled, is ready to continue its service to the Russian word and to Russian Orthodox theological and church culture.¹⁸

The Press Returns to Russia

The Press was able to openly return to Russia in 1990. On 17 September, an exhibition opened at the Library of Foreign Literature in Moscow: “70 Years of the Publishing House YMCA Press: 1920-1990.” This event allowed Struve to enter the USSR for the first time. The following spring, in March 1991, a Leningrad exhibition featured the Press. At this event, Dmitri Sergeevich Likhachev (1906-1999), the literary scholar who was considered by many to be the guardian

of Russian culture, reflected positively on the significance of the authors whose books were published by the YMCA. Struve also shared with those attending about the men who founded the publishing house but had not lived to see it return to Russia. Struve noted in particular the contribution of YMCA leader John R. Mott to the project.¹⁹

From 1990 to 1992, with the support of Patriarch Aleksy II, the YMCA Press opened libraries in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Kyiv, Tver, Orel, Voronezh, and Stavropol; these libraries opened within large existing libraries and were open to the public. From 1990 to 1992, the Press also developed a relationship with a Russian publisher, *Russkii Put'*, to reprint YMCA Press titles. In these first two years, the Press sold more than 150,000 books.²⁰ The grand opening of the “Library-Foundation of Russian Abroad” took place in Moscow on 9 December 1995. The founders of this new institution were the YMCA Press, the social foundation of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and the city of Moscow. Solzhenitsyn, Struve, and Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk all spoke at the event. In the first ten years of its work in Russia (1990-2000), the Press presented exhibitions of its books in 50 Russian cities.²¹

A Summary of Accomplishments

American and Russian participants have emphasized the uniqueness and timeliness of their publishing venture. In 1955, Donald Lowrie concluded:

Had not the YMCA Press existed, it is probable that many of these books would never even have been written. The knowledge that they could hope to have philosophical and theological works published provided a great incentive to thinkers in the Russian emigration, and hence important works were produced which otherwise might never have seen the light.²²

In addition, Anton Kartashev states:

The creators of the YMCA Press, possessing the gift of freedom, did not stress one preconceived doctrine. They encountered the fact of the spiritual needs of the emigration, interpreting it with trust and good will. These were [YMCA] people of pre-revolutionary Russia, who were fluent in the Russian language, were interested in Russian culture, and shared the optimistic premonition of their leader, J. Mott, about the great Christian future of the Russian people. Here we name the Americans P. F. Anderson, E. I. MacNaughten, and L. I. Lowrie.

The publication in 35 years of more than 250 titles (approximately 600,000 volumes) of books, brochures, and periodical editions, serving the requirements of the two million

The creators of the YMCA Press, possessing the gift of freedom, encountered the fact of the spiritual needs of the emigration, interpreting it with trust and good will.

The Russian YMCA Press:

(including America) in the Russian dispersion – this is at the very least a humanitarian and cultural virtue, which is worthy of a high moral prize. And the humble workers of the American YMCA subjectively, perhaps, do not seek more. But our Russian debt is to give them just recognition for their activity, which surpasses both their and our expectations.²³

The influence of the YMCA Press and its authors continues in Russia today. The return of the émigrés took longer than expected, but the hopes of the first generation were realized, at least in part, at the end of the 20th century. ♦

Matt Miller works in Moscow with the Evangelical Free Church and teaches at the Russian-American Christian University, Moscow.

Edited excerpts published with permission from Matthew Lee Miller, "American Philanthropy Among Russians: The Work of the YMCA, 1900-1940," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2006.

Notes:

¹ Letter from Paul B. Anderson to John R. Mott, 19 April 1951, 2. Corr. and Reports 1950-. Russian Work, Restricted, Publications, YMCA Press in Paris; letter from Paul B. Anderson to Harry Brunger, 1 September 1975, 2. Solzhenitsyn. YMCA of the USA, Anderson, Paul B., 3. KFYA.

² "YMCA-Press," promotional sheet, [1975], 1-2. YMCA Press. YMCA of the USA, Anderson, Paul B., 1. KFYA.

³ Donald A. Lowrie, "Study of Russian Publishing Program," 5 January 1955, 1. 1/55. France, Russian Work, 1954-1955, N. Goncharoff Research Project, 1954-1955. KFYA.

