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## Civic Ecumenism among Moscow's Faith-Based Charities

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In Russia, since the late 1980s, both the field of religion and the field of social services have been transformed by the shifting relationships of cooperation and competition that have emerged among religious denominations and between ostensibly religious and non-religious organizations. A diverse set of actors comprised of religious communities, religiously affiliated social services programs, secular development organizations and funding agencies, and Russian state agencies have forged collaborative ventures and strategic partnerships to tackle a wide range of social problems. In so doing, these organizations have created a parallel welfare structure that coexists alongside – and more typically compensates for – Russia's formal social assistance system.

### Faith-Based Social Outreach Overlooked

Relations among faith-based organizations (FBOs) and non-religious charities present an intriguing vantage point for understanding not just the conditions under which Russian-based social service programs operate, but also the complicated politics informing distinctions between “the religious” and “the secular” in Russia today. In scholarly research on Russian development and charitable projects aimed at poverty alleviation, economic reform, governance, health care, educational reform, human rights monitoring, and community enhancement more generally, the extensive contributions of FBOs have been overlooked in favor of secular development projects. Neither Janine Wedel's book (1998) on Western aid to Russia and Eastern Europe, nor Mark Field and Judyth Twigg's edited volume (2000) on the decay of social welfare systems in the post-Soviet period mentions the work of religious organizations at all. Although Anne White does mention religious groups briefly in her research on the emergence of charities in late-Soviet and early post-Soviet Russia (1993), her focus is overwhelmingly on non-religious groups.<sup>1</sup> In 2007, two Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies workshops on post-Soviet development made clear that even American-based development officials and scholars are curiously reluctant to acknowledge—even hostile to concede—the considerable social services work accomplished by FBOs in Russia.<sup>2</sup>

If social service activities of religious communities are acknowledged at all, they typically are described instrumentally in terms of how they contribute to church-building, proselytism, and the deepening of spiritual commitments.<sup>3</sup> Only rarely have scholars attempted to understand faith-based social work apart from a strictly religious/secular divide,<sup>4</sup> thus neglecting treatment of creative partnerships that are being fostered within and across the presumed categorical boundaries of “religious” and “secular.”

### Cooperation in Charity

Although Russia's post-Soviet religious revival most often has been described as competition among religious denominations to build their communities and expand their power through conversion – the so-called competition for souls<sup>5</sup> – more recently noticeable flexibility among religious communities is in evidence such that congregations representing diverse theological orientations (Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Baptist, to name a very few) are increasingly pursuing cooperative ventures across denominational lines. In some cases, congregations support the charitable projects of another denomination by providing money, material goods, and volunteers. In other cases, multiple congregations join forces to operate welfare programs together. Orthodox congregations are very much part of this new interdenominational collaboration with non-Orthodox Christian congregations, despite official rhetoric and policies discouraging such ventures. All of these projects require congregations with divergent theological perspectives to find common ground in structuring their programs, determining eligibility for recipients, providing services, setting guidelines for volunteers, and even presenting the programs to the public.

For instance, during a series of planning meetings and joint worship services celebrating a joint feeding program of the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy (to be referred to in this study as the Christian Church of Moscow—CCM), an Anglican church, a Catholic church, and a Lutheran church, clergy, staff, and parishioners worked to accommodate differences in liturgy and prayer among members. As I was privy to behind-the-scenes meetings among the clergy involved, I was able to observe ministers seeking to find an ecumenical middle-ground among their theological differences. On another occasion, the congregations from the CCM, an Anglican church, an Orthodox church, a Catholic church, and the Salvation Army came together for a special worship service to dedicate the donations each congregation had collected for a joint clothing distribution. The service was a cooperative event, with an officer from the Salvation Army reading from the Anglican Book of Prayer, a CCM minister giving the sermon, and an Anglican priest offering the prayer.

### Cooperation Between Faith-Based and Secular Agencies

Diversity is also evident in the partnerships forged between FBOs and non-religious aid organizations. FBOs and non-religious organizations

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cooperate by sharing resources and client lists with one another and by collaborating in joint activities. By creating these complementary relationships they recognize and harness their diverse strengths for the greater benefit of all. In the case of refugee resettlement, various responsibilities are parceled out to several FBOs, the International Office for Migration, appropriate Russian government agencies, and the embassy personnel of receiving countries. Staff and volunteers from each of these entities work so closely and smoothly with one another that candidates for immigration moving through the process are often unaware of distinctions among the different programs and staff. Staff and volunteers from the various programs even socialize with one another outside their formal working roles.

Rather than seeing one another as having competing objectives or approaches, staff and volunteers from these different organizations repeatedly emphasized the symbiotic nature of their respective activities. In interviews during my ongoing research in Moscow on FBOs, officials with Russian welfare agencies, international development organizations, and funding agencies have not only praised religiously affiliated assistance programs for the work they are doing, but have also consistently singled out these FBOs as more successful than their non-religious counterparts. In September 2009 alone, staff and volunteers from the Christian Church of Moscow, a Protestant congregation I have been following since 1997, were invited by such organizations as the UN High Commission on Refugees, the Aga Khan Foundation, and the U.S. Embassy to participate in round table sessions in order to advise staff from non-religious agencies on such projects as establishing medical clinics for homeless persons, promoting racial tolerance and assisting victims of racial violence, and assisting victims of human trafficking. After the round table focusing on racial tolerance, an official from one of Moscow's leading human rights monitoring agencies praised the CCM for its ability to do the work that other organizations could only dream of doing.

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### **Commitment to Social Justice Overcoming Differences**

These collaborative ventures have significantly reduced assumed distinctions between faith-based and non-faith-based agencies. During the course of my research, individuals who worked with religious organizations repeatedly sought to emphasize that their decision to do so was based not on religious grounds but on a sense of shared social justice ideals. One staff person confessed that she did not particularly like the theological orientation of the church with which she worked, but that she found the congregation's commitment to social justice programs exemplary and a perfect match to her own values. An American Embassy official who was a strong supporter (including in financial terms) of the CCM's social services programs shared that although she herself was Jewish, she found the CCM's programs to be the most effective – far more effective than those of other organizations in Russia.

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### **United Way Moscow**

United Way Moscow serves as another example of the blurring of distinctions between faith-based

and non-faith-based organizations. Recently I asked the director of this charity to comment on her organization's relationships with religious charities in Russia and to describe any differences she perceived between religious and secular charities. My contact with United Way had come through a minister from one of the churches I have been following. The minister, in fact, was participating with the United Way director in a charity golf tournament the very next day, and his congregation was in the final stages of submitting a grant proposal to the United Way for funding to support its charitable feeding programs and homeless shelter initiative. Hence, I was at first taken aback by the United Way director's emphatic insistence that her agency does not work with or support religious organizations. As the director continued, however, the greater import of her statement became clear. While repeating that United Way did not work with religious organizations, the director used hand gestures and facial expressions that suggested that her words were to be understood as an official "party line" statement. She then continued by stating that her agency worked very closely with "non-profit organizations" (*nekommercheskii organizatsii*) like the social ministries affiliated with the specific church I had mentioned.

By invoking the term "non-profit," or "non-commercial," the United Way director pointed to an important legal and symbolic distinction in how charitable organizations are classified in Russia today. From the perspective of the Russian state, officially registered "non-profit" organizations are classified as secular, nongovernmental organizations, and they adhere to federal regulations governing accounting practices, tax reporting, and employment for secular organizations. This formal registration also enables such NGOs to apply for federal funding from the Russian state and to work officially with state agencies. It is certainly the case that many NGOs – both domestic and foreign – currently working in Russia are not officially registered as "non-profits," which thereby limits their ability to provide services, solicit donations, and protect their clients. Yet among religious congregations, a recent trend has been to create separate "non-profit" arms to administer their social ministries. Hence, when the United Way director said that her agency did not work with religious organizations, she was referencing an official legal and semantic set of categories rather than denying actual collaboration with religious communities.

Officially designated "non-profits" inhabit a different world from their counterparts, both religious and non-religious, that do not possess this designation. Official non-profits have access to resources and a veneer of legitimacy and credibility denied to non-designated organizations. More significantly, when FBOs become transformed into official "non-profits," they divest themselves of their religious qualities and move increasingly in a "secular" direction. Yet I would hesitate to suggest that "non-profit" FBOs ever truly lose their "religious" ethos and move completely into the realm of "the secular." Even though none of the "non-profit" FBOs I encountered use their social services to proselytize or even ask participants to reveal their religious background, and even though staff, volunteers, and affiliates generally downplay

Development officials and scholars are curiously reluctant to acknowledge—even hostile to concede—the considerable social services work accomplished by FBOs in Russia.

or deny the faith-based aspect of the programs they support, there is no denying that these are religious organizations whose programs emerged out of particular theological concerns for compassion and justice.

Just as substantial numbers of FBOs in Russia have taken on more secular hues, so too, many secular entities have increasingly assumed roles more commonly associated with religious agencies. Institutions generally thought of as secular actors – state agencies, political parties, and businesses – are increasingly engaging in the work of championing tradition, defending morality, and preserving religious heritage. Conversely, institutions typically associated with the religious sphere are increasingly engaging in rebuilding Russia’s infrastructure, opening schools, renovating and supporting orphanages, providing health care, and serving as liaisons with international human rights groups such as the United Nations Humanitarian Council on Refugees.

