



EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

Fall 2009

Vol. 17, No. 4

Bulgarian Church Protection of Jews in World War II

Parush R. Parushev

In the rescue of Bulgarian Jews from German death camps, the active role of Christian communities is often overlooked. To have a complete picture of events it is necessary to examine the redemptive role of Bulgarian Orthodox and other Christian communities in moving the nation toward acts of civil disobedience in order to rescue the country's Jews.

The Orthodox

In Frederick B. Chary's words: "No other institution with comparable influence so consistently opposed the government's anti-Semitic policy as did the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church."¹ The church's leading prelates, Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia (future Exarch, 1945-48), Metropolitan Kyril of Plovdiv (future Patriarch, 1953-71), and Metropolitan Neofit of Vidin (acting president of the Holy Synod), unanimously and vocally condemned repressive measures against Bulgaria's Jews. In turn, all other church officials followed their lead.²

Metropolitan Kyril, a member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, challenged anti-Semitism in print as early as 1938. Then after the Bulgarian government enacted anti-Semitic legislation on 21 January 1941, church reaction was swift and indignant. Metropolitan Stefan, taking the Jewish cause as his personal mission, repeatedly intervened with the police and local government authorities on behalf of this persecuted minority. He also boldly preached against anti-Semitism in spite of numerous government attacks against him. Upon learning of the deportation of Jews from Thrace and Macedonia, he urged King Boris of Bulgaria to block this action, but unfortunately, unsuccessfully. In March 1943, during the days of impending Jewish deportations, Metropolitans Stefan and Kyril both offered refuge to Jewish leaders in their private homes.

On 2 April 1943 the Holy Synod reminded the government of its firm support for Bulgarian Jews, with Metropolitan Kyril stating, "Until now [I] have always been loyal toward the government. Now I reserve the right to act with a free hand in this matter [of the defense of the Jews] and heed only the dictates of my free conscience."³ On behalf of the Synod, Metropolitan Neofit also warned King Boris: "Because of the extraordinary measures . . . [and] unscrupulous harshness against the Jews . . . God's wrath against our people may be provoked."⁴ No doubt the Church's bold warnings were "a very influential factor in Boris' rejection of deportation as

Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Charges of Anti-Semitism

Jovan Byford

Nikolaj Velimirović was born on 5 January 1881 (23 December 1880, Julian Calendar) in the village of Lelić, Serbia. Nikolaj was the first of nine children of a modest and devout peasant couple, Dragomir and Katarina Velimirović. In 1898, after excelling in his village school, Velimirović enrolled in the Orthodox Seminary in the Serbian capital of Belgrade.

In 1905 he was awarded a scholarship at the University of Bern, Switzerland, where he completed a doctorate in theology in 1908. Velimirović was ordained a monk in December 1909 at Rakovica Monastery near Belgrade. Shortly after his ordination, Father Nikolaj traveled to Russia, visiting monasteries and other holy places and acquainting himself with Russian culture. There he was introduced to the works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, whose philosophical writings made a lasting impression on his thinking.

In 1911, Velimirović returned to Serbia, where he took a position at the Orthodox Seminary in Belgrade. He regularly traveled the length and breadth of Serbia and Bosnia, preaching to an increasingly enthusiastic public. His sermons were devoted not just to religious matters, but they also advocated Serbia's national and spiritual revival and the idea of unity among south Slavic nations.

With the coming of World War I, Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić sent Velimirović to England and the United States to promote the Serbian national cause. He was chosen to take part in this mission because of his erudition, his command of English, and his highly esteemed oratorical skills. Also, it was hoped that his reputation as an Anglophile, admirer of Protestantism, and believer in ecumenical dialogue would facilitate contacts with Anglican and Episcopal churches in Britain and the United States.

In the summer of 1915, Velimirović traveled to the United States, lecturing and preaching in New York, Chicago, Kansas City, and elsewhere. He made a brief second visit to the United States in December 1917 before returning once again to London, where he remained until 1919. In addition to lecturing before university audiences in Cambridge, London, Edinburgh, and Birmingham, Velimirović delivered sermons in Anglican churches across Great Britain.

In May 1919, following his return from England, Nikolaj Velimirović was ordained a bishop in the ancient diocese of Žiča. Less than 18 months later, Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Dimitrije transferred

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Bulgarian Church Protection of Jews (continued from page 1)

a solution to the Jewish question in 1943.”⁵

According to the 1941 Law for Protection of the Nation, some Jews were to be exempted from its discriminatory provisions. While exemptions theoretically were to benefit very few, in practice they became widely available, thus sabotaging the harshest provisions of the legislation. For example, so-called “mercy baptisms,” liberally conducted, saved considerable numbers of Jews. As Peter Meyer notes, “Because the law spoke of conversion and not baptism having to take place before 1 September 1940, Jews baptized later could also be saved if ministers declared that they had expressed their will to adopt Christianity before that date. Many courts accepted this reasoning.”⁶

The Catholics

In the life-and-death struggle to rescue Bulgaria’s Jews, Christian confessional boundaries did not impede common cause. Metropolitan Stefan knew of the influence of the small but active Bulgarian Roman Catholic community on Italian-born Queen Giovanna. In the face of pending deportation, he advised Jewish leaders to meet with Catholic priest Fr. Jean Romanov, the queen’s spiritual father.⁷ Also by 1943 Monsignor Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII and a personal friend of Metropolitan Stefan’s, had secured, with the help of King Boris, transit visas for thousands of Jews from Slovakia and Hungary who were escaping concentration camps by immigrating to Palestine.⁸ In addition, Metropolitan Stefan was in touch with Bulgaria’s evangelical churches in his attempts to rescue Jews.⁹

The Evangelicals

The small evangelical community in Bulgaria also took action in defense of the country’s Jews.¹⁰ In the early 1940s Nazi German publications frequently complained of Bulgarian complacency in the enforcement of anti-Semitic legislation and of church measures to protect Jews. One German newspaper reported that one Protestant minister “with a community of about 200 souls, managed to baptize 200 additional persons [all Jews] between January and September 1940.”¹¹ After years of searching for direct evidence of this evangelical involvement in rescuing Bulgarian Jews, I discovered that unnamed ministers referred to in the German newspaper were Congregationalist Pastor Asen Mikhailov Simeonov and Baptist Pastor Minkov Radev.¹²

The First Congregational Church in Sofia under Senior Pastor Simeonov and Assistant Pastor Radev was especially active in assisting Jews. Born in an Orthodox family strongly connected to the Bulgarian Revival,¹³ Simeonov apparently was converted in a Methodist church while studying in Plevan. After seminary studies in Switzerland, he served Methodist churches in Sevlievo, Plovdiv, and Sofia. Simeonov married a Congregationalist, and in 1935 he was appointed pastor of the First Congregational Church in Sofia.¹⁴ From 1935 to 1941 Simeonov and his associate pastor, Baptist Minkov Radev, issued baptismal certificates to Jews. For this aid both pastors lost their church posts and their

minister’s licenses in 1941 on orders of the Fascist government.¹⁵

The dismissal of Simeonov and Radev did not stop the church’s support of Bulgaria’s Jews. Simeonov’s successor, Pastor Vasil Georgiev Zjapkov, followed in his footsteps.¹⁶ As representative of the Alliance of Bulgarian Evangelical Churches,¹⁷ he was actively involved with Metropolitan Stefan in assisting Bulgaria’s Jews and in putting pressure on King Boris to prevent their deportation.¹⁸

For evangelical pastors Simeonov, Radev, and Zjapkov, as well as for the leadership of the Orthodox Church, it was clear that mercy baptisms were just that – acts of mercy. Christian ministers were well aware that conversions of the heart were not taking place in these acts of baptism. As Simeonov testified, “The majority of the Jews were experiencing deep pain that they had to compromise their faith. And most of them did not do it out of changing their convictions, but because they were forced by the circumstances. Therefore, I did not consider myself a missionary; my duty was simply to help them.”¹⁹

In Summary

The role of Bulgarian Christian communities standing in defense of their Jewish compatriots is a remarkable story. These communities gave concrete moral witness in action to faithfulness to a noble vision. In spite of their prominent participation in rescue activities, Christian communities in Bulgaria have been given little credit in secular historiography. Even though there was widespread public support from all levels for acts of rescue, the unanimous support of the efforts by all Christian communities, without exception, is the most telling part of this story. Faced with the dilemma of taking sides in the confrontation of a defiant people against a powerful and corrupt government, religious leaders firmly sided with their flocks and with the Jewish people. As a result, while many Bulgarians of the anti-Fascist resistance movement were incarcerated in concentration camps, not one Bulgarian Jew was sent to death camps.

I believe the Jewish Exodus after 400 years of slavery in Egypt informed Bulgaria’s understanding of its own liberation after 500 years of Ottoman oppression. Thus, the rescue of Bulgaria’s Jews is best understood as an act of civil disobedience motivated by attitudes unique to the Bulgarian context. Bulgaria’s support for its Jews in defiance of the Germans bears the marks of Christian social ethics internalized by the Bulgarian community through the prolonged period of national revival in the 18th and 19th centuries and recorded in the country’s Founding Constitution. ♦

Notes:

Frederick B. Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution 1940-1944* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 188.