⁴ A. V. Kartashev and N. A. Struve, *70 let izdatel'stva "YMCA-Press": 1920-1990* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1990), 25-27; Anderson, "A Brief History of the YMCA Press, 10-11; Paul B. Anderson, "Progress Report on Russian Work," 19 October 1959, 1-3. Chekhov, 10-12/59. France, RSCM-YMCA Press 1957-1960, Chekhov Press 1950s. KFYA.

⁵ Kartashev and Struve, *70 let*, 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁷ "So Faith Endured . . ." *Newsweek*, 24 October 1960, Reprint, no page number given, M General 1943-6. YMCA of the USA, Anderson, Paul B., 2. KFYA.

⁸ Memorandum from Paul B. Anderson to Millard F. Collins, Robert Frers, and others, 21 April 1961. 1960-61. France, Russian Work, 1956-1968. KFYA.

⁹ Memorandum from Joel E. Nystrom to the members of the Executive Committee of the International Committee, YMCA's, 4 February 1965, 1-2. Correspondence (C-D). Paul B. Anderson, Correspondence 1964-65. KFYA.

¹⁰ Henry Raymond, "Russian Emigres Gain in Publishing," *The New York Times*, 30 October 1968.

Articles. Russian Work, Restricted, Publications, YMCA Press in Paris. KFYA.

¹¹ David Remnick, "The Exile Returns," *The New Yorker*, 14 February 1994, 73.

¹² Letter from Anderson to Brunger, 1 September 1975, 2.

¹³ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf: Sketches of Literary Life in the Soviet Union* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979), 383. Solzhenitsyn describes the development of his relationship with the YMCA Press in more detail in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Invisible Allies* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1995), 216, 218, 222-23, 229-30, 235, 245, 247-48.

¹⁴ Donald E. [Davis], "Paul B. Anderson (1894-1985)," *Sobornost* 8 (No. 1, 1986), 57.

¹⁵ Nicolas Zernov, "The Significance of the Russian Orthodox Diaspora and its Effect on the Christian West," in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976), 326.

¹⁶ Max Hayward, introduction to *From Under the Rubble* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn et al. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1975), v-vii. For commentary on *Iz pod glyb*, see Marc Raeff, "Iz pod glyb and the History of Russian Social Thought," *Russian Review* 34 (1975): 476-88.

¹⁷ "IMKA-Press, 80-e gody (an interview with the director of the publishing house [Nikita Struve] by Vladimir Allo)," *Russkaia mysl'*, 11 September 1980, No. 3325 (11 September 1980), 12.

¹⁸ Alexander Solzhenitsyn et al., *From Under the Rubble*, trans. Michael Scammel (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1975), 40. For additional perspective on the role of the YMCA Press in catalyzing the preservation of Russian religious culture and promoting Orthodoxy in the West, see W. Weidle, "The YMCA-Press in Paris Connects Past and Future," *The Orthodox Church*, May 1976, 4, 6.

¹⁹ Arkhimandrit Avgustin (Nikitin), *Metodizm i pravoslavie* (Saint Petersburg: Svetoch, 2001), 163-64. See also Nikita Struve, "Retrieving the Lost (Interview with Nikita Struve)," interview by V. Semenko, *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate* No. 1 (1991), 34-45.

²⁰ Viktor Moskvina, "YMCA-Press v gorodakh Rossii i Ukrainy," *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia* 166:III (1992): 280-81. On the 1990 Moscow exhibition see also: "Vystavka izdatel'stva YMCA-Press v Moskve," *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia* 159:II (1990): 307-10. A later trip to Russia's north is presented in Ioann Privalov, ed., "YMCA-Press" v Arkhangel'ske: *Vstrechis N.A. Struve: lektsii, interv'iu, besedy* (Archangelsk: Obshchina Khrama Sreteniia Gospodnia, 2002).

²¹ T. Emel'ianova, "10-letie 'IMKA-Press' v Rossii," *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia* 181:III (2000): 266.

²² Lowrie, "Study of Russian Publishing Program," 1.

²³ Kartashev and Struve, *70 let*, 1, 6, 12-14.

The publication in 35 years of more than 250 titles (approximately 600,000 volumes) of books, brochures, and periodical editions, serving the requirements of the two million in the Russian dispersion – this is at the very least a humanitarian and cultural virtue, which is worthy of a high moral prize.