### Civic Ecumenism

These institutional reconfigurations and their blurring of religious/secular distinctions highlight the artificiality and ineffectiveness of “religious” versus “secular,” particularly in the case of non-profit FBOs. For the sake of greater clarity I propose the notion of “civic ecumenism” to capture the convergences and collaborations among diverse “religious” and “secular” actors. What seems to be the common motivation of clergy, staff, volunteers, donors, and congregants from radically different backgrounds and communities is a shared ethic of compassion and social justice and a desire to promote the public welfare of a robust Russian nation. As a result, the cooperative ventures of various groups entail civic responsibility that both encompasses and transcends religious and secular distinctions. Non-profit FBOs value the welfare of the whole, that is, the public, and the welfare of the individual over the interests of the state, the church, or the market, thereby challenging narrow definitions of what constitutes religious organizations. In fact, field observations suggest that FBOs functioning in the spirit of “civic ecumenism” demonstrate greater flexibility, greater tolerance, and greater effectiveness than would otherwise be possible if they were forced into the narrow confines of either a strictly “religious” or “secular” identity. ♦

## Character Development in Russian Orphanages:

### A Pilot Program

Beryl Hugen, Lauren Vander Plas Baker, and Anastasia Konovalova

Calvin College (Grand Rapids, Michigan) and the Russian-American Institute (Moscow) conducted a joint research study in the summer of 2008 designed to test the effectiveness of “Life at the Crossroads.” This curriculum, developed by Campus Crusade for Christ, seeks to foster healthy relationships, positive character development, faith-based sex education, and the development of critical life skills.

### Why a Youth Development Program?

Russia’s public care system has responsibility for nearly one million children. These youth usually leave public care at the age of 16, homeless and jobless, with in most cases only crime, suicide, prostitution, and HIV/AIDS awaiting their futures.

During the 2007-2008 school year, the non-profit

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Gerald W. Creed and Janine R. Wedel, “Second Thoughts from the Second World: Interpreting Aid in Post-Communist Eastern Europe,” *Human Organization* 56 (No. 3, 1997): 253-64; Mark G. Field and Judyth L. Twigg, eds., *Russia’s Torn Safety Nets: Health and Social Welfare during the Transition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); Janine R. Wedel, *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe, 1989-1998* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998); and Anne White, “Charity, Self-Help and Politics in Russia, 1985-91,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 45 (No. 5, 1993): 788.

<sup>2</sup>Melissa L. Caldwell, “Placing Faith in Development: FBOs and Russia’s Development Narrative,” unpublished manuscript under review.

<sup>3</sup>John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Gediminas Lankauskas, “On Modern Christians, Consumption, and the Value of National Identity in Post-Soviet Lithuania,” *Ethnos* 67 (No. 3, 2002): 320-44; Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov’: Sovremennoe sostoyanie i aktual’nye problemy* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2004); Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup>An exception is Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>John Witte, Jr., and Michael Bourdeaux, eds., *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

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[Orphans] usually leave public care at the age of 16, homeless and jobless, with in most cases only crime, suicide, prostitution, and HIV/AIDS awaiting their futures.

### Curriculum Review: What Works?

First, a positive approach needs to be an essential part of any youth development program. Research indicates that, in any type of prevention program, risk factors and protective factors must both be addressed. Risk factors focus on avoiding negative outcomes, while protective factors focus on the potential for

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**Character Development in Russian Orphanages** (continued from page 3)

positive outcomes. In other words, it is appropriate to teach students to stay away from drugs, but they should also be taught how to get involved in community service.

Likewise, youth develop morally in both cognitive ways—doing what is right—and emotional ways—believing what is right. Morality is inextricably linked to character, a complex set of psychological characteristics that includes moral action, personality, and reasoning.

Teaching life skills is a large part of youth development programs, with the goal being to help students build good character by becoming productive and giving back to their community. In life skills training, students practice saying “no,” but also learn steps in making good decisions. With increasing age, the capacity of youth for moral development increases. Major influences are parents, the number of a youth’s other adult relationships, and peers, with whom youth spend the greatest amount of time. Because relationships are crucial to the moral development of youth, character development *must* focus on building quality relationships. To succeed, curriculum needs to be coupled with an environment in which students feel they can be vulnerable and honest.

“Life at the Crossroads” is a comprehensive community-based approach to youth development that includes aspects of many other strategies. It focuses on teaching students to build “social capital,” that is, positive relationships.

**Methodology**

According to the Ansell-Casey Foundation (Seattle, Washington), whose methods were used in this study, the effectiveness of a program is determined by measuring program goals and outcomes. Social skills, educational and vocational development, finances, housing, transportation, physical development, and self-care are typically the best indicators of change. In 20 orphanages in the Kostroma, Vladimir, and Ryazan Regions of Russia, students were paired with

adult mentors to complete the “Life at the Crossroads” curriculum. Changes to the material were minimal and solely for the purpose of adapting it to the Russian context.

In Phase One, prior to the introduction of the “Life at the Crossroads,” students were asked, along with their mentors and caregivers, to rate themselves in several areas of development. Phase Two involved the teaching of the curriculum over the course of an entire school year. In Phase Three, students, mentors, and caregivers were once again surveyed using the same Phase One questions.

Sample questions from the pre-test and post-test follow.

**Communication**

- I explain how I am feeling (angry, happy, or worried).
- I ask questions to be sure I understand what’s been said.

**Self Care**

- I can explain how to prevent pregnancy.
- I can take care of minor injuries and illnesses.

**Social Relationships**

- I show appreciation for things others do for me.
- I avoid relationships that hurt or are dangerous.

**Self Esteem**

- I think I have a good sense of humor.
- I feel that I am a likeable person.

**Social Skills**

- I know what is important to me in relationships.
- I can plan and invite peers to social activities.

The limitations of the study included high attrition—one orphanage actually closed mid-way through the study. Also, it took longer to complete the program than originally planned or expected, and the gender demographics of students across regions were not similar.

Four of five specific categories showed positive change from the pre-test to the post-test. The exception was the self esteem category, which may be the result of harsh but realistic assessment by youths of their abilities and knowledge.

**Findings: Was the Program Effective in Creating Positive Change?**

The study documented overall positive change of 14.28 percent (6.96 point increase) measured from pre-test to post-test.

Overall Positive Change of 14.28 Percent (6.96 Points)		
	Pre-test	Post-test
Student	49.71	55.53
Caregiver	45.88	53.61
Mentor	50.65	57.98
Overall	48.75	55.71

Four of five specific categories showed positive change from the pre-test to the post-test. The exception was the self esteem category, which may be the result of harsh but realistic assessment by youths of their abilities and knowledge.

Communication			Self Care		
	Pre-test	Post-test		Pre-test	Post-test
Student	17.78	20.05	Student	17.71	20.64
Caregiver	18.65	31.33	Caregiver	16.36	20.82
Mentor	19.52	21.94	Mentor	18.19	23.08
Overall	18.65	24.44	Overall	17.42	21.51
Percent Increase: 31.09 (5.8 points)			Percent Increase: 23.5 (4.09 points)		

Social Relationships			Self Esteem*		
	Pre-test	Post-test		Pre-test	Post-test
Student	14.24	14.37	Student		
Caregiver	10.79	12.57	Caregiver		
Mentor	12.94	14.01	Mentor		
Overall	12.66	13.65	Overall	12.46	11.65
Percent Increase: 7.83 (.99 points)			Percent Decrease: 6.5 (.81 points)		

Social Skills*		
	Pre-test	Post-test
Student		
Caregiver		
Mentor		
Overall	7.11	8.30
Percent Increase: 7.83 (.99 points)		

\*Student, caregiver, and mentor surveys were not tabulated separately in these categories.

Other notable findings were revealed through questionnaires completed by students after each unit.

- Students overwhelmingly agreed that good relationships are vital. They ranked family, education, and relationships as their greatest needs; success, fame, and money were ranked least important.
- Students commented that they learned the most about respect and responsibility. They especially appreciated learning about setting boundaries for self and others.
- Students concluded that the chief reason to remain sexually abstinent is to avoid diseases. They were especially influenced by learning about the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.
- In learning about judicious decision-making, students indicated that their friends had the greatest influence and that it is important to learn how to say “no” firmly.
- Students reported insights gained in building future relationships.
- In evaluating the entire program, student comments included: “Helps my future,” and “Helps with responsibility and provides knowledge of diseases.”
- Fifty-eight percent of students felt comfortable interacting in a classroom setting.
- Eighty-six percent thought that the program was useful and practical for their lives.
- Sixty-five percent said that the topics covered were interesting.

Mentors reported good youth participation and were often able to follow up the lessons with personal conversations. Much evidence was found to support the fact that healthy relationships with adults are extremely important in the development of youth.

In summary, the “Life at the Crossroads” program led to positive outcomes in the 20 participating Russian orphanages, despite the fact that positive developmental maturation is seldom attributed to Russian orphans. Youth reported significantly

increased knowledge relating to value-based decision making, positive relationships, and developing and living a healthy lifestyle. Youth found the lessons both informative and useful for their current life circumstances.

Findings underscored the importance of supportive relationships in the lives of youth. The length of time youth experienced being in a relationship with both their caretakers and their mentor was positively correlated with higher program outcome scores. Additionally, both mentors and youth reported the importance of their relationships in the overall success of the curriculum. All participants in the program emphasized the central role trust and mutual respect played in the implementation of the curriculum. Given the fact that the program was primarily a voluntary group activity, the high levels of attendance over an extended period of time speak to the strength of the relationships developed and nurtured throughout the program. ♦

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Beryl Hugen, Lauren Vander Plas Baker, and Anastasia Konovalova, “Building Youth of Character: A Program Evaluation of ‘Life at the Crossroads: Life Skills for Character Development Curriculum in Russian Orphanages,’ ” Summer 2008.*

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*Editor’s note: For additional information on the “Life at the Crossroads” curriculum, see Matt Kavgian, “An HIV/AIDS Ministry Partnership in Eastern Europe and Russia,” East-West Church and Ministry Report 15 (Fall 2007): 1-3.*

The “Life at the Crossroads” program led to positive outcomes in the 20 participating Russian orphanages, despite the fact that positive developmental maturation is seldom attributed to Russian orphans.

