



# EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

Fall 2011

Vol. 19, No. 4

## Mere Christianity: Teaching Ethics in Ukrainian Public Schools

Mary Raber

The collapse of the Soviet Union tore a hole in public education that has not yet been mended. Today some people may joke about the regimentation and trite rituals of Soviet school life, yet the framework of stability it provided is deeply missed. Some of the more bitter fruits of independence have had particular consequences for the young: family breakdown, drug addiction, alcoholism, HIV-AIDS, and the celebration of violence in mass media. The void left by the discrediting of Communist ideology has sent educators on a continuing search for the best way to teach moral values.

During the religious boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s, many people saw a return to Christian values as the obvious solution to post-Soviet social problems, but how those values might be taught was less obvious. Early on, officials turned to the West for help. The most famous example is the case of the CoMission, a consortium of some 80 U.S.-based mission organizations that partnered with the Russian Ministry of Education in 1992 to develop morals and ethics programs and curricula for public schools. That effort foundered, however, in part because the CoMission, insufficiently aware of Orthodox Christianity's long history in Russia, presented its program with an evangelical slant.<sup>1</sup> Serious questions were also raised about whether it was appropriate to use public schools as a forum for any religion-based instruction at all.

In Ukraine, debates have continued for two decades among secular and Christian educators, government officials, and citizens.<sup>2</sup> The need for moral education is widely affirmed, but the discussion is intertwined with complex issues of national identity and ambivalence about the place of religion in public life, as well as a deep concern for the well-being of children and youth.

This article will briefly sketch the history and present status of Christian ethics curricula in Ukrainian public schools, drawing primarily upon the experience of several evangelical activists. Two distinct yet interrelated agendas are apparent. The more formal trend interacts with the national government and concentrates on consensus-building among different Christian confessions. The other focuses on life choices education and is energized by both volunteer and professional Christian educators who teach

classes on such subjects as drugs and alcohol, sexual morality, friendship, and decision-making. Numerous private agencies, individuals, and churches continue to come together in informal networks to develop and distribute teaching materials, confer with one another, and educate the public as well as schoolchildren.

### Christian Ethics in the 1990s

It is well known that by the time Ukrainian independence was declared in 1991, great curiosity had emerged regarding religion in general and Christianity in particular. All at once, it seemed, after decades of repression, Christians were in surprising demand. At first, it was not especially difficult to gain access to public schools, whether to speak to an assembly or even present regular Bible lessons.

During this early period, Christians usually taught in public schools on the basis of a personal connection. Sunday school materials were just beginning to appear, but no resources were available that were appropriate to a public school setting, so everyone improvised. Sometimes the process was successful. For example, in 1992 Tetiana Sannikova, a qualified elementary school teacher and a member of the Central Baptist Church in Odessa, began to teach biblically based ethics to fifth- and sixth-graders at School No. 26. Knowing that the authorities could withdraw their approval at any time, she prepared each lesson thinking it might be her last. Eventually, however, her teaching of ethics lasted more than 12 years, and in 2004 she published a collection of her lessons.<sup>3</sup> However, various problems surfaced. Few trained pedagogues were well-versed in Scripture, and volunteer lessons could be haphazard and uneven in quality. One well-meaning Baptist woman is said to have visited every elementary school in her city with a somber message to pupils about the End Times!<sup>4</sup> In addition, tensions developed among members of different confessions—for example, Baptists and Pentecostals—visiting the same school. In some places Orthodoxy reasserted its claims to cultural dominance, and pressure was put on school administrators to block non-Orthodox access to children. Occasionally parents objected to having someone from a different religious group teach their children. Some school directors decided that Christian-oriented lessons were either inappropriate in

### Contributing Editors

**Canon Michael Bourdeaux**  
Keston Institute,  
Oxford

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

**Father Georgi Edelstein**  
Russian Orthodox Church,  
Kostroma Diocese

**Miss Sharon Mumper**  
Magazine Training Institute,  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

**Rev. Nick Nedelchev**  
Bulgarian Evangelical  
Theological Institute,  
Sofia

**Dr. Peter Penner**  
Training Christians  
for Ministry (TCM),  
Heiligenkreuz, Austria

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

**Mrs. Katya Smyslova**  
The Esther Center,  
Moscow

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

**Bishop Hans Växby**  
United Methodist Church  
in Eurasia, Moscow

**Dr. Alexander Zaichenko**  
Gazeta Protestant,  
Moscow

*(continued on page 2)*

## Teaching Ethics in Ukrainian Public Schools *(continued from page 1)*

state-supported schools and/or too much trouble, and dropped them completely.

A more organized approach was taken by educators in the western provinces of L'viv, Ternopil', and Ivano-Frankivsk. Beginning in 1992 they launched experimental elective public school courses in Christian morality that emphasized the place of Christianity in Ukrainian history and culture. Much of the energy for this early work was generated in the Greek (Eastern-Rite) Catholic community and reflected its confessional origins. At about the same time schools in Rivne began to offer courses in general religious studies and the Bible.