An Open Door to Russian Prisons

Jeff Thompson

Editor's Note: The first portion of this article appeared in the previous issue of the East-West Church & Ministry Report 15 (Summer 2007):5-7.

A Critical Conference

In October 1994, Colonel [Alexander Nikolayevich] Dolgich, [director of Russian youth prisons], advised me, "There is an important meeting next week. The Ministry of Interior and the Orthodox Church are going to be exploring cooperation. I would like you to speak about our cooperation and your work. General Sheriayev is the moderator. You have met him before. Just tell him I sent you." The general was the colonel's immediate boss.

I arrived at the conference, which was being co-sponsored by Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship, on a chilly overcast day and wondered what I was supposed to do. Was I to just walk into the conference and tell the general I was to speak? At the morning break, I approached General Sheriayev. I had met him only briefly at that meeting in Moscow with Chairman Kalinin two years earlier. He shook my hand warmly as he greeted me. "Excuse me, sir," I said, but Alexander Nikolayevich asked me to speak to you. He felt that I should speak at the conference about the official cooperation that has existed between East European Outreach (EEO) and the Ministry of the Interior (MVD) for the last two-and-a-half years. He said you would understand."

Sheriayev looked perplexed. "I am sorry, Mr. Thompson, but we have a schedule. The time is already filled up." He stared at the schedule in his hand and said, "We must get started, but see me at the lunch break. Maybe I can find a little time."

I sat down and listened as each speaker spoke of what might be possible in the future. Some gave excellent theories on prison rehabilitation. Others spoke of their desire to help prisoners. None had any real experience in Russia.

At lunch, I found General Sheriayev. "Jeff, though you are not on the schedule, I will shorten the afternoon break and can give you 4 to 5 minutes at 3:45. Okay? I am sorry but that is all I can do." While the general was apologetic, he was firm. It was a difficult situation, and I felt uncomfortable. I wondered what was happening behind the scenes.

"We now will have a special guest from America, not on the schedule, who will report to us of his work in prisons," Sheriayev announced. He glanced at me and held up four fingers, as if to say four minutes. I understood that it was my turn to give a very brief report, and it had better be good, both for the sake of our future ministry, and for the relationship of Colonel Dolgich with his superior.

Nervously, I looked at the crowd of 200 people, mostly Russian military officers and

Orthodox priests clothed in flowing black robes. I introduced myself as the director of Eastern European Outreach from southern California, and proceeded to list our accomplishments in the prisons up to that date. I noted the number of 40-foot shipping containers with bulk food supplies we had distributed; the number of Bibles and Christian literature we had given to prisoners; and the number of meetings and spiritual seminars held. I also praised Colonel Dolgich and General Sheriayev for their cooperation and effort to assist our ministry. I closed referring to, "our joint agreement, an annual protocol that we have as a partnership already in its third year with the Ministry of the Interior. Thank you, General Sheriayev, for these few minutes to share this report."

As I stepped down from the podium, several hands shot up with questions. The general asked me to stay. "With what church are you affiliated?" a priest asked. I knew the religious questions would be a minefield, and I asked the Lord for wisdom, "None in particular, we are an independent mission organization supported by many different churches."

"Why don't you give your support to our church and allow us to distribute it? After all, these prisoners are Russian."

"Because our partnership is with the MVD and they have requested us to work with them." I answered.

General Sheriayev beamed and then asked me a question. "How many prisons have you been to, Jeff?"

"Our teams have been to 38 prisons so far, and we have a team visiting prisons in the Tula region as we speak. I have personally been to about 30 prisons," I added.

The questions kept coming, and I spent another 20 minutes elaborating on our official cooperation. The people in the room were stunned. The realization was sinking in that the MVD was serious about spiritual transformation in its prisons. The Orthodox priests clearly were not happy that a Western, non-Russian Orthodox organization had such access to the prison system. The staff from Prison Fellowship was shocked as well. As I stepped down, the general winked at me, then shook my hand.