## Correction

The editor regrets the omission of portions of two sentences in the article by Andrei E. Blinkov, “Characteristics of Growing Churches in Russia: A Pentecostal Case Study,” in the previous issue of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 18 (Spring 2010), p. 11, column two. The two sentences above “Personal Spiritual Disciplines” should read:

5. In the opinion of Russian ministers, among all spiritual disciplines, the highest correlation with church growth occurs with the existence of spiritual mentors. Participants from fast-growing churches were more than twice as likely to have spiritual mentors as their colleagues from stagnating churches.

# Korean Baptist Missions in Kazakhstan

Weonjin Choi

South Korea has become a major source of Christian missionaries. As of 2008 its 62,000 churches were responsible for a worldwide missionary force of 20,840.<sup>1</sup> Korean Baptists account for ten percent of Korean missionaries serving in Central Asia (89 of 889) and approximately 22 percent of Korean missionaries serving in Kazakhstan (48 of 230).<sup>2</sup>

## First Steps

The Baptist World Congress, held in Seoul, Korea, in August 1990, served as the catalyst for the beginning of Korean Baptist missionary work in Central Asia in 1991. Congress executive director Ki-Man Han and Minister of National Security Services Sei-Jik Park invited approximately 250 Russian representatives to attend the congress and furnished their accommodations, meals, and gifts.<sup>3</sup>

After returning home, Russian Evangelical Christian-Baptist leaders extended an invitation to visit Russia to congress director Han and Bill Fudge, coordinator of Cooperative Services International at the International Mission Board (IMB) of the U.S. Southern Baptist Convention. Thus, in 23-30 November 1990, Han and Fudge visited not only Moscow but also Tashkent, Uzbekistan; Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; and Almaty, Kazakhstan. During this trip Russia's Evangelical Christians-Baptists agreed to assist Korean Baptist missionaries preparing to serve in Central Asia. At the same time Byung-Ki You, representing Korean Baptists, and Bill Fudge, representing Southern Baptists, came to an oral agreement to divide their mission efforts in Central Asia (comity arrangement) whereby Korean Baptists would work in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and Southern Baptists would focus on Uzbekistan.<sup>4</sup> Soon afterwards in March 1991 the Korean Baptist Foreign Mission Board (FMB) sent 15,000 Korean-Russian Bibles to Russian Baptists and in August 1991, 15,000 more.

The first Korean Baptist missionary to Kazakhstan was Dong-Sung Kim. In February 1991, Kim visited Moscow, Tashkent, Bishkek, and Almaty, where in the latter city he presented the gospel to resident Koryoins (ethnic Koreans living in Central Asia). There he founded Almaty Hosanna Baptist Church, the first church planted by a Korean Baptist missionary.<sup>5</sup> Koryoin Aleksandr Han currently leads this fellowship, now renamed Almaty Central Baptist Church. This congregation alone has planted 11 daughter churches and sends ministers to villages and to other countries.<sup>6</sup>

Next, Joshua Chung and his family went to Shemkent, Kazakhstan, where they established Shemkent Immanuel Church, and Seon-Taek Oh and his family went to Bishkek where they planted Bishkek Somang Church. Russian Baptist churches were a great help to Korean missionaries during this period.

## The Role of Ethnic Koreans Living in Central Asia

Koryoins also played an important role in the establishment of Korean Baptist missions in the region. They first entered the Russian Empire in the 1860s via the Pacific maritime region (Primorsky Krai), escaping hunger and Japanese rule in Korea.<sup>7</sup> Then in 1937 a paranoid Joseph Stalin ordered the forcible removal to Central Asia of ethnic Koreans living in the Russian Far-East. Deportees numbered 171,782, with 76,525 sent to Uzbekistan and 95,256 settled in Kazakhstan.<sup>8</sup>

Since 1991, regardless of their religious background, Koryoins helped Korean missionaries when they encountered them. Koryoins who could speak Korean and Russian played a particularly crucial role as interpreters when Korean Baptist missionaries started their ministries.

## Outreach to Kazakhs

Some pioneer Korean Baptist missionaries sought to reach Muslim groups. The first was Min-Ho Chu and his family who entered Kazakhstan in September 1991. Chu's family came through *Senim*, a humanitarian aid organization.<sup>9</sup> Following four years of intensive language study, Chu completed a Korean-Kazakh dictionary.<sup>10</sup> In his effort to reach Kazakhs, Chu organized a Kazakh-American Cultural-Exchange Festival in the summer of 1991. Many evangelical Christians and mission agencies assisted, including *Senim*, which hired 150 translators, 60 of whom accepted Christ. The first ethnic Kazakh church was formed from these converts. By the end of 1992 the church had 29 baptized Kazakh members.<sup>11</sup> Todd Jamison summarizes the long-term results of the two-week festival:

First the festival served as a launching point for various projects that [Peter] Kent initiated.... The second result was the huge influx of laborers and the initiation of church planting efforts.... The third, and by far most important, result of the festival was the raising of awareness of mission opportunities among the Kazaks.<sup>12</sup>

Chu next planned a "Korean-Koryoin Culture Exchange Festival," which was held in Moscow, Bishkek, Shymkent, and Almaty, 23 October–2 November 1991. Twenty-two people attended the festival from Korea, including Korean Baptist pastors Ki-Man Han, Hong-Beom Hong, Sang-Dae Lee, Tae-Ok Lee, Tae-Gyu You, and Byung-Ki You; IMB missionary Bill Fudge; businessmen from Yoida Baptist Church; and medical doctors from Busan Baptist Hospital. Korean Baptist pioneer missionaries prepared the basis for church planting through a medical-service program, business meetings, a musical concert, as well as church planting.<sup>13</sup>

## Salem Church

Chu, along with coworkers Ki-Sup Shin, In-Ja Seo, and Andrew Song, who joined him in 1992, established Salem Church on 26 April 1996, with 50 church members.<sup>14</sup> This church became the first Kazakh church planted by Korean Baptists in Kazakhstan and was one of the first efforts to reach the Turkic people of Central Asia.<sup>15</sup> Salem Church, which now has some 500 adult members and 150 children, has, in turn, planted 12 churches, including five non-registered fellowships. It also has established the nonprofit Kazakhstan Leadership Development Center.<sup>16</sup> Through the center, Salem operates a computer-language center, a dental hospital, a young-adult leadership-development center, and an alcohol and drug rehabilitation center. In 1995 the church sent two families to Mongolia and China as long-term ministers.<sup>17</sup>

## Theological Education

As missionary work began to flourish and the number of churches and believers increased,

Korean Baptist missionaries question whether the Bible mandates reproducing leaders as quickly as Garrison proposes.



Korean Baptist missionaries urgently needed to train indigenous leadership. To meet this need Korean Baptists opened the Central Asia Baptist Theological Seminary in 1996. In 2002, supported by South Korea's Yoida Baptist Church, Korean Baptist missionaries introduced intensive theological training for local leaders in Almaty. By 2006, 116 local leaders had graduated from the seminary and were faithfully ministering in their home churches. In addition, some have planted churches in other countries.<sup>18</sup>

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### Church Growth

By 2005, Korean Baptist mission efforts had led to the formation of 83 churches in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, with 6,698 believers, including 2,187 baptized members.<sup>19</sup> By 2007 Korean Baptist missionaries had planted 52 churches in Kazakhstan with more than 5,000 believers, including 2,500 baptized members.<sup>20</sup>

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### Church Planting Strategies

From the beginning the churches planted by Korean Baptist missionaries in Almaty (Hosanna), Almaty (Salem), Almaty (Dunamis), Shemkent (Immanuel), Bishkek (Qyzylorda Somang), and Ust-Kamenogorsk (Rodnik) focused on discipleship training and the planting of numerous daughter churches. Church multiplication appears to be a hallmark of the Korean church-planting movement in Central Asia.

The Korean Baptist missionary concept of church planting, however, differs from that of IMB missionary David Garrison. His understanding of a Church Planting Movement (CPM), as defined in his widely circulated book of the same name, is “a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweep through a people group or population.”<sup>21</sup> By way of contrast, most Korean Baptist missionaries do not necessarily focus on speed. While Garrison stresses rapidity as a scriptural principle, Korean Baptist missionaries question whether the Bible mandates rapid reproduction. Many Korean missionaries warn that reproducing leaders as quickly as Garrison proposes may lead to weak or immature leadership and produce unhealthy churches. The Koreans argue that discipleship training is time-consuming but absolutely necessary. Following this deliberate approach, however, has meant that many Korean Baptist missionaries have remained in the churches they first planted. In Kazakhstan to date only two missionaries have entrusted leadership of national congregations to indigenous pastors. Overcoming this problem has become a major concern of Korean mission leaders.

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### Accounting for Korean Missionary Success

Various factors have assisted Korean Baptist missionaries in reaching Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries. First, Koreans and Central Asians share common racial and linguistic ties. Koreans trace their ethnic origins to the Mongol-Altai people group, and Koreans and Kazakhs both speak an Altaic language. As a result, Korean missionaries are able to learn Central Asian languages more easily than can Western missionaries. Korean missionaries typically learn the Kazakh language two to three times faster than Western missionaries.<sup>22</sup>

Korean and Kazakh cultures also share a number of similarities, including the custom of sitting, eating, and sleeping on the floor. Koreans understand the

hierarchical nature of Kazakh society, Muslim honor-shame culture, strong family values, and strong respect for elders. Ease of language acquisition and cultural adaptation greatly facilitate Korean missionary success in Kazakhstan.