Then, in 1998, National University "Ostroh Academy," an institution of higher education rooted in the tradition of Christian humanism,<sup>5</sup> began offering preparatory courses for teachers of Christian ethics. In the academic year 1999-2000 Christian ethics was introduced as an elective subject in 24 schools in Rivne city and province, and was rated highly by pupils, teachers, and parents.<sup>6</sup> The teacher-training program at Ostroh owes much to the vision of Vasyl' Zhukovskyy, now Dean of Humanities at the same institution and an Orthodox Christian (Kyiv Patriarchate). Future teachers from Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches, and from no church at all, are instructed in a program that minimizes differences among the confessions. The emphasis, rather, is upon the development of skilled practitioners capable of delivering a comprehensive program of moral education based on common Christian values.

### Ukraine's Complexity

Teaching ethics is a challenging assignment because of the complexity of the Ukrainian religious scene. Christianity is understood to be an important part of Ukrainian identity—but which Christianity? The Religious Information Service of Ukraine identifies seven different Orthodox churches and dozens of Protestant groups.<sup>7</sup> Deep historical and theological grievances divide some of them. Christians are separated geographically as well. Roughly speaking, west of the Dnieper River people are more likely to be Greek Catholic or Roman Catholic, or part of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate. East of the Dnieper adherence to the Moscow Patriarchate predominates. Different kinds of Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, Charismatics, and other Protestants are scattered throughout the country. To further complicate matters, certain confessions are associated with certain nationalities, i.e. Ukrainians are Orthodox or Greek Catholic, Poles are Roman Catholic, and Germans are Lutheran or Mennonite. Indeed, during the 1990s, religious revival for some of these groups was closely associated with the recovery of a national language and even permission to emigrate, not to mention the presence of other faiths, such as Muslims in Crimea, or the Jewish community.

In other words, Ukraine is a mosaic of religions and Christian confessions, with as much potential

for division as unity. Especially the rival claims of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate contain the seeds of far-reaching political consequences. Therefore, besides offering a moral framework to youth, it is significant that Christian ethics as envisioned by Zhukovskyy and others also has the potential to bring together representatives of different churches in a common enterprise.

### Developing Curricula

At first, lesson material was seriously lacking. Few Soviet-trained pedagogues had the necessary background to prepare credible lessons in Christian ethics. Accordingly, a collection of Ostroh student practice lessons aimed at different age groups was published in 2004. Students from different churches contributed material, and although it was impossible to remove all confessional overtones, it helped nevertheless point the way for other resources that have been developed since.<sup>8</sup>

Oleksandr and Valentina Bondarchuk, distinguished and well-connected educators who joined the Baptists during the 1990s, directed work in the area of Christian ethics sponsored by the evangelical mission Nadiia liudiam [Hope to People] in Rivne. Mission workers studied at Ostroh, taught at public and private day schools and boarding schools for orphans and children with disabilities (*internats*), and wrote and published Christian ethics curricula. Recognizing the spiritual as well as the professional needs of teachers and parents, the Bondarchuks also promote the organization of discussion groups and seminars for adults. Their work has developed into a multi-faceted ministry to teachers, school librarians, pupils, and their families. Nowadays Nadiia liudiam sponsors an annual summer camp in the Carpathians for Christian ethics teachers, both to inspire and support current instructors and recruit new ones. Ninety percent of participants in the camps identify themselves as Orthodox. Since 2007 the mission has published the quarterly journal, *Slovo vchiteliu* [Word to the Teacher], dedicated to the promotion of education and culture based on Christian values.<sup>9</sup>

In 2005 in the wake of the Orange Revolution, representatives of a number of Christian confessions presented to government authorities their vision for the implementation of a national Christian ethics curriculum. That summer, small groups of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant pedagogues worked almost around the clock at several different centers assembling teachers' and pupils' textbooks on Christian ethics for all grades. The curriculum was eventually approved by the Ministry of Education and published in 2007. The Ministry's highest rating—"recommended"—was granted in July 2010.

Also since the mid-2000s a Citizens' Council [*Hromadska rada*], composed of representatives of the country's main religions, including Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism, has worked with the

In 2005 in the wake of the Orange Revolution, small groups of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant pedagogues worked almost around the clock at several different centers assembling teachers' and pupils' textbooks on Christian ethics for all grades.

Ukrainian Minister of Education on religious issues as they relate to schools. An inter-confessional Christian “creative group” headed by Vasyl’ Zhukovskyy refines proposed curricular materials in monthly on-line conferences. All lesson materials must be acceptable to each member of the group, each of whom contributes ideas and watches for unacceptable language and biases. Thus, a reference to the Mother of God is flagged by a Baptist, while a Greek Catholic vetoes a reference to “a personal relationship with Jesus.” Sannikova, a member of the group, notes, “We want to keep our unity, so we’re very tactful with one another.”

### **Mere Christianity**

Its practitioners point out that Christian ethics instruction is not Sunday school. Proselytizing is not allowed: “We can give people the keys to their salvation, but we cannot force the lock,” Zhukovskyy observes. Instruction excludes doctrine, prayer, and visits to churches for the purpose of worship. In other words, the vision of the curriculum is to present “mere Christianity” for the formation of morals with no single confession dominating. “Its value is that children get acquainted with the absolute, unchanging ethical teaching of Scripture,” states Sannikova. “Whether they accept it or not is their choice; acquaintance with it is the main thing.”