The Prospect of Restrictions

In the mid-1990s the Duma, influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church, was proposing a new law on religion. By the summer of 1995, details emerged that this law was designed to restrict missionary work. The Orthodox Church was alarmed at the number of new churches being planted by foreign missionaries and wanted to protect its "sheep" by restricting the influx of new religions. New cults and pagan groups

The Orthodox priests clearly were not happy that a Western, non-Russian Orthodox organization had such access to the prison system.

An Open Door to Russian Prisons

had made the news with their strange rituals, and this information was enough to cause the Duma, under the heavy influence of the Orthodox Church, to protect the Russian people from the evils of “non-Orthodox” religions.

My relationship with Colonel Dolgich was still strong and together we had already planned the itineraries for EEO prison teams. Now, however, he could do nothing to help since it was out of his hands. “Jeff,” he said, “everything may be cancelled. I cannot help you. I cannot give the final approval. General Sheriayev is on vacation, so you must meet tomorrow with General Orlov.”

“But Alexander Nikolayevich, this new law hasn’t even been voted on yet. There is no new law. It is simply a proposal. We have an agreement.” My protest seemed in vain. The MVD was very sensitive to the changing political situation, and if the Orthodox Church was going to win this battle, the MVD did not want to be found on the wrong side.

By the summer of 1995, the Russian Orthodox Church felt it was under a well-funded attack by religious groups from the West. It saw various new private ministry activities as a monolithic invasion. American evangelists were now on television, school teachers were attending CoMission meetings arranged by Campus Crusade for Christ and others, and EEO was helping extensively in the prison system. New Bible-believing churches were being planted and pastored by non-Russian speaking foreigners and were advertising their presence on radio and in newspapers.

The next day, as our summer teams were literally in the air, which meant over 50 people would be arriving that afternoon, I prayed while riding in the taxi to the Moscow headquarters of the MVD. I nervously walked down the bare hallway and down the stairs to the executive offices reserved for generals. As I was seated in General Orlov’s office, I remembered that we had met on a few previous occasions. The general shook my hand, and without smiling, pointed to the chair across from his desk. “What can I do for you?” he asked.

I sensed this meeting was to be all business. There were no “How is life in California?” type questions. “General Orlov, thank you for seeing me today. Alexander Nikolayevich instructed that I should see you regarding our cooperation agreement with the MVD, which was approved by Chairman Kalinin. We have teams arriving today with itineraries already planned under our agreement with the MVD, and I want to be sure there will not be any problems.”

“We are the police,” Orlov said, “and if this law is passed we must enforce the law. That is our job. We cannot break the law on behalf of our agreement.”

“Yes, sir. However, the law has not been passed yet, and our teams are not acting solely as missionaries, but as partners in our agreement. I believe we will be within the law.” I said. He looked at me and thought for a moment. I felt as if the Lord had given me just the right words to say.

“Okay, I agree, but we cannot guarantee the future of the agreement until we see this new law,” General Orlov said. “Anyway, we know you, and since we have worked together well for several years, everything should be okay.” I stood up. “Thank you, sir.” We shook hands and our ten-minute meeting was over. I thanked the Lord under my breath.

To Siberia and the Russian Far East

With the approval and help of Colonel Dolgich, we planned a journey across Siberia to distribute libraries of Christian books and videos to youth prisons. Our group of four, with two translators, carried 4,000 pounds of books. From 15 August to 14 September 1995 we became pack mules, carrying, loading, unloading, and distributing books, but we also experienced real joy in preaching the Gospel in this remote part of the world. It was truly an epic journey across Siberia and the Russian Far East.

We had our first prison outreach at Angarskaya, near Irkutsk and Lake Baikal. Prison camp officials were friendly and hospitable. Some 350 boys aged 12 to 20 filled the darkened auditorium. Pastor Bob Claycamp, an EEO board member, played the guitar and sang. After the message 90 percent of the boys stood and prayed to receive Jesus. They all stood in threadbare blue cotton uniforms with shaved heads and tattoos and prayed in unison, asking for forgiveness for their sins. The prison officials were both amazed and proud of their boys.

We gave the prison a complete library of 500 books including Bibles, New Testaments, study books, biographies, and an assortment of Christian videos in Russian, such as “The Cross and the Switchblade.” A local church group taught a Bible class in this prison and provided follow-up with the boys.