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### Understanding Traditional Religion

Even though the majority faith of Kazakhstan is officially Islam, in practice it is folk Islam, incorporating several elements of shamanism and animism. Korean missionaries from non-Christian backgrounds, who readily comprehend such Kazakh religious elements as ancestor worship, animism, and shamanism, can easily share with Kazakhs from their own experience how to follow Jesus in such contexts.

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### Similar National Experience and Interest

Kazakhs also share with Koreans the experience of colonial conquest and annexation. Kazakhstan was forcibly occupied by Russia for some 70 years while Korea was an imperial possession of Japan for 36 years. Korean missionaries empathize with Kazakh national indignation toward Russia. The fact that Korean missionaries are not seen as imperialistic Westerners has been a crucial advantage in reaching Kazakhstan's Muslim population. In addition, Kazakhstan is impressed with Korea's rapid economic growth and desires to see its own economy follow the same course. Finally, the substantial number of Central Asians of Korean descent (Koryoins) has eased the entry of missionaries into Kazakhstan.

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### Spiritual Factors

Fervent prayer is one of the most significant aspects of Korean Christians. Their early-morning prayers, all-night prayers, prayer mountains, and prayer with fasting are known worldwide. This spiritual fervency has given Korean missionaries a distinct advantage in sharing the gospel among Kazakhs and other Central Asians.<sup>23</sup>

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### Unique Korean Qualities

Korean missionary Matthew Jeong attributes Korean missionary success to devotional zeal, passion for the lost, fervent prayer, hospitality, obedience to authority, perseverance, and generosity.<sup>24</sup> In particular, the Korean fighting spirit and tenacity were forged through the Japanese occupation, the Korean War, and economic distress. Korean believers have a great pioneering spirit and a willingness to face danger and hardship to reach people with the gospel. Since Korean Baptist missionaries are highly educated, they also can readily facilitate community-based projects including computer training, Tai Kwon-Do clubs, English and Korean classes, business centers, sports teams, and professional training schools. ♦

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

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Korea World Missions Association, “2008 Seogyosa Pasong Hyeonhwang [The Status of Missionary Sending in 2008]”; accessed 6 May 2010; available from <http://kwma.org/>; Korea World Missions Association, “Seogyosa Pasong Hyeonhwang [The Status of Missionary Sending]”; accessed 6 May 2010; available from <http://ekma.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Email to author from Ki-Tae Kim, chairman of the Central Asia Association of the Foreign Mission Board

The fact that Korean missionaries are not seen as imperialistic Westerners has been a crucial advantage in reaching Kazakhstan's Muslim population.

(Continued on page 8)

## Korean Baptist Missions (continued from page 7)

of the Korean Baptist Convention, 3 December 2007; Todd Jamison, "Reaching the Muslim Majority: The Responsibility of the Korean Church in Evangelizing the Kazakhs of Central Asia," unpublished paper.

<sup>3</sup> Shin, "Jangang Asia Gweonyeok Bogo [Central Asia's Regional Report]" in 2006 *Chimryegyo Seongyo Jidoja Forum [The Forum for Baptist Mission Leaders in 2006]*, ed. Soon-Sang Park (Seoul: Foreign Mission Board of the Korea Baptist Convention, 2006), 50; and You, "Chimryegyo Haeyoeseongyohoe Yeoksa," 29. Sei-Jik Park, who is an ordained deacon of Yeoi-do Baptist Church, served as a director of the National Intelligence Service in 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Author's interview with Byung-Ki You, 1 August 2007, MP3 recording, Ilsan, Korea. Byung-Ki You served as FMB president from 1988 to 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Dong-Sung Kim, "Gyohoe Gaecheok-ui Gyeongheom-eul Tonghan Baeum [A Lesson through Church Planting Experience]," *The Baptist World Mission* 38 (1995): 4.

<sup>6</sup> Seok-Ki Kim, e-mail message to author, 7 October 2007. Korean Baptists also placed their first missionary in Kyrgyzstan in 1991 and in Uzbekistan in 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Jeanyoung Lee, "The Korean Chinese (Chosonjok) in the Russian Far East: A Research Note," 164 [on-line]; accessed 10 September 2007; available from <http://gsti.mis.edu/CEAS-PUB/200108Lee.pdf>; Internet.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Senim*, which is the Kazak word for trust, was developed by Peter Kent as the primary platform for humanitarian and cultural exchange. It was officially registered in 1990 as the first American organization in Kazakhstan. By 1993, *Altyn Alma*, its Kazak partner, withdrew from the joint venture. *Senim* then registered under the title of an American enterprise. Todd Jamison, "A Historical Study of Evangelism and Contextualization of the Gospel among the Kazak People of Central Asia," Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999, 105.

<sup>10</sup> Min-Ho Chu, interview by author, 1 June 2007, MP3 recording, Fort Worth, TX.

<sup>11</sup> According to Todd Jamison, "By 1989, the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention had a non-residential missionary assigned specifically to the Kazakh people. By the following year, just prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, this missionary was able to facilitate the first long-term workers into Kazakhstan, who were intentionally focused on reaching Kazakhs." Jamison, "Reaching the Muslim Majority;" See also Jamison, "A Historical Study," 104-09.

<sup>12</sup> Jamison, "A Historical Study," 107. For more information, see "Baptist Workers Extend Hand of Friendship to People of Central Asia's Forgotten

Cities," *Word and Way*, 13 February 1992, 16; and Beth Sammons, "Baptists Visit Closed Nuclear Site," *The Commission* 55 (January 1992), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Ki-Sup Shin, "Seongyo Hyeonjang-ui Seongyo Jojik-e Gwanhan Yeongu: Jungang Asia Chimryogyo Seongyoreul Chungsimeuro [A Study of Mission Structure in Mission Field: Focused on the Baptist Missions in Central Asia]," Th.M. thesis, Korea Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001, 39-40.

<sup>14</sup> Min-Ho Chu, e-mail to author, 27 September 2007. The Salem Church was officially registered in December 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Chu, however, remembers that *Rakum* (Grace) and Joy Fellowship churches started before Salem Church. Min-Ho Chu, interview by author, 1 June 2007, MP3 recording, Fort Worth, TX.

<sup>16</sup> Min-Ho Chu, e-mail to author, 27 September 2007.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Hong-Bae Kim, "Jungang Asia Sinhakgyo Sayeok-ui Hoegowa Jeonmang [Retrospect and Prospect of Central Asia Baptist Theological Seminary]," in 2006; *Chimryegyo Seongyo Jidoja Forum [Forum for Baptist Mission Leaders]* in 2006, ed. Soon-Sang Park (Seoul: The Foreign Mission Board of the Korea Baptist Convention 2006), 149-50.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>20</sup> Ki-Tae Kim, e-mail message to author, 3 December 2007. Kim is chairman of the Central Asia Association of the Foreign Mission Board of the Korea Baptist Convention.

<sup>21</sup> David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Jamison, "A Historical Study," 173.

<sup>23</sup> Jamison, "Reaching the Muslim Majority."

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Jeong, "Hanguk Sayeokia-ui Segyehwa-wa Hyeobryeok [Globalization and Cooperation of Korean Missionaries], paper presented at the Annual Consultation for Korean Missionaries, Kyrgyzstan, 17 August 2006, electronic document, 10. Matthew Jeong obtained this data from the survey through questionnaire and interviews from 2001 to 2005.

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Weonjin Choi, "An Appraisal of Korean Baptist Missions in Kazakhstan, Central Asia," Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008. This dissertation can be purchased from VDM Verlag Dr. Mueller e.k. for \$111.*

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From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, the number of Millet churches increased from less than five to approximately 100 with, at one point, an estimated 10,000 Millet church attendees.

## Conversion and Defection among Roma (Gypsies) in Bulgaria

Richard Y. Hibbert

### Roma Church Growth...

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, and especially beginning in 1989 with the increased freedoms following the fall of Communism, thousands of Turkish Roma (Gypsies) in Bulgaria began to self-identify as Christians. (Gypsies, who call themselves "Millet," traditionally have self-identified as Muslims.) In this period, the number of Millet churches increased from less than five to approximately 100 with, at one point, an estimated 10,000 Millet church attendees.<sup>1</sup> In

a 1995 survey of 1,844 Bulgarian Roma conducted by Iлона Tomova, 46 percent of respondents were Turkish and 15 percent belonged to Protestant churches.<sup>2</sup> Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov noted that Protestant churches among Roma in Bulgaria were "especially effective and spreading fast among the inhabitants of large urban ghettos."<sup>3</sup>

### ... Followed by Church Decline

The rapid numerical growth of this church



movement stalled, however, during the second half of the 1990s. A survey taken in the first half of 2007 revealed a total of 99 churches and 6,180 attendees at Turkish-speaking churches in Bulgaria.<sup>4</sup> The decline in Millet church attendance from 1989 to 2007 amounted to 29 percent. Turkish-speaking weekly attendance in Bulgarian Protestant church meetings increased from 525 in 1989, to an approximate average of 980 in 1995, peaking in 2001 at approximately 1,065, and declining by 2007 to approximately 753. As the author of this study, I can add that from my personal observation of living and working fulltime as a missionary among the Millet from 1992 to 2001, and from five subsequent visits to Bulgaria, the number of church attendees declined significantly between 1995 and 2007.