²Michael Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler’s Grasp: The Heroic Rescue of Bulgaria’s Jews* (Holbrook, MA: Adams Media Corporation, 1998), Chapter 13.

The role of Bulgarian Christian communities standing in defense of their Jewish compatriots is a remarkable story.

³David Cohen, *Otseljavaneto: Sbornik of Documenty 1940-1944 [The Survival: A Compilation of Documents 1940-1944]* (Sofia, Bulgaria: "Shalom" Publishing Center, 1995), 230; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust. A Collection of Texts with Commentary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 98.

⁴Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler's Grasp*, 173.

⁵Chary, *Bulgarian Jews*, 189; Stephane Groueff, *Crown of Thorns: The Reign of King Boris III of Bulgaria, 1918-1943* (Lanham/New York/Oxford: Madison Books, 1998), 328.

⁶Peter Meyer, "Bulgaria," in Peter Meyer, Bernard D. Weinryb, Eugene Duschinsky, and Nicolas Sylvain, *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1971), 571.

⁷Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler's Grasp*, 194. The Apostolic Delegate in Sofia Monsignor Giuseppe Mazzoli helped negotiate the rescue of the Jews (*Ibid.*, 188 and 202-03). On cooperation and good relations between Bulgarian Orthodox and Catholics in Bulgaria, see Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Council* (London: Cassell Ltd., 1984), 141, 175-77.

⁸Groueff, *Crown of Thorns*, 230.

⁹Veselin Ignatov, "Pastir Zjapkov i Evreite [Pastor Zjapkov and the Jews]," *Zornitsa [Morning Star]* 121 (April, 1997); Hristo Kulichev, ed., *Vestitely na Istaia: Istorija na Evangeliskite Tsarkvi v Balgaria [Heralds of the Truth: A History of the Evangelical Churches in Bulgaria]*, 2nd ed. (Sofia: Bulgarian Bible Society, 1994), 264-65; 275-76.

¹⁰Cohen, *Otseljavaneto*, 42-43.

¹¹Meyer, "Bulgaria," 571 and 623; D. Andreev's article in the newspaper *Dnes [Today]*, 24 June 1941, as quoted by Ljubomir Vladikin, "Die Judengesetzgebung in Bulgarien," *Weltkampf*, Munich, No. 2 (October-December 1942), 291, cited by Meyer in "Bulgaria," 623.

¹²I want to express my special gratitude to Dr. Hristo Kulichev for his support and help in finding contacts and materials of the Bulgarian Evangelical relationship with the Jews during World War II. He was instrumental in organizing a meeting with Lidja Asenova Simeonova, the daughter of Asen Simeonov. She provided personal documents from her father's file from the archives of the Bulgarian Communist security prison system and gave me indispensable insights into her father's life and ministry for the Jews (personal interview, 14 March 2002).

¹³His grandfather, Simeon Benchov, was an Orthodox priest active in the 19th century Bulgarian Revival who passed on the vision of the revival to his grandson (interview with Lidja Asenova Simeonova, 14 March 2002; Kulichev, *Vestitely na Istinata*, 275-76). For Simeon Benchov's biography, see the entry in *Bulgarska Vazrozhdenska Inteleghentsia [Encyclopedia of the Bulgarian Revivalist Intelligentsia]* (Sofia: Dr. Petar Beron Publisher, 1988).

¹⁴The service of induction was held on 15 November 1931; see "Programa za ustanovjavavaneto nap astir Asen M. Simeonov v I-va Evangeliska Tsarkva, ul. Solun 16, Sofia" [Program for the Induction of Pastor Asen M. Simeonov in the First Evangelical Church on 16 Solun Street, Sofia] in the author's possession.

¹⁵"Reference: Concerning Asen Michailov Simeonov" (Simeonov file in the Archive of the Directory of Police, 10 March 1958, 129. Absolutely Secret) and "Agent's Report to the Chief Officer of Division 'B'. 1-Department in regard to the investigation of Asen Mikhailov Simeonov," Report of agent of 23rd group of the Division 'B' of the First Department (Simeonov file in the Archive of the Directory of Police, January 1950, p. 45, Sofia, Strictly Confidential).

¹⁶Kulichev, *Heralds of the Truth*, 273-75.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 275.

¹⁸Eyewitness report of Ignatov, "Pastir Zjapkov i Eveite," 3.

¹⁹Nikola Kjosev, "Pastir Asen Simeonov," *Zornitsa [Morning Star]*, 123 (May 1999), 2. Simeonov's testimony is confirmed by prominent poet Valeri Petrov who writes: "I know that because I am one of the baptized....Our family [with a Jewish father and a Bulgarian mother] was a family of atheists and faith cannot be imparted with a document, and Pastor Simeonov knew that very well." Hristo Kulichev, *Contributions of the Protestants to the Bulgarian People* (Sofia, Bulgaria: St. Kliment of Ohrid Publisher, Sofia University, 2008, in Bulgarian, 281).

Edited excerpts published with permission from Parush R. Parushev, "Walking in the Dawn of the Light: On the Salvation Ethics of the Ecclesial Communities in the Orthodox Tradition from a Radical Reformation Perspective," Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006.

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Velimirović to Ohrid, where he remained until 1936. At this time he was reinstated as bishop of Žiča, a title which he retained until his death in 1956. His appointment in the spring of 1922 as the administrator of the Serbian Orthodox Church in America was a role which he performed simultaneously with his duties at Ohrid.

In the early 1920s, within a few years of his arrival at Ohrid, Velimirović, who had been known for his tidy hair, silk cassocks, and confidence that bordered on arrogance, became a recluse, ascetic, and conservative figure. By the mid-1920s, his admiration for Western Europe and his longstanding sympathy for the ecumenical movement all but disappeared. In some ways, Velimirović "gave up"

on the West, which he believed had discarded God for the secular values of the French Revolution. He abandoned hope that a new Christian civilization could be built on the pan-humanist principles which had preoccupied him a decade earlier.

The first instance of anti-Semitism in Velimirović's writings can be found in the sermon, "A Story about the Wolf and the Lamb," which he delivered during a trip to the United States in the autumn of 1927. In treating the well-known Christian parable of the wolf and the lamb, Velimirović referred to "Jewish leaders in Jerusalem" at the time of the crucifixion as "wolves," whose thirst for the blood of the Lamb of God was motivated by their "god-hating

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Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic Charges (continued from page 3)

nationalism.” He explicitly stated that the murderous actions of Caiaphas were not attributable to “individual depravity,” but that, in plotting to kill Christ, he and other Jewish leaders “represented the Semitic race” and acted “in the interest of their nation.”¹ This sermon provoked a bitter reaction from Belgrade Rabbi Dr. Isak Alkalaj, who saw in Velimirović’s words a reiteration of the medieval blood libel against the Jews and a potential incitement to violence against the followers of Mosaic faith in Serbia.²

A speech given by Velimirović in 1936 in the presence of Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović gave a similar portrayal of Judaism as an inherently anti-Christian and dangerous creed. He explicitly warned that among the “dangers that loom over our internal and external lives” was “bloody Jewish Judaism, because Jews are working slyly and cleverly on the destruction of faith—faith in the real God.” In the bishop’s subsequent writings, Jews reappear, time and time again, as a devilish people who tried and murdered Christ, “inspired by the stinking breath of Satan.” In his most controversial work, *Words to the Serbian People through the Dungeon Window*, written in 1944, Velimirović wrote that Jews:

showed themselves to be worse enemies of God than the godless Pilate, because in the fury of their malice, they uttered those terrible words: “Let his blood be on us and on our children!” The Devil taught them through the centuries how to fight against the sons of Christ.

Europe knows nothing other than what Jews serve up as knowledge. It believes nothing other than what Jews order it to believe. It knows the value of nothing until Jews impose their own measure of values. All modern ideas including democracy, strikes, socialism, atheism, religious tolerance, pacifism, global revolution, capitalism, and Communism are the inventions of Jews, or rather their father, the Devil.³

Velimirović was arrested in July 1941 on suspicion of links with Serbian Chetnik insurgents who were fighting against German troops. However, he was promptly released on condition that he suspend his activities as the bishop of Žiča and remain under German surveillance at Ljubostinja Monastery.⁴ In December 1942, the Germans arrested Velimirović for a second time and transferred him to another monastery in Vojlovica near Belgrade. For 18 months he was kept there under house arrest, together with Serbian Patriarch Gavilo Dožić.

In September 1944, Velimirović and Dožić were transferred to Germany. They spent just over two months at the notorious concentration camp at Dachau, where they were held as “honorary prisoners” (*Ehrenhaftling*). The reason behind Velimirović’s and Dožić’s release in November 1944 remains a matter of controversy.

After World War II, Velimirović’s detractors regularly raised three additional controversies: a medal which he received in 1934 from Hitler for

his contribution to the restoration of a World War I German military cemetery in his diocese; an affirmative reference to the German Führer in a 1935 speech; and his association with Dimitrije Ljotić, a Nazi collaborator and the leader of the Serbian fascist movement Zbor [Rally].