Inhumane Conditions

In Chita, prison barracks built before the Bolshevik Revolution were surrounded by 12-foot walls, barbed wire, and guard towers. An officer told us that the prison was extremely overcrowded. “Moscow won’t do anything about it,” he said matter-of-factly. “Come with me.” Our destination was the high security section of the prison. Iron doors slammed behind us in the corridor. One guard struggled with the key to open one of the windowless steel doors. The men’s groanings could be heard through the door. The guard succeeded, allowing a little fresh air into the cell. We were not prepared for the sight.

(continued on page 14)

We gave the prison a complete library of 500 books including Bibles, New Testaments, study books, biographies, and an assortment of Christian videos.

An Open Door to Russian Prisons *(continued from page 13)*

On the far wall, the cell window was boarded up. Prisoners had broken the wood and the lucky ones, or appropriately, the strongest ones, were able to get close enough to stick their face next to the opening for a breath of fresh air.

Seventy men occupied 300 square feet of space, a little like stuffing 70 people into a kitchen. Men leaned on one another because there was no room to lie down in this cell that was built for 12 people. A bucket for human waste stood in the corner. The stench was nauseating. The men, wearing underwear or ragged shorts, just stared at us with empty eyes. One prisoner told us to tell people what conditions were like, because it was against the law to treat people as they were being treated.

We gave out some literature and talked a little about the reality of God. One older man said, "I don't believe in God. My father was put in prison during the revolution. I received ten years in prison under Stalin for my father's crimes. I remember Christians in prison during those years. They always shared their parcels and letters with the rest of us. They should never have been put in prison."

Our trip included stops at Birobidjan, Kharbarovsk, Vladivostok, Sakhalin Island, and the peninsula of Kamchatka. Sometimes the reception by prison officials was warm, but at other times it was chilly. Nevertheless, after we announced we had an official agreement with the Ministry of Interior signed by Chairman Kalinin, General Sheriayev, and Colonel Dolgich, we always received cooperation.

On several occasions, we learned of local Russian or American missionaries who visited the prison camps. It was great to know that follow-up teaching was available and our visit was not the prisoners' only exposure to Christianity. Everyone was impressed with the variety of books and we felt certain that they would be put to good use.

The Open Door Narrows, Then Closes

By summer 1996, one could sense the political climate was changing in Russia. Each year it became increasingly more difficult for Colonel Dolgich to push through our joint agreement. He made sure that I made appearances at birthday parties for Generals Sheriayev and Orlov, and that I gave appropriate gifts to each. Each agreement had to be signed by Chairman Kalinin.

Colonel Dolgich refused invitations to the United States to visit prisons. Prison Fellowship, however, brought Chairman Kalinin over a few times to meet White House dignitaries and others. This, I believe, also indirectly helped our ministry to continue in the prisons, as Kalinin remained very positive about our ministry and that of Prison Fellowship.

Where EEO was active teaching and preaching inside the prisons, Prison Fellowship worked on a political level. It also encouraged greater cooperation between the Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Interior. This was, of course, the purpose for their co-sponsoring the October 1994 conference where I spoke.

I could see the proverbial handwriting on the wall. The Russian Orthodox Church was asserting its power, and it did not want Evangelicals on the religious scene. Our agreement lasted through the end of 1998, long after other Western groups were no longer welcome in Russian prisons.

Today, Pastor Sergei Danielenko, our EEO representative in Moscow, sits on the board of a council set up by Prison Fellowship to coordinate the ministry of churches and religious groups working in prisons. Pastor Sergei, himself an ex-prisoner, has helped establish 34 rehabilitation centers for ex-prisoners who have confessed Christ as their Savior, but have nowhere to go when released from prison.

Our prison ministry has changed, and Russian national pastors and workers now do most of the outreach. Ironically, most of them are ex-prisoners whose lives have changed and who have found purpose by returning to prisons to preach the Gospel. Generous EEO sponsors support these men as they visit prisons providing Bibles, Christian literature, and other supplies. I still personally minister in Russian prisons, but it is no longer on the same scale as during the days when we had an official agreement. ♦

Jeff Thompson is executive director of East European Outreach, Murrieta, California (www.eeo.org). Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Jeff Thompson, *Leaving the American Sector* (Hemet, CA: Theatron

Ukrainian Evangelical Migration to the West *(continued from page 16)*

you won't help them evangelize. God's will for you is to be here and to evangelize your nation." They said, "We will go to America. Its morality has fallen, and we will go to raise it."