The program is also geared to promoting respect for the religion and worldview of others, a valuable outcome in a multi-cultural and multi-confessional society. Sannikova also works at overcoming stereotypes with her students at the Odessa Institute for Post-Graduate Pedagogical Education where she teaches Christian ethics methods. For example, she discourages the use of the word “sectarian” and insists that all confessions be discussed with respect. “We’re pedagogues,” she says, “We need to encourage dialogue. If we teachers will learn to do this, the children will follow.”

Furthermore, Christian ethics is not a required subject, but an approved elective, offered in all Ukrainian public schools at the request of parents. Four interested families in a village and eight in a city are sufficient to give the subject space in the schedule. Any child may attend with parents’ written permission.

Its elective status is prized. “As soon as you make Christian ethics a requirement it loses its appeal,” Sannikova claims. (Alternative courses are philosophical ethics, which takes a secular approach, and religious ethics, which explores the moral values of other religions besides Christianity.)

Thus, the mechanism for the systematic teaching of Christian ethics in Ukrainian public schools is presently in place. The courses are popular and appreciated. Anecdotal evidence indicates the children’s behavior and relationships have improved where the classes have been implemented, besides providing a rare forum for educators and others to overcome religious barriers. Students who choose

the elective participate in a national Bible knowledge “Olympiad” held annually, and recognition is given for the best Christian ethics teacher. ♦

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> For analysis of CoMission see Perry Glanzer, “A Troubled Troika: The CoMission, the Russian Ministry of Education, and the Russian Orthodox Church,” *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 8 (Summer 2000), 1-3; Perry Glanzer, *The Quest for Russia’s Soul: Evangelicals and Moral Education in Post-Communist Russia*. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2002); and Walter Sawatsky, “Return of Mission and Evangelization in the CIS (1980s-Present): An Assessment,” in Walter W. Sawatsky and Peter F. Penner, eds., *Mission in the Former Soviet Union* (Schwarzenfeld, Germany: Neufeld Verlag, 2005), 94-118.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed discussion is presented by Andriy Bychenko and Mykhailo Mischenko, “What Ukrainians Think about Religious Education,” *National Security & Defense* No. 8 (68), 2005, [http://razumkov.org.ua/eng/files/category\\_journal/NSD68-eng.pdf](http://razumkov.org.ua/eng/files/category_journal/NSD68-eng.pdf), accessed 11 September 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Personal examples and quotes in this article are from notes taken during conversations with Tetiana Sannikova (31 May 2010, 16 March 2011, and 30 March 2011); Vasyl’ Zhukovskyy (26 February 2002); Oleksandr Bondarchuk (26-27 February 2002 and 13 September 2010); and Olena Prokhorenko (10 September 2010 and 30 March 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Related by A. V. Solomina at a conference on spiritual-moral education held in Odessa, 17-18 March 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Ostroh Academy was founded in 1576 by Prince Kostiantyn-Vasyl’ Ostroz’kyy as an institution of Orthodox higher learning. In 1581 the famous Old Church Slavonic Ostroh Bible was printed there.

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed description of this early stage, see Vasyl’ Zhukovskyy, “Vykladannia predmetu ‘Khrystyians’ka etika’ u zagal’noosvitnikh shkolakh Rivnenshchyny” in V. I. Makliuchenko *et al.*, eds., *Khrystyians’ka etika i pedagogika: Statti ta uroky* (Ostroh, 2000), 8-14.

<sup>7</sup> <http://rus.org.ua/en/index/resources/statistics/ukr2010>, accessed 14 September 2010.

<sup>8</sup> See endnote 6 for bibliographic information.

<sup>9</sup> Available at [www.slovochitelyu.org](http://www.slovochitelyu.org).

*Editor’s note: The concluding portion of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 20 (Winter 2012).*

**Mary Raber**, from St. Louis, Missouri, has spent 16 years in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Presently she is a service worker with Mennonite Mission Network based in Odessa, Ukraine, teaching church history and other subjects at Odessa Seminary, Donetsk Christian University, and other theological schools in Ukraine, Russia, and Armenia.

The vision of the curriculum is to present “mere Christianity” for the formation of morals with no single confession dominating.



# International Mission Board Church Planting in Central and Eastern Europe

Mark Edworthy

Why the continual emphasis on planting churches?" Many godly national evangelical leaders in Central and Eastern Europe posed this question to the International Mission Board (IMB) in the early 1990s.

"Why the continual emphasis on planting churches?" Many godly national evangelical leaders in Central and Eastern Europe posed this question to the International Mission Board (IMB) in the early 1990s.<sup>1</sup> They quickly pointed out the need for trained pastors, renovated old buildings, erecting of new chapels, publishing of materials, and other pervasive needs. Not only were their churches going through an unprecedented transition, the IMB was also in transition and developing an unapologetic focus on church planting as *the* key to fulfilling the Great Commission. Clearly, the needs went beyond the establishment of new churches, but was any need truly greater?