In 1946 Velimirović emigrated from Serbia to the United States, where he soon withdrew from public life and retreated to the Russian Orthodox St. Tikhon’s Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. There he taught and lived a solitary existence until his death, 18 March 1956, at the age of 76. His remains were interred in the gardens of the Serbian Orthodox St. Sava Monastery, Libertyville, Illinois, a monastery which he helped to build in the 1920s. Before the funeral, Velimirović’s body was placed in Serbian Orthodox churches in New York, Chicago, and Lackawanna, New York, for the faithful to pay their respects. He was buried 27 March 1956, in the presence of 42 Serbian priests and prominent members of the Serbian diaspora. In May 1991, among considerable pomp and ceremony, Velimirović’s remains were returned to Serbia and laid to rest in a chapel in his native village of Lelić.

Today in Serbia Velimirović is widely regarded as the nation’s most respected religious figure since medieval Serbian St. Sava. Bishop Velimirović is also, without doubt, the best-selling Serbian author of the past two decades. In an open letter to a symposium on Velimirović held at Žiča Monastery in April 2003, the leader of the Democratic Party of Serbia and then President of Serbia and Montenegro, Vojislav Koštunica referred to Velimirović as “our guide... who is and forever will be among us.” The prime minister also cited the bishop’s “real patriotism” as a suitable blueprint for the emerging post-Milošević version of Serbian nationalism.⁵

The bishop’s popularity in Serbia reached its climax in May 2003, when the Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church voted unanimously to canonize Velimirović. Icons with his image have become commonplace in Serbian churches, in the homes of the faithful, and even in taxis, where they are sometimes prominently displayed on the dashboard. The canonization has also sparked a noticeable merchandising industry. Key rings, postcards, credit-card size laminated icons, and other memorabilia can now be bought in Serbian church shops.

The Campaign for Canonization

The positive memory of Bishop Velimirović in Serbia today involves a continuous process of *not* remembering his association with Nazi collaborators, his anti-Semitism, and his positive evaluation of Hitler in a 1935 speech. Furthermore, justifications, trivializations, and denials of anti-Semitism have been woven into the routine of remembrance and entrenched in commemorative speeches, books, articles, sermons, and everyday talk devoted to Nikolaj Velimirović, Serbia’s new saint and the country’s most popular religious author and spiritual authority.

The campaign for canonization of Velimirović began in the 1980s, building on a cult following that

The positive memory of Bishop Velimirović in Serbia today involves a continuous process of *not* remembering his association with Nazi collaborators, his anti-Semitism, and his positive evaluation of Hitler.

dates back to the 1930s and 1940s. As early as 1945, 11 years before his death, an icon bearing his image was painted on the walls of a church in the village of Rataje, near the town of Aleksandrovac.⁶ As early as the 1970s, Velimirović was regarded as a saint among the Serbian diaspora in the United States. Apparently, monks at the Russian St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, where he died, remembered and venerated him as "St. Nikolaj of South Canaan." The bishop's veneration in the United States was not limited to a single monastery. In the Serbian Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity in Parma, Ohio, a fresco bearing the title, "Synaxis of the Saints of North America," includes Velimirović depicted as "St. Nicholas of South Canaan."

In Serbia, the bishop's rehabilitation over the past two decades has included the transformation of his image from "traitor," a term frequently used by Communist authorities, to "saint." In the late 1980s, nationalism gradually began to replace Communism as the dominant Serbian ideology. Simultaneously, supporters of Velimirović, previously marginalized in the Serbian Orthodox Church, became a prominent force within the ecclesiastical establishment, and initiated the rehabilitation of his public memory. ♦

Notes:

¹ Nikolaj Velimirović, "Priča o vuku i jagnjetu [A Story about the Wolf and the Lamb]," *Pregled crkve*

eparhije žičke (No. 1, 1928), 6-9.

² Isak Alakaj, "Priča o vuku i jagnjetu [A Story about the Wolf and the Lamb]," *Vreme* (15 January 1928), 3.

³ Nikolaj Velimirović, *Poruka Srpskom Narodu Kroz Tamnički Prozor [Words to the Serbian People through the Dungeon Window]* (Belgrade: Svetosavska Književna Zadruga, 1985), 193-94.

⁴ P. Ilić, *Moji doživljaji sa dr Nikolaj Velimirovićem i dr Vojom Janićem [My Experiences with Dr. Nikolaj Velimirović and Dr. Voja Janić]* (Belgrade: n.p., 1938).

⁵ A. Jevtić, *Sveti Vladika Nikolaj Ohridski i Žički [Holy Bishop Nikolaj of Ohrid and Žiča]* (Kraljevo: Sveti Manastir Žiča, 2003), 321-22.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The concluding portion of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report.

Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Jovan Byford, Denial and Repression of Antisemitism; Post-Communist Remembrance of the Serbian Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008).

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Protestant Theological Education in Central Asia: Embattled but Resilient

Insur Shamgunov

Editor's note: In 2007 Insur Shamgunov conducted in-depth interviews with 40 graduates and four principals of four theological colleges, two in Kazakhstan and two in Kyrgyzstan, for his dissertation on Protestant theological education in Central Asia. The author chose Kazakh and Kyrgyz institutions because of the relative ease of access compared to the other Central Asian nations of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Shamgunov carried out an earlier pilot study (August-September 2006) which involved interviews with four pastors from Tatarstan, Russia, who were graduates of three different theological colleges in Russia.

Interviewees, given pseudonyms in the text, were single and married, male and female (but mostly the former), predominantly recent graduates (the majority, three to six years out of school), and had prior education ranging from secondary and technical school diplomas to undergraduate and post-graduate university degrees. Shamgunov's subjects ranged in age from 24 to 71, with most between their late 20s and early 50s; they represented ten nationalities (mostly Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Russian, and Korean, but also including some Tatars, and one Uzbek, Uigur, Armenian, Kurd, and Ethiopian each); in addition, they were all evangelical Christians, including Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Pentecostals,

Korean Presbyterians, and members of independent churches. Graduates were leading both rural and urban churches; Central Asian, Russian, and mixed congregations; and traditional and cell churches, with regular attendance ranging from eight to over 1,000.

The first part of the article (in this issue) provides an overview of political and social issues affecting church growth in Central Asia; the following two issues (Winter and Spring 2010) will treat the internal challenges facing theological institutions and recommendations respectively.

Abstract

In summary, graduates gave generally positive appraisals of their training, but they noted little connection between their studies and the capabilities needed to succeed in ministry. Therefore, it can be argued that the Central Asian institutions under review have inherited the flaws of the "schooling" paradigm of theological education. Recommending a more integrated, context-specific, missional approach, this study also provides a useful starting point for the reformulation of curricula.

What Prompted the Research: Training Missing the Mark

Having worked in the region since 1999, both as a theological college principal and as a participant in the training track of a confidential Central

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Central Asian church leaders perceive a disconnect between current theological training and real-life vocational skills.

Asian evangelical conference, I have been in close contact with many evangelical leaders of several Central Asian countries – primarily in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan – and have closely followed developments in theological education.

In general, I discovered that Central Asian church leaders perceive a disconnect between current theological training and real-life vocational skills that theological college graduates need in church ministry. A national leader of the major Tajik evangelical church association shared that his churches no longer intend to send students to theological colleges because their graduates “begin talking a strange language about strange problems, become useless in the ministry, and want to emigrate to the West.”¹ A church leader in Uzbekistan wanted to start her own theological school and not let her people “get spoiled in these [other] colleges,” by which she meant that they became unfit for church leadership by the time they finished their education.² Similarly, a leader of a major association of churches in Kazakhstan expressed the opinion that those who did not undergo theological training were more successful in ministry than those who did.³

Such comments prompted me to investigate further underlying issues affecting success and failure in theological education. First, what problems do graduates encounter in their professional practice and what enables them to successfully address them? Second, in what ways does their training contribute to, or fail to contribute to, their ability to minister effectively?

The Demographic Context

The current population of Kazakhstan is 15.4 million, with ethnic Kazakhs representing approximately 50 percent of the population; Slavs constitute around one third; Uzbeks, Uigurs (ethnic Turkic Muslims), and Tatars together – about 10 percent; Germans – 1.5 percent, and Jews – about one percent. The country’s demographics remain in flux as Slavs and Germans continue to emigrate.⁴ The Slavic population, which largely considers itself Orthodox, is served by 257 Orthodox churches. Approximately two percent of the population are Roman Catholic (mostly Germans and Ukrainians), with 82 registered organizations.

Kazakhstan also has 964 registered Protestant organizations, with 546 places of worship and 30,703 adherents.⁵ This figure for Protestants may be considered conservative because only about 50 percent of their churches submitted information for the above study, and it also omits unregistered and house churches. Protestants include charismatic congregations (450 in 2005); Evangelical Christians-Baptists (227 registered churches with an estimated 10,000 members); and other groups such as Presbyterians and Lutherans.

According to the 2007 National Statistics Committee, the population of Kyrgyzstan is 5.2 million, consisting of 67 percent Kyrgyz; 14.2 percent Uzbek; 10.3 percent Russian; 1.1 percent Dungan (ethnic Chinese Muslims); one percent

Uigur; and six percent other nationalities.⁶ About 11 percent of the population are Russian Orthodox, although the number may be as low as eight percent, with only 44 churches. Roman Catholics have three churches. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan has 226 registered Protestant churches, including 49 Pentecostal, 48 Baptist, 43 Charismatic, 35 Presbyterian, 30 Seventh-day Adventist, and 21 Lutheran.