### Demographics

Traditionally Muslim, Turkish-speaking Millet number between 300,000 and 400,000 in Bulgaria. While they tend to identify themselves to outsiders as Turks, the latter do not accept them as such.<sup>5</sup> The majority lives in the eastern half of Bulgaria, mostly in segregated urban neighborhoods, some of these in “extreme slum conditions.”<sup>6</sup>

Roma in Bulgaria have traditionally affiliated with either Orthodox Christianity or Islam. Ilona Tomova’s 1995 survey of Roma in Bulgaria revealed that 44 percent of Roma respondents were Orthodox, 39 percent were Muslims, and 15 percent belonged to various Protestant churches.<sup>7</sup>

### Reasons for Growth According to Church Leaders

The reason church leaders most frequently gave for Turkish-speaking Roma coming to Protestant faith was the occurrence of a miracle, nearly always in the form of physical healing. Some conversions occurred because Roma saw the results of a miracle in another person’s life: “God did lots of miracles and people saw these.” People looked for help from believers when they were sick partly because they did not charge money:

The main reason people come to faith is because of sickness. They get sick and they look for help. Doctors want money, and most of the Millet don’t have money. And they turn to God and God works through us to help them, and then they are happy, and they start coming to church.<sup>8</sup>

The second most prominent reason given by leaders for people coming to Protestant faith was the togetherness and love of the believers, which helped to overcome the initial opposition to Christianity in an otherwise Muslim neighborhood. A practical demonstration of this love was that believers often visited sick people in their homes and prayed for them. This often resulted in healing.

Third, people came to faith because they saw a change in the life of someone they knew who had become a believer. The radical transformation in lifestyle of one of the first male converts in one village affected many others: “Many people in the village heard that God had done something in my life and some people panicked. They understood that the Lord exists and that he is able to do anything, and then lots of people started coming to church.”

A fourth reason for people joining churches (given by two leaders) was the beginning of a new church meeting or the acquisition of a larger building for

worship. For example, when a pastor and his wife moved into one Millet neighborhood,

They started a house meeting. After that, the number of people increased a lot. God saw this and wanted lots of people. So what did we need to do? People came and helped us make a church building. God filled that building. We became 300 people.

Two final reasons for Millet coming to Protestant faith were mentioned only in passing: evangelism (cited by two leaders) and material help (cited by one leader): “Some people came because something was being given out in the church.”

### An Overview of Reasons for Decline

Several possible reasons for the decline in Millet churches since the late 1990s have been offered including the negative effects of foreign material and financial aid to churches, temporary “rice Christianity” (resulting in conversions for material gain), the transition from primarily female to male leadership associated with an increasingly authoritarian leadership style, poorly contextualized patterns of leadership adopted from Bulgarian churches, rapidly worsening poverty compelling Millet to live and work abroad, a lack of adequate discipleship of new converts, and Islamic proselytizing.<sup>9</sup>

The literature on religious defection offers a range of possible explanations. These differ from situation to situation, but most relevant to the decline of the Millet Protestant church movement are four of the five reasons for defection noted in Jorge Gomez’s study: 1) sinful conduct of some church leaders, including 2) misuse of money, 3) a sense of shame about one’s lifestyle not matching the standards of the gospel, and 4) pressure from family and friends.<sup>10</sup> Eugene Nida’s suggestion that religious movements experience decline especially because of poor leadership supports the first of these reasons.<sup>11</sup> Reasons for defection other than those suggested by Gomez, which are especially relevant in the Millet context, are a low level of interaction between newcomers and existing believers,<sup>12</sup> and a lack of post-baptismal care.<sup>13</sup>

Studies of conversion suggest possible deficiencies in the process of conversion that may be associated with later Millet defections: 1) A lack of meaningful ritual to demonstrate conversion or to signal incorporation into the church; 2) insufficient development of social interaction with church members; and 3) motivations for conversion that are primarily utilitarian, such as healing, without sufficient understanding of the full meaning of the gospel. Regarding inadequate social interaction, a number of studies suggest that the inability of newcomers to develop and maintain strong, satisfying bonds with church members and pastors leads to church departures.<sup>14</sup>

### Reasons for Decline According to Church Leaders

Reasons given by local Protestant pastors and regional leaders for people leaving their churches may be grouped into the following categories: Theological reasons, leader-related reasons, work-related reasons, sin-related reasons, the increasing influence of Islam, church-related reasons, and pressure from other people.

#### Theological Reasons for Church Losses

Nearly all surveyed church leaders offered

The reason church leaders most frequently gave for Turkish-speaking Roma coming to Protestant faith was the occurrence of a miracle, nearly always in the form of physical healing.

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## Conversion and Defection *(continued from page 9)*

theological reasons for decline, explaining that churches were being “shaken” or “sifted.” Those who were not true believers were being “weeded out” from the churches.

### **Leader-Related Reasons for Church Losses**

The first and most-often-noted reason given by church leaders for church decline related to church leaders themselves. They cited infighting among themselves, leaders caught in adultery and other sins, and leaders leaving the country to earn money. All six leaders surveyed mentioned conflict and divisions among leaders themselves. Their inability to resolve disputes with each other had a widespread negative effect on other believers’ attitudes toward the church.

The earliest conflict identified in church leaders’ interviews occurred in 1993. In this case a Bulgarian pastor was said to have steered material aid from West European churches away from a Millet church to an ethnic Bulgarian church. The next incident occurred in 1995, growing out of accusations that several leaders allowed believers who committed adultery to continue in the church. A final conflict occurred in 2006 over the use of foreign funds: two pastors disagreed over the location of a kitchen to provide food for the poor. As a result, one pastor confided, “Many, many people grew cold toward the faith because of our argument. We were left with only 10-20 people in our church. We—the leaders—are the main reason people have left.” Unfortunately, each conflict led to a church split.

Another pastor noted that in one case infighting had occurred between pastors and older believers who had become envious of younger believers who were given responsibilities in the church. As a result, “The number of believers decreased because of the lack of agreement and the arguments in the churches.”

Sin in leaders’ lives was the second reason cited by leaders for people leaving the church. Every one of the leaders in one town discussed an incident of adultery between two prominent believers. Although not pastors, the man and woman involved were both counted among the church leadership. One pastor related, “This event was covered over, but many people were shaken. There were many people in the church before that. The church was filled. But after this event, many people abandoned the faith.”

One leader explained that some people left one church because its leader “used to drink and smoke and use drugs.” In another case several church leaders took money from political parties during elections with the understanding that they would encourage their congregations to vote a certain way. “People heard that some of the leaders had taken that money and used it to buy things for themselves. Some people left the church because of that.”

Two leaders mentioned that pastors leaving to work in Western Europe had led to congregational losses. The decline in one village church was largely the result of a pastor working in another country on two occasions for several months at a time without telling anyone he was going. As a result, the church failed to meet for several months.

### **Work-Related Reasons for Church Losses**

The second-most-cited reason for people leaving churches related to work. Three interrelated aspects of work-related defections emerged: poverty, “running after money” abroad, and “growing cold.” According to

most leaders, poverty led many people to seek work in Western Europe. Decreasing employment opportunities for Millet in Bulgaria became pronounced beginning about 2004. One leader clarified that work in itself is not the problem:

But it’s bad when they run after money and it gets in the way of their relationship with Jesus. People are poor and need to earn money, and that often means they spend all their time earning money and don’t give time to God or to the meetings. Their relationship with God grows cold. There are many people like that.

In the same vein, another leader mentioned that over the previous two years, “a coldness has entered; people have given themselves to the world and to working.” He contrasted this with the warmth that was in the church five and ten years ago. One of the leaders shed light on the subject:

I grew cold in my faith while in Italy. Because I experienced this, I understand how it happens to others. Coldness comes when we work every day for five or six months, and people start to become greedy for money. You start to work continually. You have left your country, your wife, and your children to work. You start to think only about working to earn money. That’s how people grow cold. Once you stop coming to meetings – once, twice, three times – you start gradually to break away from spirituality, and the Holy Spirit starts to withdraw from you.

Another respondent also described the extent of defections caused by people working abroad:

Some don’t return, while others who do return only come back for a couple of months and then go again, and they aren’t able to keep the love they first had in the faith. From our church, about 60 people have left with their families to work abroad. The ones who have returned have often stopped coming to meetings.

### **Known Sins Contributing to Church Losses**

Some converts, after being in the church for a while, could not find the spiritual strength to abandon a life of sin. These individuals:

Stop coming because of lack of money and they know they won’t be able to steal, but they like stealing, and they realize that God’s way is narrow. They think, “How am I going to earn enough money to live as a believer? And what will my life be like with only one wife?”

One leader noted that adultery was a common sin among men when working overseas without their wives.

### **The Increasing Influence of Islam**

In some villages with high percentages of Turks, Millet churches faced strong opposition from the local Muslim *imam* as well as from some Muslim villagers. Nevertheless, few left the church because of the growing influence of Islam. But for those who did abandon Christian faith, the next step sometimes was conversion to Islam. One leader shared that since 2000 “Many of the people who turned from the faith went to the mosque. Some of them had been coming to church for years.” In particular, young people became Muslims after 1995 following the incident of adultery noted earlier.

The first and most-often-noted reason given by church leaders for church decline related to church leaders themselves: Infighting, leaders caught in sins, and leaders leaving the country to earn money.