## Early IMB History in Central and Eastern Europe (1920-1942)

The work of the IMB in Central and Eastern Europe dates back to the historic London Conference held in 1920. This conference, following the end of World War I, was attended by representatives of Northern Baptists, Canadian Baptists, British Baptists, and the International Mission Board to chart out the next chapter of missions engagement in Europe. With personnel already serving in Italy, the IMB agreed to new assignments in Spain, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine "with territories east thereof."<sup>2</sup>

The IMB responded immediately with humanitarian aid to Ukraine and Russia, helping with an acute famine during the early 1920s. Personnel could not obtain residential visas, so work was coordinated by sporadic visits and national coordination. Everett Gill led the IMB work in Central and Eastern Europe and reported in 1922: "As elsewhere, our principal work will eventually be that of helping in the work of theological schools, publication work, and church planting. For the present we must help the churches to support their pastors, though this is understood to be a temporary matter."<sup>3</sup>

Missionaries arrived in Romania in 1923 and were embraced by Baptist Union leaders. Evangelicals were struggling in the face of intense government persecution, and early IMB workers helped the Romanian Baptist Union establish a theological school and publishing house.<sup>4</sup> Funds were also provided for the Hungarian Baptist Union to start a theological school, publishing house, and to provide loans for new church buildings.<sup>5</sup> The first IMB appointments arrived in Hungary in 1935.

Yugoslavia was first mentioned in IMB records in 1922, with the work described as "a small Baptist Union of about six hundred, which included Germans, Hungarians, and Croats."<sup>6</sup> Personnel finally arrived from the IMB in 1938 and helped purchase land for a seminary in September 1940.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, by early 1942, all IMB workers had been evacuated from these countries due to World War II, and nearly 50 years would pass before residential visas could again be secured.

## IMB History in Central and Eastern Europe (1988-1993)

During the Cold War, IMB workers lived outside the Soviet Union and its satellites, but often traveled

into these countries. Ongoing contact continued with Baptist Union leaders, and some support was provided through intermediaries. Interestingly, Nela Horak was the granddaughter of the founder of the Baptist Union in Yugoslavia, Vincent Vacek, and the daughter of a Baptist pastor and Union leader, Josip Horak. She married an American exchange student, James Williams. They were appointed by the IMB to Yugoslavia in 1976 and were allowed to live behind the "Iron Curtain."<sup>8</sup> Tragically, James was killed in an automobile accident in 1980, after which Nela continued to raise their three children and serve in her assignment. She was the only IMB worker allowed to live in the region for several years. In 1988, Bill and Debbie Steele arrived in Yugoslavia as the first of a new wave of IMB missionaries who would enter former Communist states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The IMB was undergoing major changes in the late 1980s and 1990s. In 1988 the organization released the "70/30" Plan for all workers. Of the plan, President Keith Parks wrote, "The ten-year plan to have seventy percent of Southern Baptist missionaries giving more than half of their time to evangelistic outreach and church planting is part of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's [IMB] effort to escalate the rate of reaching the world for Christ."<sup>9</sup> Many missionaries embraced church planting but some saw a devaluing of auxiliary ministries like medical and educational initiatives. This emphasis gained strength in the following decade and was replaced by a campaign called "New Directions" in 1997. Avery Willis, IMB senior vice president for overseas operations, commented:

As we began to look again at what God is saying to us, we saw there were some things we needed to come back to. New Directions is a return to a biblical mandate. The Bible is what we want our missionary manual to be. The basic concepts of New Directions are:

- 1) A strong emphasis on prayer support,
- 2) Focusing on people groups wherever they are instead of organizing by countries,
- 3) Missionaries who work in teams to plan comprehensive strategies for sharing the gospel with entire people groups,
- 4) Lay training programs that enable new believers to move quickly into church leadership roles,
- 5) Working in cooperation with "Great Commission Christian" mission partners,
- 6) Working and praying for God-led church planting movements to begin, and
- 7) A general "whatever-it-takes" approach to sharing the gospel, despite social, political, cultural or other barriers.<sup>10</sup>

Many Baptist leaders in Europe did not embrace this new emphasis and preferred the previous relationship and institutional support.

The vast majority of the first IMB missionaries deployed to Central and Eastern Europe were transfers from other countries. The argument was made that transfers would be able to more quickly acclimate to very different cultures and would be able to connect

more easily to national leaders. The early workers were called “fraternal representatives” and served largely a liaison function with existing Baptist Unions. Since the priorities of virtually every union were consolidation and structural health, very few of these early workers engaged in the planting of new churches.

---

### **New Emphasis on Church Planting Bears Fruit**

The noted changes in the IMB became obvious in the former Soviet Union and satellites by the middle of the 1990s. Four varied examples will be given over a 15-year timeline.

---

#### **Poland**

This author and his family arrived in Poland in 1991 and immediately began language study in Krakow. The local Baptist pastor and Union leadership were accepting and encouraging, but church planting was a new discussion point for most of the leaders. The Baptist Union had suffered momentous losses during World War II and struggled to survive during the following four decades. Despite government persecution and the strong influence of the Roman Catholic Church, the Union continued faithfully to encourage churches, conduct camps, and be “salt and light” in the society.