Government Harassment and Pressure

Evangelical churches in both countries currently are experiencing increased pressure from their governments and local communities. Thus, in Kyrgyzstan, under more restrictive legislation which took effect in January 2009, both local Muslim communities and government officials exhibit increasing intolerance and condone violence toward evangelicals and other non-traditional religious communities. For example, in August 2007 agents of the KNB (former KGB) raided Grace Protestant Church, seized documents and computers, harassed and interrogated church members, and charged several people with “treason.”⁷ In June 2008, Forum 18 reported that a Western missionary who served as principal of a Kyrgyz theological college was expelled from the country because he refused to open confidential student files for the national secret police.⁸

In Kazakhstan, Forum 18 reported that the government was frequently raiding church worship services,⁹ closing and threatening to confiscate churches,¹⁰ demanding that church leaders disclose personal information about church members, and imposing large fines on unregistered religious communities.¹¹ In addition, Kazakh media publish stories criticizing Evangelicals, depicting them as dangerous sects.¹² While “traditional” religious groups are considered to be more or less acceptable, “sects” – particularly those aided by foreign mission organizations that appeared after *perestroika* – are viewed as alien movements that “threaten social stability and challenge the independence of the republic.”¹³

One principal of a Kazakh theological college stated that political opposition to religious minorities began to escalate in 2008, developing into a major problem for his institution. The college was unexpectedly visited by various officials, including secret police. During this period the Kazakh government attempted to pass a law prohibiting religious institutions from functioning without a license. Since it was practically impossible for religious minorities to obtain one, the principal viewed this new law as a definite sign of the government’s tightening control over religion. His understanding was that only the Islamic University was licensed, and perhaps the Orthodox college would be given a license, too, but not Protestant schools. Several Protestant theological colleges had just been shut down. He felt that this recently increased pressure was the result of the growing influence of Islam on the government, which initially (after *perestroika*) had been more tolerant toward other religions. The government is also trying to

make it impossible for his college to receive funding from abroad. He also fears that the government might change the laws even more radically and even confiscate the buildings of evangelical training institutions. Although the college legally purchased an unused kindergarten, a local TV station reported that “sectarians” had stolen the building.

Although the principal was concerned about what he felt was a real possibility of the government shutting down the college, he remained calm about it. He pointed out that his denomination was no novice to government persecution during Soviet times: “If we are forced to close, we will be educating people anyway.” Inspired by the success of the underground cell-church movement in Uzbekistan, he was considering opening a new department to train small group leaders. Besides, the college staff was discussing ways to make the college self-sustaining in case the government made it impossible for them to obtain Western funding.

A New God: “I Have No Time”

Fifteen of 40 graduates who were interviewed reported both decreased commitment by regular church members and a general decline in society’s interest in Christian spirituality in the last few years. Most graduates connected the lack of commitment with the rapid economic growth and dramatic increase in the cost of living taking place in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, especially the latter with its rich oil resources. The result was significantly increased busyness, skyrocketing prices, and rampant materialism, with unprecedented opportunities to reach a decent standard of living. As one pastor noted, a new god, “I Have No Time,” has appeared.

Financial Dependency

Two graduates living in poor areas of Kazakhstan, when discussing reasons for people’s decreased commitment to the church, linked it to the problem of financial dependency. One of them (Efrem) said his church was established by Korean missionaries who offered a generally poor population some material support, which resulted in people coming to church for material, rather than spiritual, reasons. After the missionaries left and he was ordained as pastor, some people lost interest in the church because it could not provide them with any more gifts.

In contrast, the growth of Islam was aided by immense resources that poured in from Muslim nations, compared with relatively few resources available for the church. Two other graduates working in villages added to these observations that secular people becoming committed Muslims often changed their attitude to Christianity from neutral to hostile, and it was becoming increasingly more dangerous for people to become Christians, particularly in smaller communities.

Ministering to “Wounded Hearts”

Nine graduates pointed out that one of the key problems they encountered in ministry concerned the immense social problems of post-Soviet Central Asia and the destruction of society’s moral fabric. Aida, a middle-aged, single-parent, female pastor

in a major city, described the problem as follows: Kazakhstan “is morally destroyed – [we face] alcoholism, drug abuse, a lot of occult practices. The family is destroyed: no father, or often a father [who] does not take his due responsibility in the family. The wife and children suffer. There is a high divorce rate.”

One female pastor (Tatyana) in a small, predominantly Russian town, pointed to extreme alcohol abuse: “Some people who were coming to church in the early days are now dead – they were either frozen to death while drunk, or just drank themselves to death.” A female missionary (Malin) in a predominantly Kurdish town in Kazakhstan related a horrifying reality: high unemployment, illiteracy, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, and widespread domestic physical and sexual abuse. “Theft and rape happen all the time.” Drug abuse is very common and is perceived to be normal. Women are treated as an inferior class to be used and abused by men who divorce their wives or simply throw them out on the street for reasons such as infertility. It is common for a man simply to snatch an adolescent girl, take her to his house, rape her, and force her to marry him.

Five pastors noted that for a significant number of people coming to church from such backgrounds, it was difficult to “grow spiritually” and to rid themselves of self-destructive behaviors because they themselves had been damaged so profoundly. Two graduates, independently of each other, used the term “wounded hearts” to describe this phenomenon:

These people were wounded: a divorce, a wounded childhood – many were forsaken by parents or grew up in a family where their parents did not want them. God showed me – people can’t change because *their hearts are wounded* [emphasis hers] (Tatyana).

Pastor Gulnora also saw the emotional damage done to people as one of the roots of spiritual passivity. Moreover, she thought that the recent economic changes were contributing to the damage:

There is so much rejection in our society – women are rejected by men, children by their parents. People were much wounded during Soviet times; but nowadays children are rejected because their parents are busy making money.

Pastor Tatyana described her “ministry of soul healing” that she practiced, both in one-on-one sessions and in a small group context in her church. At those meetings people recalled difficult emotional episodes in their lives and prayed for each other. This pastor shared that she had been concerned about “wounded souls” for a long time, even while studying at Bible college. ♦

Insur Shamgunov currently works as a management consultant for a human relations firm in London, England.

Editor’s note: The second portion of this three-part article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 18 (Winter 2010).

(continued on page 8)

One pastor noted, a new god, “I Have No Time,” has appeared.

Protestant Theological Education in Central Asia (continued from page 7)

Edited excerpts published with permission from Insur Shamgunov, "Listening to the Voice of the Graduate: An Analysis of Professional Practice and Training for Ministry in Central Asia," Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 2009.

Notes:

¹ Conversation with "Artur," March 2002.

² Conversation with "Nazima," February 2004.

³ Conference lecture by "Munir," March 2002.

⁴ "Kazakhstan," *International Religious Freedom Report 2008* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108501.htm>; accessed 24 September 2009).

⁵ "EP": 2007 Project Overview.

⁶ "Kyrgyz Republic," *International Religious Freedom Report 2008* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108502.htm>; accessed 24 September 2008).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1145, accessed 1 July 2008.

⁹ "When Is a Raid Not a Raid?," 30 May 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1137; accessed 30 September 2008.

¹⁰ "Nationwide Religious Property Seizures Continue," 20 August 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1174; accessed 30 September 2008.

¹¹ "Are Intrusive Questionnaires 'a Simple Formality'?", 25 February 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1093; accessed 30 September 2008.

¹² Thus, on 15 February 2008 a national newspaper published an interview with an anonymous KNB officer who claimed that foreign "sects" were foreign intelligence agents working undercover. He also equated new Christian and Buddhist organizations with Islamic extremists.

¹³ Sebastien Peyrouse, "The Relationship between Church and State in the Post-Soviet World: The Case of Christianity in Central Asia," *Journal of Church and State* 49 (2007), 114.

Insur Shamgunov: An Autobiographical Note

I was born in a culturally Muslim, but secular, home in my native Tatarstan, Russia. I grew up ideologically within the Soviet school system and became a convinced atheist. However, having witnessed *perestroika* and the collapse of Communism, I found myself on a spiritual journey, looking for meaning in life. In 1993, after several years of searching, I embraced evangelical Protestant Christianity.

I then began ministerial training in St. Petersburg at one of the first evangelical theological colleges in Russia. My studies followed a traditional Western theological curriculum, mostly oriented towards the transfer of "head knowledge." Nevertheless, while in school I became particularly interested in

the spiritual and practical dimensions of ministerial training, which have become major interests in my life.

After graduation I became part of a team that started a new church in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, and eventually became pastor of that church. Thus I had firsthand experience trying to transfer my theological training into the work place, with both successful and frustrating experiences in the process. During those years of active ministry, I also earned a master's degree in theology at a university in the United Kingdom. In 1999, I founded a new ministry training college in Kazan. For the next five years I worked as the principal and a lecturer in that college. ♦

Association for the Study of Eastern Christian History and Culture membership is open to persons without regard to confessional affiliation.