### Other Factors Leading to Church Losses

Conflict among believers led to some church departures. In one case, two brothers worked together but one ran away with the money both had earned. Then the aggrieved brother reacted in anger and left the faith. In another case, a congregational split over ethnic tensions led to almost all Millet converts abandoning the church. Also, a denominational policy requiring church members to be baptized, to give a tithe of their income, and to attend worship services regularly caused some people to leave the church. As one leader explained,

Maybe the hardest thing for a Millet to do is to give money. Maybe this is our weakest point. Some probably think they are stealing from God by not giving their tithe, feel guilty, and do not feel worthy of going to meetings.

Also, older believers acting harshly toward other church members was said to have led to defections. Some church members were “driving people away by the things they did. They shouted at people and rebuked them saying, ‘You have this problem; you have that problem.’ People got offended and left.”

An additional problem concerned the distribution of food received from Christians outside Bulgaria. This material aid was given only to church members, while people who had attended church but who had not become members felt discriminated against and consequently left the church. Finally, leaders noted that pressure from non-Christian husbands against believing spouses led to church losses. Muslim husbands, in particular, pressured Christian spouses to abandon their faith. ♦

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

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Publishing, 2001), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Ilona Tomova, *The Gypsies in the Transitional Period* (Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and International Relations, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, “The Relations of Ethnic and Confessional Consciousness of Gypsies in Bulgaria,” *Facta Universitatis: Philosophy and Sociology* 2 (1999), 86.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Otto, “Spreadsheet of Attendees in Millet Churches in 2007,” unpublished paper, May 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Marushiakova and Popov, “Relations,” 86.

<sup>6</sup> Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, *Gypsies (Roma) in Bulgaria* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 96; Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov, “Bulgaria: Ethnic Diversity—A Common Struggle for Equality” in *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Will Guy

(Hatsfield, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 372.

<sup>7</sup> Tomova, *Gypsies*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Y. Hibbert, “Stagnation and Decline Following Rapid Growth in Turkish-Speaking Roma Churches in Bulgaria,” Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity International University, 2008. Editor’s note: Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent direct quotations will be taken from Hibbert’s survey research in his dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> Otto, “Spreadsheet”; David Richards, phone conversation with author, August 2006; Sara Hewitt, email correspondence with author, February 2008; John Taylor, interview with author, combined with Excel file on church attendance with notes on 2001 developments, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Jorge Gomez, “Protestant Growth and Desertion in Costa Rica: Viewed in Relation to Churches with Higher Attrition Rates, Lower Attrition Rates, and More Mobility, as Affected by Evangelism (i.e. Message and Method) and Discipleship Practices (Including Church Discipline),” D. Min. project, Columbia International University, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Eugene Nida, “Dynamics of Church Growth” in *Church Growth and Christian Mission*, ed. by Donald McGavran (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> Allen Swanson, *Mending the Nets: Taiwan Church Growth and Loss in the 1980s* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> John Lofland and Rodney Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver,” *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965), 863-74; Norman Skonovd, “The Process of Defection from Religious Totalism,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis, 1981; Swanson, *Mending the Nets*; Arthur Duck, “Attrition and Retention Factors in Three Pentecostal Churches in Curitiba, Brazil,” Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity International University, 2001; Dean Hoge and David Roozen, “Research on Factors Influencing Church Commitment” in *Understanding Church Growth and Decline 1950-1978* ed. by Dean Hoge and David Roozen (New York: The Philadelphia Press, 1979), 42-68; Janet Jacobs, “Deconversion from Religious Movements: An Analysis of Charismatic Bonding and Spiritual Commitment,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (No. 3, 1987), 294-308.

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Richard Y. Hibbert, “Stagnation and Decline Following Rapid Growth in Turkish-Speaking Roma Churches in Bulgaria,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Trinity International University, 2008.*

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Pressure from non-Christian husbands against believing spouses led to church losses. Muslim husbands, in particular, pressured Christian spouses to abandon their faith.

## Healing the Natashas: Observations on Trafficking Aftercare in Moldova

Andrew Raatz

*Editor’s note: The first portion of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 18 (Summer 2010): 16-15.*

### Children

We did not expect the number of children who have entered the Home of Hope with their mothers. Children bring an entirely different dynamic to aftercare, making the efforts of social workers all the more challenging.

Daily we have to deal with who has the right to discipline children, how children will be disciplined, how to handle jealousy among mothers, and how to enroll children in schools.

On the positive side, women with children have

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## Healing the Natashas *(continued from page 11)*

shown greater stability than other women, nearly always overcoming the temptation to run. Most mothers possess an innate desire to see their children have a better life. Perhaps having a child or children keeps them from returning to their old lifestyle.

We are very committed to keeping mothers and children together, teaching parenting skills to the women as best we can. One resident's referring agency recommended placing a child in a state orphanage because of the expectation that the child's mother was incapable of becoming a responsible parent. We refused to accept the mother without her child and now we are pleased to see that she is slowly learning how to be a wonderful mother.

### Illiteracy

We were surprised by the minimal prior education of girls entering Home of Hope. Nearly all have low literacy levels, some with no reading ability. Our initial plans for job training, English lessons, and computer work have had to take second place to basic reading and writing. One of the early additions to our staff was a teacher who gives the girls Romanian or Russian lessons.

Some of the girls came to us labeled mentally handicapped, but a more accurate description would be traumatized with minimal education. Most of the girls are intelligent, with great sensitivity to reading people's body language. For years their survival depended upon their ability to perceive other's emotions. Thus, though they may be challenged in math or language arts, they score off the charts in reading other people's emotions.

### Attachments to "Boyfriends"

Even after all the demeaning treatment endured by the women we serve, they continue to hold deep attachments to "boyfriends." The women cling to false assumptions of love, frequently overlooking the indignities perpetrated against them by their pimps. We have established a policy of no cell phones in Home of Hope. We also have no visits from men and limit any outside contacts, especially in the first weeks.

### Stress on Staff

We have faced large staff turnover because aftercare for trafficked women is very intense work, and no amount of training can fully prepare one for it. Theoretical training does not always translate into practical ministry skills, with on-the-job training being the best teacher. We work hard to make sure each staff member has time away from the home. Because they need a respite, staff is not allowed to stay at Home of Hope on their days off.

Within East European culture, shame is the mode of correction, yet most of the girls in Home of Hope have been shamed everywhere they have gone. Therefore, our center needs to be a place of love and acceptance, mercy and grace. In a shame-based culture it is a challenge to teach staff to not shame, but to understand.

### Deep Trauma

It is hard for any of us to understand the depths of trauma that trafficked women have experienced. Our counselor knows more than anyone what they have suffered, but that information, of course, is private. Home of Hope workers have to realize the trauma the women have faced and respond with patience and understanding. We must accept that the rage the women feel stems not from personality defects or ingratitude, but from the deep trauma they have experienced. As

their stories begin to emerge, emotions come to the surface in the form of hostility toward staff and other residents. We have had to learn not to respond in kind.

### Issues of Privacy

We are very selective about non-residents entering the home, but we have come to realize that occasional visitors are not nearly as invasive and traumatic as we thought they would be. We were surprised by the degree of openness within Moldovan culture. Homes of Hope in India do not allow cameras on site because the girls are afraid of them. Girls in Moldova, however, are much more open about their past, sometimes even showing us their photos taken in brothels.

Still, we are very careful not to take advantage of the girls, their stories, or their images. Even for fund raising purposes, we refuse to show individual photos or share names of our residents. They already have been exploited for money, and we refuse to do the same. We want to avoid sensationalism for the sake of profit or recognition.

### A Long-Term Process

Aftercare for trafficked women is not a short-term process. Ministry to their needs can very well last a decade, even though women will not be staying at Home of Hope nearly that long. The healing process is not something that can be accomplished quickly. The best we can do is to become a new family for our residents, providing healthy models for dealing with conflict and giving them consistent encouragement and support as they begin their new lives.

### Spiritual Warfare

Even in the secular realm, people often describe trafficking as the greatest evil they have ever seen. Likewise, in our efforts to reclaim lives, we have experienced intense months of spiritual battles, and we have needed concentrated times of prayer and fasting. We are grateful to have numerous individuals around the world praying for our ministry, for the staff, and for the women and children in our care. This prayer support is critical because of the opposition we face. We need great sensitivity to God's leading. Because Home of Hope is a holistic ministry, we desire to help each woman with her physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.

### Practical Matters

- We confiscate cell phones the first day so that "boyfriends" will have no ongoing control or influence.
- We do not force anyone to convert to Christianity and are very careful not to manipulate the girls into belief. However, from the outset we share with each girl that we function as a Christian home with high moral standards. We do not allow our residents to return to bars or to drink because we want to separate them from past negative influences. Since all of our residents are part of our home, we all attend Sunday services together at a small, local evangelical church. This community loves and accepts the girls without reservation. Church members also serve as volunteers at Home of Hope. In addition, we see that God is the one who starts the greatest healing. Each girl needs a miracle in her life, which is more critical to her recovery than the counseling or care she receives at Home of Hope.

It is hard for any of us to understand the depths of trauma that trafficked women have experienced.

- We strive for honesty in Home of Hope. In contrast, dishonesty has been a way of life for our residents; to break the pattern is a major challenge. Until they can face the truth in their lives, they cannot distinguish truth from falsehood. As a result, for our staff healthy skepticism is necessary. One staff member grew up in a family of falsehoods, which gives her an uncanny gift for detecting lies. Unfortunately, our charges have a great capacity to deceive and we need to be able to uncover deception before lives of truthfulness can become a reality.
- Our residents face a huge temptation to hoard. In the past, when we received donations of clothing, the girls would take whatever they wanted for themselves—and we would then subsequently find it under their beds. We now have one staff member sort and distribute donated items as needed. We have had to clarify that as children grow, their donated clothes are to be given to younger children—that clothing is not the permanent possession of one mother and her child.