In 1993, Gustaw Cieslar, pastor of the Krakow Baptist Church, was asked to serve as president of the Polish Baptist Theological Seminary scheduled to open the following year in the Warsaw suburb of Radosc. Cieslar agreed and asked Mark Edworthy to move to Warsaw and serve as dean and professor of the new school. Edworthy consulted with the Baptist Union which agreed to change his assignment from church planter in Krakow to church planter in Warsaw. He insisted that he was primarily a church planter who also served as dean and professor of the new seminary. Along with his wife, Susie, and three children, Edworthy moved to Warsaw in June 1993. The Baptist Union was positive about a new church but underscored that no city had two Baptist churches, no church had ever been started in a public building, and no church had ever been started by a foreigner. After several meetings with the elders of the existing church, Edworthy finally received a lukewarm blessing to start a second church. Along with six young Polish believers, the Edworthys began to earnestly pray and plan for the new work.

In October 1993, Edworthy invited a seven-day volunteer team from the U.S. to Warsaw to share the gospel in public parks, teach English in the high school where the new church would meet, and distribute invitations to the church start. The church planting team participated with the volunteers and also mailed 10,000 brochures announcing the new church and giving a coupon for a free New Testament. The team decided to launch with a worship service instead of a home Bible study, which historically took 10-12 years to grow to an official church with 25 members. The argument was given that many Roman Catholics preferred a measure of anonymity and might attend a worship service if they could observe and decide their level of participation. The first worship service had about 35 in attendance, including the 10 from the volunteer team. Many seekers without a church home visited the new fellowship, and attendance averaged over 25 for the first three months.

The worship was marked by its informality,

upbeat music, testimonies, brief expository messages delivered by Edworthy in Polish, and extended times of prayer. The new congregation also hosted a time of fellowship with coffee, tea, and baked goods each Sunday after the service. Several people repented during that first year, and six were baptized. Several evangelical college students also joined the church during their years of study. Forty baptized believers were present when the congregation was officially constituted as the Second Baptist Church of Warsaw on the first anniversary of its initial meeting. The new church called a Polish bi-vocational pastor, Wlodek Tasak, about six months later. Though the church did not grow significantly numerically over the next decade, it was directly involved in the start of several other churches.

---

#### **Lithuania**

The IMB work in Lithuania began with the arrival of Milton and Lara Magalhaes in Klaipeda in January 1996.<sup>11</sup> The first three years were spent in learning the language and visiting the few existing churches in the country. In late 1998, the Magalhaeses relocated to nearby Silute and started a group in their home. The Lord blessed, soon three families were actively sharing the gospel, and several people began attending the new congregation. Milton Magalhaes discovered that a Baptist church had existed many decades before, so the young congregation gave sacrificially and purchased the former Baptist parsonage in which to meet. Within a year, the church was officially registered and had a membership of over 30 baptized believers.

The primary strategy was intensive gospel sharing in the town and evangelistic visits with the relatives of new believers. The young church also organized camps and special events where the gospel was clearly presented. In a country where the existing Baptist churches usually baptized two to three believers annually, this was an amazing harvest. By the end of the decade, the church helped establish the New Hope Baptist Church in Klaipeda. This church emerged from a Christian-based recovery program where several residents had come to faith. One of the former addicts became the pastor and continues to serve in that role today.

---

#### **Russia**

The IMB deployed its first personnel to Russia in 1990. but several years passed before the first churches were started. By the mid-1990s, churches had been formed by the IMB in Khabarovsk and Moscow. In the ensuing decade, scores of churches were started across this vast country. To date, the best example of reproducing church plants in Russia is in Ufa. The city had one Baptist church when communism fell in 1991 and seven by 2005. Chris and Eileen Carr arrived in 2000 with a vision for reproducing models of church planting.<sup>12</sup>

Over the next decade, Carr shared various training models related to organic or simple church planting. He slowly began to influence the traditional mind-set and earned the right to influence the regional association of Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches. He expanded and sharpened his training which included: *Indigenous Church Planting* by Charles Brock, *Training 4 Trainers* (IMB), *Acts 29* by Bruce Carlton, *Pioneer Evangelism* by Wade Akins, *Universal Disciple/ProCare* by Thom Wolfe, *Alpha* by Nicky Gumbel, *The Organic*

To date, the best example of reproducing church plants in Russia is in Ufa.

(continued on page 6)

The IMB has assigned over a thousand short-term and long-term missionaries to Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall, with approximately two-thirds of the total serving long-term.

## International Mission Board Church Planting (continued from page 5)

*Church* by Neil Cole, and *Rethinking the Wineskin* and *Rethinking Church* by Frank Viola.