News Note

The Association for the Study of Eastern Christian History and Culture (ASEC) is an academic organization founded in 2003 by professors of Russian history and literature who wished to expand their knowledge of various Eastern Christian cultures broadly conceived. ASEC biennial conferences at Ohio State University (October 2005; October 2007; October 2009) have included historical, theological, literary, linguistic, cultural, and anthropological investigations of Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Eastern Christian churches. ASEC is an affiliate of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

The theme of the 2007 conference was "Centers and Peripheries: Interaction and Exchange in the Social, Cultural, Historical, and Regional Situations of Eastern Christianity." In 2009 the ASEC meeting addressed "Reform Movements in Eastern Christianity: Renewal, Heresy, and Compromise." The keynote address for the 2009 conference was "Southern Challenges to Eastern Christianity: New

Pressures for Reform in Contemporary Ukraine," given by Catherine Wanner (Penn State University), author of *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

Membership is open to persons without regard to confessional affiliation who are enrolled in, or have completed, a master's program or higher academic degree. Annual membership fees are \$25 (\$10 for graduate students and retirees). Officers are president: Jennifer B. Spock, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY, jennifer.spock@eku.edu; secretary: Christine D. Worobec, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL, worobec@niu.edu; treasurer: Lucien Frary, Rider University, Lawrenceville, NJ, lfrary@rider.edu; and newsletter editor: John-Paul Himka, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, jhimka@ualberta.ca.

The next ASEC conference is scheduled for October 2011 at Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.

Christians in Central Asia

Sebastien Peyrouse

Editor's note: The first portion of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church & Ministry Report 17 (Summer 2009): 9-11.

The Islamic-Orthodox Alliance

Orthodox leaders have supported the efforts of Muslim clergy (*ulema*) to pressure Central Asian authorities to restrict missionary activity. The Orthodox Church finds itself in an ambiguous position insisting on religious freedom for itself, but complaining that post-Soviet states should not abide by any broader Western model of freedom of religion. Orthodoxy, not regretting the Soviet period, would prefer greater continuity, citing the Belarusian example of the state recognizing the Orthodox Church as the "national church."¹ Other Christian churches question whether an established faith would guarantee a country's stability, contending that this is "only a myth that leads to inquisitions and monastery jails. Religious freedom is a right for anyone, for small and large denominations."²

The current Orthodox Church in Central Asia considers itself the victim of Christian proselytism, Russian emigration, and people's indifference to religion. Church leaders, despite their official apolitical stance, have turned to the authorities for support. Central Asian Archbishop Vladimir Ikim has met Central Asian state presidents several times and confirms good relations with all. Vladimir and Islamic *mufitis* in Central Asia have not hidden their intention to put pressure on authorities in order to restrict religious freedom.³ Archbishop Vladimir's virulent and denigrating attitude toward other Christian movements, echoed by high and low clergy, reflects a trend across the former USSR. Orthodox clerics in Central Asia have attacked the Catholic Church, claiming it has "always tried to seize the Orthodox Orient."⁴ In 1998, Archbishop Antonii of the Uralsk and Gureev regions of Kazakhstan declared: "What can we think of a church that has systematically violated God's law? The Pope, who has declared himself God's substitute on Earth, who is he? The Antichrist!"⁵

Criticism against local missionary movements fills the pages of local Orthodox journals.⁶ A Kazakhstani journal defined Protestantism as a religion of "the aggressive bourgeois."⁷ Orthodox writers attack Jehovah's Witnesses as the most dangerous movement, which, among other things, would convert people using narcotics and hypnosis.⁸ Many articles explain how Orthodox Christians should confront missionaries, Jehovah's Witnesses in particular.⁹ The leader of an Orthodox parish in Dushanbe condemned denominations for proselytizing with "a meal in one hand and a Bible in the other."¹⁰

Orthodox and Muslim leaders agree that "in Central Asia and in Russia, there is a natural distribution of the sphere of influence between the two religions, Orthodoxy and Islam, and no one will destroy this harmony."¹¹ Leaders of each religion have agreed not to proselytize among nationalities

traditionally belonging to the other religion and to fight all other proselytizing movements. Official inter-religious conferences and meetings between *mufitis* and Orthodox hierarchy publicly confirm their mutual understanding.¹²

Below the level of central hierarchies, tensions simmer between church officials and believers of various Christian denominations. Lutheran pastors, for example, strongly criticize other Protestant denominations. One Lutheran cleric in Tashkent condemned "all the sects developing in the country."¹³ Lutheran officials, expressing particular hostility toward Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses, criticize the activity of "foreign" missions and have been suspected of pressuring political authorities to place limits on Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and charismatic movements. Such hostility varies greatly from the ecumenism of Western Europe or North America; in Central Asia denominations at best ignore each other, but much more often label rivals as "sects," at times collaborating with the government to ban these movements.

Legislative restrictions threaten to shutter many Christian denominations, which rarely consist of more than 20 believers in villages and 50 to 70 believers in small-to- middle-size cities of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Laws against proselytism have endangered movements of religious officials, even those of the more established religions.

In Turkmenistan most Protestant communities have been refused registration while Orthodox parishes, which rarely consist of more than 50 people, are allowed to maintain their religious activity. In Uzbekistan any denomination suspected of proselytism – or at least too visible proselytism – is denied registration, regardless of the number of signatures collected.

Believers of primarily Protestant denominations are forced to celebrate services in homes, even though conducting religious activities in private is forbidden. State authorities also consider the distribution of religious literature in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as proselytism. These Central Asian republics have banned so-called "foreign" Christian denominations from importing religious books of any kind written in local languages. Authorities do not hesitate to seize Christian material in homes or even in registered religious buildings.

In addition to legislative restrictions, many believers, especially Protestants, undergo unofficial pressures from authorities. These pressures show a real continuity with Soviet anti-religious practices, varying from subjective interpretations of law to police raids during services, temporary illegal internments, and psychological pressure. Registration formalities continue to be the main form of pressure exercised by authorities upon believers and their leaders. State authorities ignore legislation in their refusal to register Christian groups. Special efforts to deny registration to Christians are concentrated on "foreign" proselytizing movements such as Presbyterians,

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The Orthodox Church finds itself insisting on religious freedom for itself, but complaining that post-Soviet states should not abide by any broader Western model of freedom of religion.

Christians in Central Asia (continued from page 9)

charismatics, or Jehovah's Witnesses. Several groups have been refused registration on the basis that their leader is a foreigner. In recent years, some legally registered churches have also been suppressed.

Conclusion

As in the Soviet era, Central Asian states fear the influence of religion. Secularism has become a way to face not only "foreign" Christianity but Islam, a force that could lead to a questioning of the elite's acquired privileges, which could then threaten their political power. Leaders mistreat known religious movements by means of a combination of nitpicking, arbitrariness, extra-legal measures, and everyday administrative humiliations. By way of contrast, the Orthodox Church has been able to gain status as a type of "official" religion for Russians, whom Central Asian leaders want to see remain in their republics.

In all Central Asian republics today official secularism excludes any reference to the Quran or *sharia* and officially grants Christianity, especially Orthodoxy, the same rights as Islam. Discrimination against several Protestant movements – such as Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Pentecostals – as well as, at times, the Catholic Church and even non-Christian Baha'i and Hare Krishna, result more from general restrictions on freedom and national considerations rather than religious ones. The situation of Christians in Central Asia resembles the situation in Belarus or Russia, where Orthodox believers meet no real difficulties, but repression of other Christian groups significantly affects the everyday life of believers, who in some cases are not even able to celebrate regular services. These difficulties stem primarily from the fact that these groups are considered "foreign denominations" imported from Western countries. As such, political authorities and the hierarchs of so-called traditional religions view them as a threat to internal security and stability.¹⁴ ♦

Notes

¹ "V. Belorussii zapreshena deiatel'nost' obshchestva soznaniia Krishny," *Svet pravoslaviia v Kazahstane*

No. 5 (1999), 16-17.

² *Blagovestnik. Gazeta i uznoi konferentsii tserkvi khristian-adventistov sed'mogo dnia*, March, 1996, 3.

³ *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 1 October 1994; Alisheva, "Multiconfessional Kyrgyzstan."

⁴ *Vedi* 17 (No. 3, 1998), 2-8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ E. Luzanova, "Religious Renaissance or Political Game?," *Central Asian Post*, 23 March 1998, 4.

⁷ "Protestantizm kak religiia agressivnogo burzhua: ekskurs v istoriiu," *Svet pravoslaviia v Kazahstane* No. 6 (1997), 12-14.

⁸ *Slobo zhizni* No. 9 (19 December 1995), 3.

⁹ See, for example, "Svideteli Iegovy, i kak k nim otnosit'sia pravoslavnym khristianam," *Vedi*, non-dated and non-numbered, 26.

¹⁰ Interview with the leader of the Orthodox parish in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, October 2000.

¹¹ I. Botasheva and V. Lebedev, "Krestonostsy kontsa XX veka," *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, 2 April 1996.

¹² *Svet pravoslaviia v Kazahstane* No. 1 (1993), 8.

¹³ Author interview with a Protestant pastor, 1999.

¹⁴ Sebastien Peyrouse, ed., *Gestion de l'indépendance et legs soviétique en Asie centrale, Cahiers d'Asie centrale* Nos. 13-14 (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2004).

Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Sebastien Peyrouse, "Christians as the Main Religious Minority in Central Asia" in Everyday Life in Central Asia, Past and Present edited by Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 371-83.

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In Central Asia Orthodox believers meet no real difficulties, but repression of other Christian groups significantly affects the everyday life of believers.