### Strong Families—The Best Protection Against Traffickers

Although many factors contribute to the evil of trafficking, poverty and a poor home environment are major causes. Even so, girls in many poor families are in no danger of trafficking simply because they grow up in a healthy family structure. Other factors behind trafficking include corruption, poor education, and a lack of respect for women's rights. While these issues do contribute to trafficking, I am convinced that a girl's greatest safeguard against the lies of a trafficker is a solid family.

Moldova's future is not bright in terms of healthy families able to withstand the false promises of traffickers. The majority of children in Moldova do not live with both parents, often not even with one. With one or both parents working outside the country, children do not have sufficient parental guidance and do not have the example of a healthy marriage. Other families are broken apart by divorce or the death of

a spouse. And for the girls who do have parents in Moldova, too often they have experienced sexual or physical abuse. Many of the rest of our residents come from alcoholic homes or from state-run orphanages.

If the Church in Moldova is to combat trafficking effectively, it must step forward and become fathers to the fatherless and parents to the parentless. We need churches that will volunteer to be mentors in every state orphanage, that will be good neighbors to street kids, and that will provide examples of healthy marriages. Each church must preach against physical and sexual abuse, proclaim the value of girls as well as boys, and invest time and love in the children in their village or city. Churches need to set aside denominational barriers in order to work together, tearing down the protective walls of individual ministries for the sake of coordinated combat against the tragedy of trafficking.

### Conclusion

It is time for churches to stand up collectively against the scourge of trafficking. We must remember that these are *our* girls, *our* daughters. It is not the time to judge the victims of trafficking, but to reach out to the women who have never known real love. To stand against trafficking, we must take action. It will cost us energy, time, and money as we care for children in our towns. It will be uncomfortable as we try lovingly to parent children who have no discipline. It will be costly as we support and minister in places like Home of Hope. And it will be dangerous as we stand against those who profit richly from the trade.

Could it be that ten years from now Victor Malarek's *The Natashas* may be read as history, rather than as an ongoing evil? Could we see the potential Natashas in each village loved and protected by believers from every church? Could we see Home of Hope Moldova closed because the need for such a program no longer exists? I pray it may be so. ♦

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It is time for churches to stand up collectively against the scourge of trafficking.

## The Current Crisis in Protestant Theological Education in the Former Soviet Union

Mark R. Elliott

*Editor's note: The previous two portions of this article were published in the East-West Church and Ministry Report 18 (Winter 2010): 16, 14-15; and 18 (Spring 2010): 5-7.*

### Revising the Curriculum

It could happen that Protestant non-formal leadership training programs in the former Soviet Union will eclipse full-time residential theological education. However, if residential programs do survive, they will require a thorough reworking of the traditional curriculum. First, mentoring should be as central to Protestant programs as classroom work, according to Insur Shamgunov and Mark Harris.<sup>1</sup> Instead of the traditional lecture format, Shamgunov advocates problem-based learning (PBL): Schools "could integrate the academic element of theological study with the development of students' skills in exegeting biblical texts, research, and preaching."<sup>2</sup>

In calls for curricular reform, two tendencies emerge: 1) the favoring of courses with practical, ministry application; and 2) the favoring of courses that can motivate and equip students to contribute to the transformation of both culture and congregations.

A 2007 Overseas Council study of four Ukrainian seminaries revealed that, at least in the minds of graduates surveyed, the least important subjects in their curriculum were systematic theology, Hebrew, philosophy, radio production, Greek, and Ukrainian history (32 to 21 percent). In contrast, graduates ranked as most important for their ministry hermeneutics, introduction to the New and Old Testaments, church history, apologetics, spiritual counseling, evangelism and discipleship, and Christian ethics (91 to 81 percent).<sup>3</sup> In the majority of cases, courses with immediate practical ministry application scored highest.

Shamgunov recommends courses in social work, counseling, social psychology, leadership, management, organizational development, strategic planning, time management, financial planning, and starting a business.<sup>4</sup> For today's Orthodox seminarians Vladimir Fedorov recommends missiology, psychology, (continued on page 14)

cultural studies, political science, finance, law, and ministry to drug addicts and HIV/AIDS patients.<sup>5</sup>

The courses Shamgunov and Fedorov recommend are primarily utilitarian, with the aim of reshaping culture as much as serving local congregations. With the same view in mind, Balkan Pentecostal theologian Peter Kuzmič argues that if seminary graduates are to engage the culture they will need courses in psychology, philosophy, and sociology.<sup>6</sup>

Given the Slavic context, missionary Donald Marsden urges coursework in Orthodoxy, without which Evangelicals will be “doomed to a kind of intellectual vacuum in their own culture.”<sup>7</sup> It is striking that Archbishop Hilarion offers essentially identical advice in reverse—Orthodox seminarians should study non-Orthodox traditions. Orthodox schools, the archbishop contends, should educate

in a spirit of tolerance and openness towards other confessions. We are now living not in the Middle Ages and not even in the nineteenth century. It should be borne in mind that many of the future clergymen of our Churches will have to live in a multi-confessional society. They will have to be able not only to see the differences, but also to clearly understand that Christians belonging to most varied denominations have a single dogmatic basis, common belief in the Holy Trinity, belief in Jesus Christ as God and Savior.<sup>8</sup>

### Courses in Counseling

As noted, Archbishop Hilarion and a host of others recommend counseling and psychology for the seminary curriculum.<sup>9</sup> These subjects would serve a good purpose based on needs in Central Asia. Pastors in this region surveyed by Insur Shamgunov convinced him that wounded hearts were commonplace in Central Asian churches and in the wider culture which had been “morally destroyed” in the Soviet era. Graduates face “alcoholism, drug abuse, occult practices, a high divorce rate, high unemployment, prostitution, and widespread domestic physical and sexual abuse!”<sup>10</sup>

The case for courses in pastoral counseling comes through clearly as well from the heart cry of a Lutheran pastor from Kazakhstan, put off by lengthy conference debates on academic qualifications for clergy. What is desperately needed, he argued, is “concentrated training in the basics for ‘emergency preachers.’”

I am in full agreement with much of the programs that you have presented here. But much that was said by American and European specialists cannot be connected with the concrete, burning needs of the churches and the believers, such as ours in Kazakhstan. We too allow ourselves to dream sometimes about grand plans, as they were developed at this conference. But in all honesty, they are for us at present quite unreal futurism. We face a mountain of problems: We are surrounded by people who feel lost, who seek comfort, intimacy, calm and a way to God. They are hungry abandoned children, lonely pensioners without means, mothers ready to give up the daily struggle for bread, drug addicted youth, young women who are forced to turn to prostitution to survive, and disoriented hopeless intellectuals. The church may not pass over them carelessly.<sup>11</sup>

### Contextualization

The impassioned plea of this Lutheran pastor was that pastoral preparation take into account actual, contemporary social conditions as they exist in Kazakhstan. In other words, he was urging that the curriculum be contextualized. In the early 1990s, in the first panic to patch programs together posthaste, new Protestant seminaries emerged in the former Soviet Union that took little account of the social and cultural setting. “Western training programs were simply imported and installed.”<sup>12</sup> Course texts were usually translations from English; faculty, of necessity, in the beginning, were Western, Korean, or Western-trained; course offerings replicated those of schools abroad; and early on, even some seminary libraries held more English than Russian titles.<sup>13</sup>

### A West-Knows-Best Mentality

Sad to say, too many Protestant programs, launched, led, and funded by Americans, labored under the handicap of an ethnocentrism that “tended to assume that proper training would help the Russian to think like an American.”<sup>14</sup> Too often differences between Western and Slavic mentalities were not sufficiently taken into account. Underscoring the East-West cultural divide, social scientist Geert Hofstede ranked Americans as the most individualistic of some 40 world cultures surveyed, whereas in his study Russians were among the most collectivist, typically deferring to majority preferences and traditions over personal wishes.<sup>15</sup> Unquestionably, some of the tensions in seminary classrooms derived from divergent Western and Slavic mindsets. Examples would include students hesitating to engage in class discussion or reticent to question a teacher imparting “received wisdom” and students “sharing” answers on a test for the good of the class average.<sup>16</sup>

St. Petersburg theological educator Sergei Nikolaev provides a startling illustration of an over-weening, West-knows-best mentality among some seminary graduates:

Recently I visited a church where a very interesting young man of wide reading, a graduate of a Russian theological institute, was preaching. People were very attentive and listened to him with enthusiasm. In his sermon the young pastor quoted Spurgeon and Moody, Lewis and Berghoff, Stevenson and Barth, and I was carried away by his vast knowledge. But he did not even mention Solovyev or Bulgakov, Prokhanov or Florensky, Dostoevsky or Kargel. How is it that he knows authors of foreign birth and does not know those of his motherland? Why does he think that Lewis and Barth have better answers to the hopes of his countrymen than do Solovyev and Alexander Men?<sup>17</sup>

Undoubtedly, this example underscores the need for theological education that is properly contextualized, taking into account Russian history, including one thousand years of Orthodox tradition.<sup>18</sup> Caribbean theological educator Dieumeme Noelliste calls for a creative synthesizing of Western and indigenous cultures rather than a jealous, blind attachment to either exclusively: “What is needed is a critical appropriation of the [Western] legacy, involving the endorsement of its useful features, the adaptation of others, the correction of those deemed faulty, and the creation of

Too many Protestant programs, launched, led, and funded by Americans, labored under the handicap of an ethnocentrism that “tended to assume that proper training would help the Russian to think like an American.”



new ones as may be required by the peculiarities of each environment.”<sup>19</sup>

Of course, Nikolaev notes, “It is impossible to fruitfully serve your own people if you do not know your culture!” Still, he seconds Noelliste’s call for the blending of the best of West and East: “To be able to communicate with people in comprehensible terms we have to find an effective way to combine the enormous experience of evangelical theology of the West with our native religious quest.”<sup>20</sup>

### In Summary

Protestant theological education currently faces serious challenges. Of course, in the Soviet era, state hostility led to many decades of no formal Protestant theological education at all. In contrast, the source of difficulties today stems primarily from an enrollment crisis precipitated by a panoply of mostly self-inflicted wounds. Since the fall of Communism Protestant schools too often have overbuilt, have depended too heavily upon Western money and models, and have admitted too many marginal students. In addition, they have too often failed to maintain sufficiently close ties with the church, have adopted more classical than practical curricula, and as a result, have produced graduates who are frequently ill-equipped for pastoral duties or are not welcome in the churches they have been trained to serve.