Carr used these many resources to develop a training course which became the basis for a doctor of ministry project. He shared the vision of replicating new churches at an associational retreat in August 2009. A small group of pastors and leaders agreed to attend the nine training sessions conducted in the fall of 2009. The group quickly embraced this new understanding of biblical principles and started 17 new house or cell groups by the end of the project. Within a year, these had expanded to approximately 30 groups in the city and surrounding areas. The fledgling movement is currently addressing the challenge of developing leaders as rapidly as the new groups are developing.

### Roma

The final example relates to the expanding work among Roma (Gypsies) throughout Europe. The IMB's work with Roma began in 1991 in Romania. It was focused primarily in that country for the first decade where several new churches were started. The work expanded to other countries over the next decade and presently includes groups in Poland, Macedonia, Slovakia, Italy, and the Czech Republic.

Roma believers at the center of the expansion are the most exciting part of the Roma story. Under the leadership of Boyd Hatchel, Roma have been sent as summer missionaries for several years.<sup>13</sup> Partial support was provided to assist them during these weeks of ministry in which they were challenged to strengthen an existing Roma church and help start a new one. Many groups resulted over the past five years. The program was enlarged in 2010 with the sending of Roma missionaries on one-year assignments, resulting in the development of new groups in Skopje, Rome, and Prague.

Two Roma families agreed to move from Krakow, Poland, to dedicate a year to starting a church in Prague. They arrived in the summer of 2010 and immediately began sharing the gospel in the Roma communities of Prague. They saw a few people respond to the gospel and others express varying degrees of interest. They launched a new church in a rented room in January 2011. Over 60 attended the initial service and nearly 20 responded to the gospel in the following four months. The church continues

to grow and actively share the gospel with Roma who have yet to hear.

### Conclusion

The IMB has assigned over a thousand short-term and long-term missionaries to Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall, with approximately two-thirds of the total serving long-term. These workers served faithfully with varying degrees of effectiveness. New churches have been started in over 20 countries and countless national leaders have been trained through the work of the IMB. At the same time, missionary personnel are still learning how to more effectively plant reproducing churches and to work more closely with national partners and other Great Commission Christians. Thankfully many national and international partners now share the vision of planting churches. The prayer of IMB is that the Lord will continue to multiply His Church among every nation, tribe, people, and tongue throughout Europe. ♦

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>IMB was founded in 1845 as the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. The current name, adopted in 1997, will be used throughout.

<sup>2</sup>William Estep, *Whole Gospel, Whole World: The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention 1845–1995* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 62.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes of the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC, Annual SBC Convention, 17 May 1922, archives.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 May 1923.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 May 1922.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 June 1940.

<sup>8</sup>Nela Williams interview with author, 26 June 2008.

<sup>9</sup>Don Martin, "Parks Calls 70-30 Ratio Effort to Speed Up World Evangelization," *Baptist Press*, 27 July 1988, 1.

<sup>10</sup>Mike Creswell, "Europe, Middle East Baptist Leaders Confer with IMB on Unfinished Task," *Baptist Press*, 11 April 2000, 1.

<sup>11</sup>Milton Magalhaes interview with author, 22 March 2011.

<sup>12</sup>Chris Carr, interview with author, 1 April 2011.

<sup>13</sup>Boyd Hatchel interview with author, 8 March 2011.

**Mark Edworthy, based in Prague, Czech Republic, is a missionary serving with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board.**

## Russian Orthodox and Russian Pentecostals: Comparisons and Contrasts

Jonathan C. Frazier

### Fundamental Differences

Western treatments of Eastern Christianity generally acknowledge differences in Eastern and Western mindset and worldview as critical components to mutual understanding (or misunderstanding as the case may be). For example, legal scholar John Witte, Jr., quoting Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, identifies the heart of East-West differences as a reflection of the "shadow of the Enlightenment" that erodes Western civilization. This shadow creates an environment in which "intelligent, well-intentioned people sincerely [believe] that the wonders of science

could replace the miracles of faith."<sup>1</sup> Witte's further explanation of the tensions that result from divergent worldviews is particularly meaningful as it relates to the Orthodox accusation that Western missionaries in Russia are guilty of proselytizing.

Theologian Donald Fairbairn suggests several fundamental ways in which differences shape the East-West discussion. First, one must recognize that Western Christianity focuses on the individual while Eastern Christianity tends to emphasize the group. For the Eastern mindset, which emphasizes corporate responsibility and individual connection to the whole, the Western notion of individual rights proves to be



irrelevant.

This contrast of the individual and the group serves as an important distinction between East and West. For Russian Pentecostals individual opinion often gets buried underneath a type of “group think” that permeates Pentecostal church culture. On occasion, Western missionaries, when dealing with church leadership, believe that allowing individual expression of various points of view builds consensus. Only later do they discover that, in reality, the group had previously formed a “consensus” around the view or opinion of one strong, individual leader. While members of the group may actually disagree, their unanimous submission to the “will of the group” (that is, its leader) is more important than an expression of disunity (even though their opposing view may actually lead to better solutions). A form of “pressured conformity” emerges rather than genuine consensus—an outcome made possible because of the underlying mindset that emphasizes the corporate nature of individual roles.