Russian Orthodox Attitudes on Church-State Issues

Christopher Marsh

The 1997 Russian law on "Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" established a two-tier system distinguishing between religious "organizations" (which have operated in Russia for at least 15 years) and religious "associations." While the former are granted a broad range of privileges, the latter are permitted to worship but face restrictions on their property rights and their educational, publishing, and evangelistic activities.

The situation in Russia has since evolved, with the Constitutional Court and other court decisions interpreting the law somewhat less restrictively than was initially anticipated. Still, regular and severe violations of religious freedom occur in Russia, ranging from the denial of clergy and religious worker visas to the liquidation of

religious associations that fail to meet registration requirements. Issues of religious freedom and church-state relations in Russia, therefore, remain some of the most critical issues surrounding the establishment of democracy and liberty in a state with a long authoritarian tradition.

This study seeks to determine the orientation of Russian Orthodox Christians toward issues of church and state. While the Moscow Patriarchate's political maneuvering and the Kremlin's homage to religion are at the center of the study of church and state in Russia, the beliefs and values of Russian citizens regarding church-state issues remain seriously understudied. Do Russian Orthodox Christians look to the church to give answers about social problems, and perhaps even to advise them on how to vote? And do they welcome the idea

of the church playing a strong role in politics? By exploring such questions I hope to shed light on issues that have thus far remained unexamined with the use of empirical data.

Quantitative Analysis of Russian Religious Values

Sociologists of religion and others have long taken advantage of modern survey methods to explore the religious orientations of people across the globe, and Russia is no exception. Since the onset of political openness to survey research in Russia and other post-Communist societies, a wide array of studies has assessed value orientations, both within individual countries and cross-nationally, on indicators such as religious belief, support for democracy, trust among citizens, and orientations toward civic life.

Little if any attention, however, has been devoted to the critically important issue of how differing degrees of religiosity may be related to attitudes toward civic life, religion and politics, and church-state relations among Orthodox believers.¹ One of the primary reasons is that these studies tend to classify respondents by how they answered a single question on religious belief or practice. For example, the major studies of the value orientations of religious believers in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union use the response to a question on religious denomination to code respondents as Orthodox Christians. While self-identification is an accepted means of classifying religious believers in the West, in a post-Communist environment where for decades a policy of forced secularization attempted to mold “scientific atheists” while destroying religious life, such an approach is problematic.²

In the two most thorough analyses of Orthodox religious life in Russia, V.F. Chesnokova has shown that religiosity and church adherence are complex processes that cannot be gauged by any one indicator.³ Her analysis explored Russian Orthodox religiosity using a complex array of indicators, including belief in God, regular church attendance, taking communion, making confession, fasting at prescribed times, praying at home with the use of church prayer books (*molitoslov*), and knowledge of Old Church Slavonic sufficient to understand the liturgy. Understood this way, it was clear that only a very small number of self-identified Orthodox Christians were “fully church-ed,” while the majority of respondents exhibited extremely low levels of church adherence. These findings, although perhaps more nuanced, are quite in line with conclusions reached by several other Russian scholars who have argued that the number of “real,” “traditional,” or “church-minded” Orthodox in Russia is no larger than five-to-seven percent of the population, with other Orthodox believers characterized as “nominal,” or as Varzanova has phrased it, Orthodox only in a “cultural sense.”⁴

While Chesnokova and her team’s work is a major contribution to the field of the scientific study of religion, the fact that their survey does not contain a sufficient number of questions on issues

of politics, society, and economics means that it will be difficult to incorporate her achievements into studies that focus on such factors. In order to examine the religious and political value orientations of Russian Orthodox Christians, data from the World Values Survey is used. No other survey has the same range of questions relating to religious belief, practice, and spirituality, along with accompanying questions on social values, civic engagement, and political orientation. This study uses data from the 1999-2001 World Values Survey, released in spring 2004. This dataset provides a reliable look at contemporary Russian society after more than a decade of social, economic, and political upheaval, including significant changes in the role of religion in individual and public life and the laws governing public religiosity.

Religious Beliefs and Behavior

The first set of questions relates to the role religion plays in the lives of Orthodox believers in terms of their belief in God and sin, frequency of prayer, and church attendance. Three percent of self-identified Orthodox Christians said they did not believe in God. As well, 15 percent of Orthodox said they did not believe in sin, while many denied belief in life after death (46 percent) or heaven (42 percent).

Sharp disparities emerge when looking at religious behavior as opposed to religious beliefs. While 86 percent of Orthodox Christians take comfort and find strength in their religion, only 11 percent attend religious services at least once per month, and only slightly more than five percent attend religious services weekly. This phenomenon is in some ways similar to that of “believing without belonging,” which Grace Davie identified as a trend in England after World War II.⁵ In contrast, Inna Naletova argues that many still take part in a vibrant Orthodox life connected to “external” forms of religiosity.⁶ Despite low levels of church attendance, evidence does support the latter position: more than one quarter pray at least once per day (27.9 percent), while more than half (56 percent) regularly engage in prayer or meditation. Nevertheless, only 60 percent responded that God played an important part in their lives.

It might be useful to categorize Orthodox respondents as devout if they identified themselves as Orthodox, stated a belief in God, and attended church services at least monthly, all key indicators according to Chesnokova. Using these criteria, 186 Orthodox Christians in the survey are devout. The remaining self-identifying Orthodox (1,001), some of whom do not even believe in God and none of whom attend church services more than a few times per year, may be labeled cultural Orthodox.

The Babushka Factor

In terms of level of education and rural/urban setting, devout and cultural Orthodox differ little. (See Table 1.) When noting gender, however, the contrast is remarkable. It is clear that devout Orthodox are primarily comprised of females 55 and over (half of all devout Orthodox), with a slightly less likely chance to have ever been married. Also, many more women than men are cultural Orthodox.

Fifteen percent of Orthodox said they did not believe in sin, while many denied belief in life after death (46 percent) or heaven (42 percent).

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents (in Percentages)

	Devout Orthodox	Cultural Orthodox	Non-Religious
male/female	18/82	33/67	52/48
18-34 years old	18.3	22.1	31.8
35-54 years old	31.2	39	42.8
55 years old and over	50.5	39	25.3
Higher Education (at least some)	21.5	19.7	21.5
City/small town	69.4/30.6	63.6/36.4	66.2/33.8
Married (widowed)	41.1 (16.8)	51 (13)	56.1 (12.4)

These characteristics suggest that the phenomenon of *babushkas* (grandmas) who stand guard over church services and who ensure adherence to codes of conduct is real (as if empirical confirmation were necessary). More significant, however, is that a relatively large percentage of devout Orthodox are between the ages of 18 and 34 (just below 20 percent), confirming the trend being observed of the younger generation finding its way to church. These two factors combined indicate that church adherence among Russians may be on the rise: 1) a healthy number of women are joining the church in later life (and the large number of cultural Orthodox women are likely to become more devout as they age); and 2) the younger generation appears to be finding its way to church earlier in life as well.

Views of the Church

Using the distinct categories of devout and cultural Orthodox believers in Russia, we can now begin to examine their views of the church itself. (See Table 2.) Surveys regularly find that the church is the most trusted institution in Russian society, with around 60 percent of all Russians expressing confidence in it. Using our distinct categories, however, we can in fact see great variation in levels of trust. Devout Orthodox more often expressed high levels of trust in the church (92.6 percent), than cultural Orthodox (76.5 percent). Interestingly, and something that has remained overlooked, is the fact that very few non-religious Russians have a great deal of trust in the church (5.7 percent), although a modest 30 percent do respond that they have quite a lot of trust.

Table 2: Orthodox Christians and Their Views of the Church (in Percentages)

	Devout Orthodox	Cultural Orthodox	Non-Religious
Trust in church: great deal (quite a lot)	73.3 (19.3)	32.6 (43.9)	5.7 (30)
The church answers spiritual problems	89.6	75.6	36.3
The church answers moral problems	87.4	71.7	36
The church answers family problems	78.5	57.7	24
The church answers social problems	41.5	23.7	9.6

In addition to trusting the church, Orthodox Christians in Russia also believe that the church provides answers to people’s spiritual, moral, and family problems. While these numbers are significantly higher for devout Orthodox (89.6, 87.4, and 78.5) than for cultural Orthodox (75.6, 71.7, and 57.7), it is significant to note that as we move away from the spiritual realm, the church is seen as having less relevance. Although the church is seen as having a significant role to play in people’s spiritual, moral, and family life, fewer respondents in each group felt that the church could provide answers to social problems, ranging from 41.5 percent and 23.7 percent for devout Orthodox

and cultural Orthodox, respectively, to under 10 percent for the non-religious (9.6 percent). Quite interestingly, more than one third of non-religious Russians still felt that the church provides answers to people’s spiritual and moral problems. ♦

Notes:

¹ Andrew Greeley, “A Religious Revival in Russia?,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (1994): 253-72. While Greeley considered many of the factors I examine here, he compared East Germans with Russians, with no distinction between respondents’ religious preference, religiosity, or beliefs, making it impossible to determine the ways in which religious preference or adherence impact

political and civic views. Likewise, in their analysis of religion and political choice in Russia, Hesli *et al.* grouped together all Orthodox adherents, regardless of their particular beliefs or levels of church attendance. Vicki Hesli, Ebru Erdem, William Reisinger, and Arthur Miller, "The Patriarch and the President: Religion and Political Choice in Russia," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 7 (Winter 1999): 42-72.