Consequences have included, and will continue to include, school closures and mergers, a more entrepreneurial approach to the use of facilities and faculty, and decreasing dependence upon Western direction and funding. Additional responses include increasing curricular revisions relevant to a Slavic context and diversification into liberal arts, business, and/or vocational degrees. Above all, schools are scrambling to develop or expand their nontraditional programs through correspondence courses, distance learning sites, and online instruction.

It is hoped that, ultimately, theological educators and their Western and indigenous stakeholders will come to realize that both traditional, residential theological education and nontraditional programs have their place and should be seen as complementary. Formal training typically has the advantage of spiritual formation in community, face-to-face faculty-student interaction, greater library resources, and campuses that provide a witness of presence and permanence. Informal training typically has the advantage of more practical content, more flexible schedules, closer church-school ties, and greater accessibility.

To its detriment, formal training can lead to ivory tower isolation from the local church and less focused concentration on pastoral preparation. To its detriment, non-formal training typically is lengthier with less instructional oversight close at hand, has lower retention rates, provides less adequate verification of student work, and offers fewer recognized degrees. Thus, formal and non-formal programs have their

strengths and weaknesses; both have their place; both, however, also require adaptation to the unique complexities of the post-Soviet environment. ♦

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### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Shamgunov, “Listening,” 276 and 284; Harris, “Needed,” 84.
- <sup>2</sup> Shamgunov, “Listening,” 280. See also Toivo Pilli, “Toward a Holistic View of Theological Education” in *Theological Education as Mission*, ed. by Peter Penner (Hagen: Neufeld Verlag Schwarzenfeld, 2005).
- <sup>3</sup> Sannikov, *Effectiveness*, 75.
- <sup>4</sup> Shamgunov, “Listening,” 30, 241-42, 257, 265, and 278. See also Tiberius Rata, “Theological Education in Romania,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 10 (Spring 2002), 6.
- <sup>5</sup> Fedorov, “An Orthodox View,” 30.
- <sup>6</sup> Elliott, “Recent Research,” 3.
- <sup>7</sup> Marsden, “Post-Soviet,” 3. See also Elliott, “Theological Education,” 71.
- <sup>8</sup> Hilarion, “Problems,” 6.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 7; Fedorov, “Orthodox View,” 20; Shamgunov, “Listening,” 241; Dennis Bowen and D. Russell Bishop, “Training Pastoral Counselors in Russia,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 12 (Spring 2004), 3-5; Dennis Bowen, “Christian Counselor Training in Ukraine,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 16 (Summer 2008), 4-6.
- <sup>10</sup> Shamgunov, “Protestant,” 7.
- <sup>11</sup> Gerd Stricker, “The Problems of Theological Education: The Experience of Lutheran Institutions in the CIS,” *Religion in Eastern Europe* 21 (June 2001), 18.
- <sup>12</sup> Harris, “Needed,” 84.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*; Elliott, “Theological Education,” 69-71.
- <sup>14</sup> Harris, “Needed,” 84.
- <sup>15</sup> Geert Hofstede, “Cultural Differences in Teaching and Learning,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 10 (1986), 306-16.
- <sup>16</sup> Steve Chapman, “Collectivism in the Russian World View and Its Implications for Christian Ministry,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 12 (Fall 1998), 12-14.
- <sup>17</sup> Sergei Nikolaev, “The Problems of Euro-Asian Theology for the New Millennium,” *Religion in Eastern Europe* 20 (April 2000), 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Harris, “Needed,” 84; Elliott, “Theological Education After Communism,” 71.
- <sup>19</sup> Noelliste, “Theological Education,” 278.
- <sup>20</sup> Nikolaev, “Problems,” 4. See Shamgunov, “Listening,” 274-75, for examples of Central Asian graduates successfully gleaned Christian texts from the West for their own purposes, rather than simply parroting them.

Since the fall of Communism Protestant schools too often have overbuilt, have depended too heavily upon Western money and models, and have admitted too many marginal students.

Both traditional, residential theological education and nontraditional programs have their place and should be seen as complementary.

### Russian Orthodox Educator (continued from page 16)

a profitable system of ritual services.” Such people, Mitrofanov concludes, are not able “to talk with people including the intelligentsia on their level.” They lack the live experience and knowledge to be “the bearers of the highest Orthodox culture.” Only if that is changed, he suggests, will Orthodoxy be able to fill “the greatest commandment—go and teach all peoples.” ♦

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*Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Paul Goble, “Russian Society Dominated by Baptized Godless, Mitrofanov Says,” Window on Eurasia, 19 April 2010.*

# Russian Orthodox Educator Sounds Alarm

Paul Goble

## “Baptized Godless”

At the end of the Soviet period many Russians believed that theirs was an “Orthodox” people who simply lacked churches. However, now a leading Orthodox educator states that this was an illusion. Rather, Father Georgy Mitrofanov of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy argues, Russian society consists of “baptized godless” people who have numerous “magical and pagan prejudices.”

## Weaknesses in Seminarians and Seminaries

Still worse, according to Father Georgy, Orthodox are increasingly forced to admit that the new generation of priests is incapable of changing the situation for the better. Indeed, they may be making the situation even worse ([www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=e9045ade-c37e-44bc-9a0ceccdeabf4e68tdocsid=135453](http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=e9045ade-c37e-44bc-9a0ceccdeabf4e68tdocsid=135453)). Ever fewer young men are training for the priesthood, he continues, the result of the country’s demographic problems and the decline of popular interest in the Orthodox Church. No longer do seminaries experience competition for places in their classrooms, and “the social and educational level of those enrolled leaves much to be desired.” That is especially true, Mitrofanov says, in the 37 new Orthodox seminaries which have opened in Russia’s provinces since 1991. Only five or six of these correspond in any respect to the standards of the St. Petersburg or Moscow seminaries, and in the capitals, the size of classes is half what it was ten years ago.

Much of what is wrong now, he argues, began at the end of Soviet times when the state ceased to be involved in seminary admissions and handed over complete power to the church. The hierarchs “received the chance” as a result to approve “all who wanted” to become priests, as long as another priest recommended them.

Russian society consists of “baptized godless” people who have numerous “magical and pagan prejudices.”

Today, the situation is such that “only a little more than a third of priests [in the Russian Orthodox Church] have a seminary or academic education, and a large part has made do in general without any theological training.” That has led to “a catastrophic decline” in the level of the priesthood, but the Patriarchate has not done anything about it.

Indeed, Mitrofanov says, “the clergy of the post-Soviet period is now not only more numerous but qualitatively it is frequently worse than that of the Soviet period.” Because the Soviet system destroyed so many priests, sons of priests were fewer in number to help maintain clergy ranks.

New priests who entered church life in the 1990s and since, Mitrofanov continues, “brought with them a specific conglomerate of ideas” which gives one a headache just to think about. A “significant part” of these priests are confused and “disorganized” young people who “dream of acquiring[in the church] their accustomed totalitarian ideology and organization.”

Their minds are full of “mystical literal and totalitarian anti-human politicized ideology” and, having become priests, they quickly project this on their flocks, encouraging “the search for enemies” like “Jewish Masons, ecumenists, Protestants, and the like,” as if “all problems of church life were somehow connected with external ‘dark’ forces.”

Believe it or not, Mitrofanov says, values now are very different from those that animated their Soviet-era predecessors. Priests in earlier times had to pass through a much more difficult school and face many more obstacles from the regime. Those who did so were often among the most committed.

“The final decision as to whether an individual could attend seminary was taken by a special figure from the [security] organs, [and] the plenipotentiary of the Council of Religious Affairs of the USSR Council of Ministers.” He placed as many obstacles as he could on the path of future priests, especially those from urban areas.

## The Threat of Material Values

At the end of the Soviet period, “more than half” of the Orthodox churches in the U.S.S.R. were in Western Ukraine, and Soviet officials ensured that the largest portion of new entrants to the seminaries came from rural areas in that part of the country, places where religion still had an active role among the population. Furthermore, priests in Soviet times could not count on big incomes. But now, at least some of them are able to use the churches as a business to such an extent that “certain girls specifically seek to marry future priests: there is money and a certain status in society.”

In large measure, Mitrofanov says, this reflects the drive to rebuild churches, something that attracts not former Soviet people but “people who are still Soviet now.” He adds, Communists created “a new type of man, a poor envious individual who believed the main values are material.”

“For the present-day generation of priests, the church at least in part is not the body of Christ and not a community of people united by Christ but above all a church in which it is possible to be actively involved in business relations with commercial people and build

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