Second, Western Christianity typically views Scripture through a legal perspective while Eastern Christianity maintains an orientation that is “more personal and mystical, more concerned with participation in divine life.”<sup>2</sup> As Fairbairn illustrates:

The ancient Romans were among history’s greatest lawyers, and the Latin legal expertise bequeathed to the Western Church a mindset that understands biblical words such as “justification” in terms of legal status, guilt and innocence. In contrast, the Greek mind has long been fascinated with the quest of the soul to gain union with God, and this mystical bent has helped to shape Orthodoxy’s view of Christian life as a pilgrimage leading from death to life.<sup>3</sup>

This fundamental difference is especially noteworthy in the cross-cultural teaching context. The pedagogical methodology utilized in the classroom often reflects an indirect expression of the Western-legal and Eastern-pilgrimage tension. Westerners often come to the classroom prepared to systematically engage the subject material with outlines, charts, and other teaching tools that clearly delineate propositional truths in an informative (Easterners may say impersonal) manner. Very often, Eastern students must adapt the way in which they digest the material and adjust their thinking in order to understand the Western, information-oriented teaching style.

Third, the West orients itself to reality through a text or the written word while the East is “more pictorial and image-oriented in its approach to reality.”<sup>4</sup> A manifestation of this phenomenon is apparent in simple, but not insignificant ways. Fairbairn writes:

If one asks a typical Western Christian what the expression “Word of God” refers to, that person will probably answer, “Scripture.” When asked the same question, an Orthodox person is much more likely to answer, “Christ.” The incarnate Christ, the visible representation of God, the image of the invisible Father, is the one who the Orthodox celebrate in their churches full of icons and other visible images.<sup>5</sup>

The way in which Russian Pentecostals typically preach illustrates the Eastern emphasis on imagery. Unlike their Western counterparts who, by and large,

have adopted the typically Western propositional style of preaching, Russian Pentecostal preachers generally rely on storytelling and illustrations to convey biblical truth. While they may not worship in cathedrals surrounded by visible symbols and images of the gospel in the form of frescoes or icons, Russian Pentecostals use image-laden word pictures, allegories, and elaborate stories to communicate and illustrate their message. Clearly, Russian Pentecostals place a strong emphasis on illustration in the communication and transmission of the gospel due to the image-orientation rooted in the Eastern mindset.

Distinctives of Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Western Christianity are further revealed in their respective usage of the most basic of theological terms: *orthodox*.<sup>6</sup> From the original Greek, *orthodox* is a combination of *orthos* (meaning straight, right, correct, upright, or proper) and *doxa* (meaning opinion, glory, worship, or praise).<sup>7</sup> For Westerners, the term *orthodox* usually is defined as right doctrine or right opinion. Therefore, one may speak of errant points of view as *unorthodox*. In contrast, the term for Eastern Christianity usually is defined as right praise or proper glory that leads to right worship.

Westerners lean toward doctrinal exactitude while Eastern Orthodoxy focuses on an attitude of worship that gives proper glory to God. For the Orthodox, then, the liturgy—the ultimate act of right worship—provides the fullest means by which one may experience God. Fr. Kallistos Ware’s comment on the liturgy provides essential insight:

The Orthodox approach to religion is fundamentally a liturgical approach, which understands doctrine in the context of divine worship. It is no coincidence that the word *Orthodoxy* should signify alike right belief and right worship, for the two things are inseparable.<sup>8</sup>

“Those who wish to know about Orthodoxy,” Ware admonishes, “should not so much read books . . . [but rather] attend the liturgy. As Christ said to Andrew, ‘Come and see’” (John 1:39).<sup>9</sup>

### Common Ground

For many Westerners, the challenge of getting past the obvious differences in order to discover some common ground is daunting. However, a careful examination of the differences between the worldview and mindset of Eastern and Western Christianity ultimately serves to clarify the intellectual and theological milieu in which Russian Pentecostalism exists.

Edmund J. Rybarczyk, in *Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism on Becoming Like Christ*, suggests several characteristics that apply to both Pentecostal and Orthodox believers.

Neither answers to the pope in Rome.

Second, both Traditions allow and encourage ministers/priests to marry and have children. . . .

Third, both perceive themselves to be the great defenders of pneumatology. . . . Fourth, . . . both are theologically conservative. . . . Both believe that Jesus Christ is God’s only means of salvation and that he was born of the virgin Mary; both argue that the Christian canon is inspired of the Holy Spirit, and both maintain a Nicene-Constantinopolitan understanding of Christology (that Jesus was fully human and fully divine) and

Westerners lean toward doctrinal exactitude while Eastern Orthodoxy focuses on an attitude of worship that gives proper glory to God.

(continued on page 8)

## Russian Orthodox and Russian Pentecostals: (continued from page 7)

the Trinity (three persons in one being).<sup>10</sup>

These features illustrate basic points of compatibility between the two traditions.

Missionaries need to shift their focus from comparisons between East and West (Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism) to comparisons between East and East (Orthodoxy and Russian Pentecostals). Ultimately, the more one understands the mindset of the Eastern Orthodox context, the more one understands Russian Pentecostals. Three theological motifs in the Orthodox context markedly influence the Russian Pentecostal Church: the significance of experience, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the nature of evangelism.