All of the preaching against migration and the teaching about the corrupt influence of the West cannot persuade some Baptists to stay in Ukraine as they leave for what they hope will be a better life. The parishioners who move away go with the disapproval of their church leaders. Even so, they believe that the morality of America has

fallen, and they are hoping that a missionary attitude will make their pastors at home feel better about losing them. ♦

Edited excerpts published with permission from Esther Grace Long, "Identity in Evangelical Ukraine: Negotiating Regionalism, Nationalism, and Transnationalism," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2005.

Esther Grace Long is assistant professor of geography, Morehead State University, Morehead, Kentucky.

Our prison ministry has changed, and Russian national pastors and workers now do most of the outreach. Ironically, most of them are ex-prisoners whose lives have changed and who have found purpose by returning to prisons to preach the Gospel.

Foster Care in Ukraine

Naomi Ludeman Smith

Sergei and Valya Sobko, from the Zolotonosha District of Ukraine, are unusually progressive thinkers in their church. They have a deep desire to help orphaned children, especially those who, when they turn 18, are usually on their own with no one to guide or support them. These orphan graduates have no help in pursuing an education and no support group. One of the outcomes of this situation is the serious problem of sex trafficking of desperate and directionless young women.

Church Support for Foster Care

After talking about this Ukrainian need with an American couple, Paul and Linda Wicklund, the Sobkos began to explore the idea of a foster home. The social service model of foster care is a known entity in the United States, but it is not well known in Ukraine. With support from Calvary Baptist Church, a Baptist General Conference congregation near St. Paul, Minnesota, the Sobkos traveled to the U.S. – Sergei in 1993 and Valya in 1999 - to explore various ways foster homes are structured and supported. Upon returning to their church in Ukraine, they looked for ways that foster care might be adapted to the Ukrainian cultural context. With financial help from the Shepherd's Foundation, headed by Paul and Linda Wicklund, the Sobkos established the first foster home in their region. Sergei Sobko, in turn, founded a foster care agency, New Hope, using his working relationship with nearby Kropivna Orphanage to place, to date, 12 teenage girls and boys with six church families in Cherkassy and Zolotonosha, Ukraine. While the children are placed in specific homes, the entire church actually helps support them, serving as an extended family for the foster children.

Joys and Sorrows

Over the years of their foster care ministry Sergei and Valya Sobko have recognized the importance of a loving Christian home and education for their foster children. They have experienced the joy of orphans given a new chance in life by means of a safe and loving environment. Several of their foster children have learned English well enough to serve as translators for American ministry teams and several attend university. At the same time, they hold out hope and continue to love other foster children who have not always made the best decisions in their young lives. Like other caring foster parents, Sergei and Valya experience pain when their charges follow a destructive lifestyle. In addition, biological parents who have lost their parental rights sometimes reenter their children's lives in ways that disrupt rather than help them.

The foster care facilitated by the Sobkos is serving as a prototype for the Ukrainian government as it becomes better able to support foster homes for an increasing number of needy children. The introduction of foster care in Ukraine illustrates the church's role in creatively addressing a national need. It also provides a viable means for Western partners to encourage and support Ukrainians in their efforts to save and sustain their nation's richest resource, their children. ♦

Naomi Ludeman Smith is associate professor of general studies, Bethel University, St. Paul, Minnesota.

The introduction of foster care in Ukraine illustrates the church's role in creatively addressing a national need.

Letter to the Editor

A friend gave me the print copy of your Spring 2007 *Report*, and I am so impressed that I am sending in for a three-year subscription. I have made three trips to Ukraine, two to Belarus, and one to St. Petersburg (short-term mission outreaches and business teaching). On each trip I talk to missionaries and church leaders in the respective countries, trying to gain more personal knowledge about the Orthodox Church and the relationships between it, the government, and the Protestant church movement. None, however, have given me the insight into what is happening in former Soviet Union churches like this issue

has. Several talked around some of the points presented; others were frustrated at recent events and gave personal observations about the coming changes. But none gave the perspective your *Report* does. Thank you, and I look forward to receiving the next volume. The information will be invaluable and a great source of information for the short-term mission team members we send.