² Paul Froese, "Forced Secularization in Soviet Russia: Why an Atheistic Monopoly Failed," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43 (2004): 1, 35-50.

³ V. F. Chesnokova, *Protsess votserkovleniya naseleniya v sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Fond "Obshchestvennoe Mnenie," 1994 and 2000).

⁴ M. P. Mchedlov, "Religioznoe vozrozhdenie v Rossi: Prichiny, Dharakter, Tendentsii," *Obnovlenie Rossi: Trudnyi poisk reshchenii* (Moscow: Toddikii Nezavisimyi Institut Sotsial'nykh i Natsional'nykh Problem, 1992), 102-12; M. P. Mchedlov, "Novyi tipveruyushchego na poroge tret'ego tysyacheletiya," *Istoricheckii vestnik* 9-10 (2000); M.P. Mchedlov, "Ob osobennostyakh mirovzreniya veruyushchikh v post-Sovetskoi Rossii," *Religiya i prava* 1 (2002): 15-18; T. Varzanova, "Religioznoe vozrozhdenie i molodyozh," in V. I. Dobrinina, T. N. Kychtevich, and S. V. Tumanov, eds. *Kul'turnie miry molodykh*

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⁵ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

⁶ Inna Naletova, "Orthodoxy Beyond the Church Walls: A Sociological Inquiry into Orthodox Religious Experience in Contemporary Russian Society," Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 2006.

Editor's note: The conclusion of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 18 (Winter 2010).

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Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Christopher Marsh, "Russian Orthodox Christians and Their Orientation toward Church and State" in Perspectives on Church-State Relations in Russia, ed. by Wallace L. Daniel, Peter L. Berger, and Christopher Marsh (Waco, TX: J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, Baylor University, 2008).

Russia and Its National Minorities: Conducting Christian Ministry in a Racially Charged Atmosphere

Peter Johnson

Editor's note: The first portion of this article appeared in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 17 (Summer 2009), 1-2.

The Origins of Russian Nationalism

A phrase that is often used in the study of the world's largest country is "Russian cultural exceptionalism." It refers to the very deeply held assumption that Russia is on a higher cultural level than other nations. Russian writers refer to Russia's originality (*samobytnost*) and her special path (*osobyi put*).¹

While other nations, including the United States, have experienced similar attitudes, the Russian case goes deeper than most. It is common to trace this Russian attitude back to the years immediately after the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. A letter written by the Russian monk Philoteus (Filofey) in 1511 to Grand Duke Vasili III proclaimed, "Two Romes have fallen. The third stands. And there will be no fourth. No one shall replace your Christian Tsardom!" For centuries since, this concept of the Third Rome has underpinned Russian "exceptionalism." Rome was the center of the Christian empire; Constantinople, the Second Rome, took its place; and Moscow, the Third Rome, justified its dominion over surrounding nations using this theological formulation.

With the fall of Byzantium, Russia declared itself the defender and champion of the true Christian faith. Russia, as the Third Rome, came to see itself as the light of the world, and so the advancement of Russian dominion equalled the advancement of true Christian faith, giving theological foundation to

a belief in Russian cultural exceptionalism. By the 19th century Russian writers were widely referring to "Russian Messianism," the concept of Russia as the savior of the world.

While today most Russians would be uncomfortable with such expansive claims, it is not hard to see how this attitude continues to influence Russia's view of the world and her treatment of minority nationalities. Thus, a particular brand of chauvinism emerged with the birth of the Russian Empire which continued in a Marxist form after the Bolshevik Revolution, and still exists in Russia today.

Russia is not just one of the nations, on a par with Germany, Turkey, or the United States, much less Ukraine or Georgia. Russia exists on a higher cultural plane. This attitude was illustrated in a recent television documentary on a cult in Siberia led by a self-proclaimed messiah. A pair of the "messiah's" followers, who were in fact Latvian, were interviewed and asked why they did not speak Latvian with their children. The couple replied, "The Master teaches that in the new reality there will be no culture," and so Latvian was irrelevant. Yet the documentary filmed them speaking Russian with a balalaika on the wall, listening to traditional Russian music, drinking tea from a samovar in a village of traditional Russian architectural style.

It is, of course, common for large nations to assume that their traditions are normative. Russia is no exception. Russia's relations with its indigenous peoples, as well as with neighboring nations, start with the subconscious assumption that the Russian language has a supra-cultural status, and that Russia

Russia's relations with its indigenous peoples start with the subconscious assumption that the Russian language has a supra-cultural status.

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as the Third Rome has a divine obligation to rule.

Sadly, but not surprisingly, these cultural assumptions find their way into Russian Protestant as well as Orthodox churches. I work with a number of Russian pastors who are exceptional in their work in indigenous ethnic regions and their support for indigenous language ministry. One of these pastors has grown a large church which includes a very large number of non-Slavic members. Yet, still, he is fond of saying from the pulpit, "We are all Slavic people." This is a man who believes he has a ministry to Russia's non-Slavic minorities, but he cannot help trying to fit them all into a Slavic mold.

One Christian parachurch organization with the word *Eurasia* in its name started in Russia with the expressed purpose of assisting Christian ministries in Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and across Central Asia. Yet it used the slogan, "supporting Russian language" ministries. In fairness, it should be noted that this organization seems to have dropped this slogan. But the fact that it used it at all illustrates a serious problem deriving from a majority Russian mindset.

The strong value Russians place on the collective also factors into this complex equation. Russian culture has a very deep fear of schism, with an aversion to individuals who separate themselves from the group. The Russian ideal is collective uniformity. Whether this world view derives from Orthodoxy as the One True Church, or whether it reflects a deeper pre-Orthodox value, a connection certainly exists between the majority Russian attitude toward religious minorities and ethnic minorities.

Just as religious minorities are seen as a threat to the stability of the nation, so too, ethnic minorities, although officially celebrated, are also viewed as a danger. The Russian Federation officially celebrates and promotes ethnic diversity, but the actual discrimination and violence suffered by ethnic minorities coping with a Russian majority culture tell another story.

In September 2006, race riots broke out in the northwestern Russian town of Kondopoga between ethnic Russians and people from the Caucasus.² A group calling itself "The Movement Against Illegal Immigration" gleefully reported the riots, hailing them as "an awakening of the Russian people."³ The slogan, "Russia for Russians," is often championed by such groups, but what makes the events in Kondopoga especially noteworthy is that, as the town's name indicates, this is not ethnic Russian territory. Kondopoga is in the Republic of Karelia, which, while part of the Russian Federation, is not Slavic territory. The indigenous Karelians and Veps are Finno-Ugric, very close in language and culture to Finns. A "Russia for Russians" riot in Kondopoga is equivalent to an "England for English" protest being held in Scotland. It is a direct denial of the legitimacy of a nationality's existence.

"Racist Attacks Become More Frequent in Moscow": Such was the headline on the mosnews.com site on what should have been a beautiful spring day in April 2009. The article quoted the

Moscow Bureau for Human Rights stating that 122 people were killed and at least 380 injured in 2008 in racially motivated attacks across Russia. Russian skinhead assaults on foreigners and ethnic minorities are now "a regular occurrence in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as other Russian cities."⁴ In July 2008, Russian prosecutors charged a skinhead gang with the murder of 20 people during a series of brutal attacks against minorities in Moscow. The case followed repeated accusations from human rights groups that authorities in Russia were failing to investigate racial killings, often simply labelling xenophobic attacks as hooliganism.⁵ For example, in August 2006, Russia's Supreme Court upheld a verdict in which killers of a nine-year-old Tajik girl were found guilty of simple "hooliganism," rather than a hate crime.

Nevertheless, of late the continuing increase in racial violence has forced the government to take more notice. In February 2009, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported Russian President Medvedev's acknowledgment that racist attacks in Russia grew by 30 percent in 2008 and had become a threat to national security. UNHCR also quoted Deputy Interior Minister Yevgeny Shkolov stating that the destructive threat of extremist racial attacks "is equal or in some aspects stronger than that of the terrorist threat."⁶

The root problem is not simply racism. It has to do with an ingrained belief about Russia's place among the nations. Russia first must come to peace with itself. Russia, just like all other nations, must learn that in the eyes of God all ethnic and national groups are of equal value. The bearer of light to the gentiles is Jesus Christ, not any ethnic or political nation. As a result, no nation can act as if it has a God-given right to control the destinies of others. Size and power should not confer special value, but they should oblige citizens to use size and power to do good.

The Russian Capacity for Love and Generosity

Having lived and worked for many years among both Russians and Russia's indigenous minorities, I have learned the immense capacity Russians have for love and generosity. I do not know if I have ever met a warmer and more open-hearted people. Yet when it comes to minorities, be they ethnic or religious, all too often this great warmth is eclipsed by anxious, chauvinistic attitudes.