Richard Watson

Eastern European Medical Team

Ukrainian Evangelical Migration to the West

Esther Grace Long

Each of the Baptist churches studied [in L'viv, Kherson, and Vinnytsia] lost large numbers of people – up to half of their pre-1991 families – as they emigrated to America, Canada, and other countries.

The West threatens Ukrainian Baptist churches because it is the destination of many Baptist families who are permanently leaving Ukraine. Each of the Baptist churches studied [in L'viv, Kherson, and Vinnytsia] lost large numbers of people – up to half of their pre-1991 families – as they emigrated to America, Canada, and other countries. Baptists who left were seen as abandoning their church, depriving it of pastors (actual and potential) and lay leaders. Once Baptists arrived in America they tended to disappoint those who stayed behind by not sending as many plump checks as had been hoped for from the land of plenty.

Large-Scale Church Losses to Emigration

In any conversation with Ukrainian Baptists about the West, the topic of emigration invariably arises. People in all the churches studied expressed the opinion that their churches were damaged by emigration. They are disappointed that those who moved away no longer sing in the choir, lead various ministries, or pastor churches. Members of L'viv Baptist reported, for example, that 150-200 of their church members, plus children, left for places like Philadelphia, Seattle, Germany, Canada, and Poland. This seems a high number, but there is no way to disprove the statistic. Young adults at Kherson Baptist said that they lost “more than half” of their church in this way, more than 100 families. Pastor Evgeniy at Vinnytsia Baptist told me that about 150 families from his church emigrated to the West.

Emigration from Ukrainian churches fits in with the larger trend of migration from Ukraine in general. From 1992 to 2003, for instance, over 223,000 Ukrainians legally immigrated to the United States (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2003). Ukraine's population decreased from

52.2 million in 1993 to 48.5 million in 2001. Part of this decline is a result of emigration (Olena Malynovska, *International Migration in Contemporary Ukraine: Trends and Policy*, Global Commission on International Migration, 2005, <http://www.gcim.org>).

Church Opposition to Emigration

While transnational connections through migration do increase the exposure Ukrainian Baptists have to the West, nearly all of the people who spoke with me were opposed to the idea of emigrating and felt abandoned by those who had already left. Although some who moved away maintain contact with the church and support it financially, one young man in Kherson said that “the rest have forgotten us. We don't hear or see anything from them.” The general consensus appears to be that when a church family gets ready to emigrate, they make big promises about helping the church financially when they get to their new home, but that most of the promises fall short. Pastor Oleksandr in L'viv, eager for American financial support, took a fund-raising trip to the United States in which he especially hoped to recruit Ukrainian Baptists to donate to the church. Some people did help, he said, but our desire was that those people who wanted to help would do much more. But a person has various personal problems: “I have a house, or a car, I need to pay insurance for my car” or “I'm sorry, I can't help you.”

Pastor Oleksandr actually found that recent immigrants were more generous than those who had been in the United States for a longer period of time. He felt that after being in the United States for awhile, Ukrainian church members had become more concerned with their own personal financial needs and less concerned about the needs of the church they had left behind. Ukrainian Baptist pastors try to discourage their flocks from leaving Ukraine. In response, those who do decide to leave sometimes provide Christian excuses to justify their exit. Pastor Evgeniy in Vinnytsia quoted some parishioners as claiming that they would go to America to raise the level of morality there. Pastor Evgeniy remained unconvinced and blamed some of the problems in the church on the fact that so many of his parishioners had left for the West:

They could be ministers, of whom we don't have enough. We could establish more churches in our region, but there's a lack of ministers. It is very sad that those families emigrated. I worried a lot about that. I preached trying to stop them. Of course, there were people who did not like me for that - I mean those people who were going to emigrate. I told them, “You have to be here. America is for Americans. They evangelize, and

(continued on page 14)

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. Individual print subscription rates: \$49.95 per year (U.S. and Canada); \$59.95 (international); Library rates \$53.95 (U.S. and Canada); \$63.95 (international); E-mail: \$22.95. See website for multi-year discounts. 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 OCLC Public Affairs Information Service (formerly PAIS), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), and Zeller Dietrich (formerly Zeller Verlag).

Editor Mark R. Elliott
Assistant Editor Billie Faye Harvey

**SOUTHERN
WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY**

©2007

ISSN 1069-5644

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