Both Orthodox and Protestant theology stress preaching and reading the Bible in the indigenous, vernacular language, giving Christianity the possibility of replacing negative nationalism with a positive view of all nations. The Church, which from the days of the Apostle Paul, has been a multi-ethnic body accepting all nationalities, should take a conscious and active role as an example of love and tolerance. The Russian Federation is a multi-ethnic society and its cultural diversity is a source of beauty and potentially a source of strength. The question, however, remains: Can Russian society learn to live in harmony with non-threatening minorities in its midst?

Just as religious minorities are seen as a threat to the stability of the nation, so too, ethnic minorities, are also viewed as a danger.

How Should Missionaries Respond?

It is the Russian people themselves who have to come to terms with their often-subconscious racial attitudes and assumptions. Nevertheless, Western missionaries have a responsibility to model charitable attitudes toward minority populations. First, missionaries should be an example by showing love and respect toward indigenous groups and by not following the subtle patterns of exclusion that alienate ethnic minorities. Second, missionaries should demonstrate through their actions and words that human worth does not depend upon numbers, power, or a particular culture, but rather in everyone's sharing equally in the image of God. Missionaries should show due respect for indigenous languages and cultures. This means taking the time to learn indigenous languages and cultures. Third, missionaries should lovingly but clearly question negative attitudes and actions directed against non-Slavic peoples. If possible, confrontation and condemnation should be avoided in favor of speaking the truth in love. Finally, missionaries should encourage indigenous peoples to watch their own attitudes and to pray for those in authority over them, both in government and in the

churches. A degree of responsibility does lie on both sides. ♦

Notes:

¹ It is, of course, also true that hand-in-hand belief in Russian cultural exceptionalism is an equally deeply felt sense of insecurity in the Russian psyche. The tension, clearly seen in Russian writers, between feeling strong and feeling weak, feeling proud and feeling ashamed, is very important for fully understanding the Russian mindset.

² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5312078.stm>, 4 September 2006.

³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6084458.stm>, 25 October 2006.

⁴ <http://www.mosnews.com/society/2009/04/23/1270/>, 23 April 2009.

⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jul/01/raceissues.russia>, 1 July 2008.

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/category,REFERENCE,,,RUS,49904c6d28,0.html>, 6 February 2009.

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Developing a Strategic Missiology

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our failures, learn from our mistakes, revive and reenergize international partnerships, and feel a part of global Christianity.

In formulating a new Slavic Protestant missiology, I believe we Evangelicals need to rethink our relationship with Orthodox Christians, with our own tragic national history, and with past and present worldwide mission efforts. First, we need to rethink our relationship with Eastern Orthodoxy. This will include appropriate contextualization of the gospel in an Orthodox culture, a subject that, to date, is little studied. The evangelical current within Orthodoxy must be valued and affirmed. If the majority of a country's population is Orthodox, then we must think about how to help more Orthodox become evangelical, instead of arguing with Orthodox that their faith is un-Christian. Protestants and evangelical Orthodox need to recognize that as representatives of different churches their commitment to the gospel and the Great Commission is more important than their commitment to a particular Christian confession.

Second, we need to come to terms with our own troubled history. The past four generations of my family have been evangelical Christians, but some of them, before coming to Christ, were Communists, and before 1917, were Orthodox priests. Unfortunately, our national history, like my personal history, has been torn to pieces by circumstances. In countries recovering from the yoke of Communism, what Christians of all traditions need is healing of the memories, in order to gather together the broken pieces of our history.

Finally, it is important to see our mission work in a wider context and to overcome ethnocentric and narrow denominationalism. We need not only contextualization of the authentic gospel for people

of local cultures, but we also need the lessons of world-wide, missiological experience in order to contextualize the gospel for post-Soviet societies. We cannot demand of God special revelation in missiology for Slavic churches, rejecting the truths that have already been revealed to missionaries in other countries. God's plan is that nations be given different gifts, and we should not dismiss God's gifts to other nations as unneeded by us. If we believe that the Christian God is Lord of history, then we must see this history as an indivisible whole. This should be a refreshing revelation for missional churches in the former USSR to feel themselves a part of global Christianity, and to find their special place in the general history of the Church and its mission.

More and more often, I hear calls to reject any change and to concentrate on preserving our evangelical traditions. I hear from my friends and colleagues from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that we do not need anything, that we have no problems, and that American mission experience is not worth anything. American missiology, like any other, is not perfect. But despite its mistakes, it does offer much from which we can learn.

Unfortunately, in-depth analyses and strategic missiology do not interest us. Our leaders say it is because we love practice. But what is our actual practice? By practice we mean something else—everyday life without difficult questions. As a result, it becomes clear why the eyes of people from the former Soviet Union visiting the West light up when they get the chance to go shopping. What has happened to our legendary Slavic spirituality and exalted missionary passion? ♦

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If the majority of a country's population is Orthodox, then we must think about how to help more Orthodox become evangelical, instead of arguing with Orthodox that their faith is un-Christian.

Developing a Strategic Missiology for Post-Soviet Churches

Mikhail Cherenkov

For evangelical churches in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, decline has gradually replaced explosion. The impact of even the largest evangelistic crusades has faded away. Huge evangelistic events in stadiums and transcontinental evangelistic expeditions no longer give life and enthusiasm to missions.

What is going on? Where are the expected results? Why is it that, despite all of the energy spent by churches and enormous international investments, goals remain unaccomplished? It seems that this question should be asked at all national mission conferences and in all Christian media outlets in the former Soviet Union. However, since the Berlin Wall fell and the door of unlimited opportunities suddenly opened 20 years ago this year, many national leaders are ignoring this question for fear of acknowledging mistakes, failed projects, wasted resources, and empty, multi-million dollar seminary buildings. Even so, this problem needs to be discussed—not to criticize, but to analyze and to learn from our mistakes.

We missed our chance to start right—with the strategic development of a national missiology. We started with “missions,” however each person understood this term. In other words, we started with rousing, motivational slogans and grassroots work. Unfortunately, many of the projects turned out to be utopian, and much of the effort of truly committed and faithful missionaries was wasted. Now, since the ineffectiveness of many mission efforts has become apparent, we have a second chance to start right—with a Slavic evangelical missiology that identifies appropriate vision, strategy, values, and mission principles. So what about our post-Soviet missiology? We still can count very few national mission specialists and no thorough analyses or publications—despite the fact that we now have access to an abundant wealth of literature and Western missiologists.

No doubt, thousands of Christian leaders from former Soviet-bloc countries travel the world in search of finances to support the mission activity

of their local churches. They gladly use new technology to raise funds and purchase new equipment and fashionable clothing for their families during their travels, but they are not ready to purchase or accept new ideas. Take a look in the suitcases of those returning from the United States or other countries—you will find everything there but good missiology books. Our “poor” leaders buy expensive new iPhones, laptops, and cameras, but they will not even glance in a bookstore or spend time with a missiology professor at any good college or seminary—places where real ministry riches can be found, which would help equip them to expand effective ministries in their local churches and stop their steady decline. It is disappointing that during the past 20 years of open borders and almost unlimited opportunities for ministry, our churches have learned how to milk Westerners for money, but they have not enriched themselves with progressive ideas or ministry experience from the rest of the world.

At seminars offered by successful Western leaders in former Soviet-bloc countries, I do not see national pastors really engaging with the strategic concepts offered. Nationals do not seem to be attracted to strategic and progressive content as much as to free lodging and transportation. It turns out, sadly, that their interest in other countries is really only Christian tourism. With their falsely inflated sense of self-sufficiency and claims of fulfilling a world messianic role, they would not need to travel anywhere if their churches did not have the unfortunate shortage of funds to support less than strategic local mission projects.

In 2009, I had the wonderful opportunity to conduct research at the Wheaton College Library, Wheaton, Illinois, which has one of the best missiology collections anywhere. I gained access to this wealth of information through a program that has been offered to Christian leaders from East European countries during the past ten years, but there are few results in any of those countries. Amid this wealth of information, I discovered a large volume of missiological research and writings—including periodicals, special monographs, and long-term studies—on missiology in Australia, Africa, Japan, India, China, Madagascar, and Papua New Guinea, but almost nothing on the church in the former Soviet Union. Only a limited number of publications have been written by a few post-Soviet enthusiasts.

The mission world is steadily losing interest in the evangelical church in the post-Soviet sphere. Reasons, of course, include political changes, but also mission projects which have been ineffective despite massive costs, ongoing inter-church conflicts, extreme legalism and conservatism in traditional evangelical churches, and the marginalization of Protestant churches in contemporary society.

I am speaking out about these problems in order to explain their causes to our Western partners and to find a way out of this crisis. Dialogue with our brothers in the West will teach us how to analyze

Our churches have learned how to milk Westerners for money, but they have not enriched themselves with progressive ideas or ministry experience from the rest of the world.

The quarterly *East-West Church & Ministry Report* examines all aspects of church life and mission outreach in the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe as a service to both church and academia. Letters to the editor are welcomed. Annual subscription rates are \$49.95 (individuals, U.S. and Canada); \$59.95 (individuals, international); \$53.95 (libraries, U.S. and Canada); \$63.95 (libraries, international); and \$22.95 (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 at no 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 the *EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT*. Currently indexed by American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies (ABSEES), OCLC Public Affairs Information Service (formerly PAIS), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Zeller Dietrich (formerly Zeller Verlag), and Christian Periodicals Index.



©2009

ISSN 1069-5664

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