### The Significance of Experience

Appearances can be deceiving. For the uninformed, the liturgy, the premiere mode of worship for the Orthodox, appears dark and mysterious. Services, led by robed priests set off from the congregation by screened partitions, accompanied by the wafting smell of incense, and chanted in a strange, unknown language, seem confusing, discomfiting, and completely foreign. The unfamiliar religious trappings feel cold and impersonal, but also, in some mystical way, sacred. Even the architecture, with its prescribed use of space, painted frescoes, candles, and icons, creates an atmosphere that charges the senses so that the observer, according to the Orthodox perspective, may be transformed into a participant and experience the genuine presence of God.

Edmund Rybarczyk correctly asserts that for both Eastern Orthodox and Pentecostals, “Christianity is—indeed life is—comprised of experience.”<sup>11</sup> The visceral, experiential knowledge of God that comes from a personal connection with Christ determines the significance and meaning of life rather than the theological constructs and arguments that inspire the intellect. “The experiential realm—accurately defined as the mystical realm because it incorporates ineffable and mysterious elements—is affirmed by both traditions, but there are distinctions.” In the end, “both are emphatic that to be a Christian is to experience Christ and his Holy Spirit—not only at conversion, but throughout one’s Christian life—in the deepest recesses of one’s being.”<sup>12</sup>

### The Role of the Holy Spirit

In the Orthodox context, the integral role of the Holy Spirit throughout one’s Christian life cannot be overstated. Theologically, pneumatology simply permeates every discussion within the Orthodox Tradition. Veli-Matti Karkkainen describes pneumatology as “one of the most distinctive characteristics of Eastern theology.”<sup>13</sup> In a manner comparable to the accusation that Pentecostals maintain too strong an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, Eastern Orthodox theology has been accused of being “pneumatocentric,” that is, having an “excessive concern with the person and work of the Spirit at the expense of the incarnate Word.”<sup>14</sup>

“The Orthodox,” Rybarczyk articulates, “discuss their doctrine of Christian transformation as a process involving *theosis*.”<sup>15</sup> The term *theosis*, translated into English as “deification,” simply refers to the “transformation of believers into the likeness of God.”<sup>16</sup> Rybarczyk explains:

United to Christ in Orthodox water baptism, . . . he or she does not become god but, in keeping with Scriptural teaching, is renewed in Christ’s image. [For] Orthodox, salvation involves organic union, not just forensic pardon.<sup>17</sup>

The role of the Holy Spirit in deification and in sacramental worship carries both individual and corporate implications. The individual’s participation in the corporate reality of the liturgy signifies an active role of the Holy Spirit who draws all humanity to Christ in the midst of community. Orthodox see the Holy Spirit as inextricably linked to the salvation process which is characterized by the sanctification of the Christ-image-bearing human being in community, beginning with baptism and culminating in *theosis*.

### The Nature of Evangelism

In reference to the famous mission of Cyril and Methodius to the Slavs, missiologist James Stamoolis points out several characteristics as being “regularly cited as the key elements in authentic Eastern Orthodox missions.” First, Orthodox missions emphasize the use of the vernacular, or the common language of the people in the liturgy, along with the translation of Scripture into common languages. Second, the use of indigenous clergy serves as a characteristic feature. Their theological training centers focus not so much on formal study, but rather “on a proper grasp of the essentials of the faith and, most of all, the liturgy.” A third element is the emphasis on the establishment of local churches that eventually become self-governing.<sup>18</sup>

The liturgy represents another characteristic feature of the Orthodox understanding of mission. The Church itself becomes an agent in the evangelistic mission of the church. Ultimately, evangelism in Orthodoxy centers more on calling the community together in worship than going out as witnesses in the world.

### Summary and Analysis

Clearly, fundamental differences exist between the worldview and mindset of Eastern and Western Christianity. For the Western missionary, an exploration of the Orthodox vision of life is analogous to the cross-cultural imperative to seriously and personally engage the host culture. In other words, an accurate awareness of the fundamental differences between East and West enhances the missionary’s ministry effectiveness as he or she interacts with and engages the culture. With regard to Western missionaries working with Russian Pentecostals, a corollary axiom may be that the more one understands the mindset of the Eastern Orthodox context, the more one understands Russian Pentecostals. While Russian Pentecostals certainly adhere to many core values compatible with Western Pentecostal points of view, a completely Eastern orientation remains the underlying, fundamental view of reality. In a word, Russian Pentecostals and the Orthodox Church display notable similarities.

Like Orthodox, Russian Pentecostals share an orientation toward the experiential reality of God who is active in this world, in this life. While Orthodox relate Christian experience to the life-long process of salvation with the ultimate goal of *theosis*, Russian Pentecostals recognize salvation as a one-time event followed by a progressive work of sanctification

Evangelism in Orthodoxy centers more on calling the community together in worship than going out as witnesses in the world.



throughout the Christian life. In each case, the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the outworking of becoming Christ-like in the truest and fullest sense. The Holy Spirit empowers Russian Pentecostals for witness and life.

An atmosphere of community also has a prominent place among Russian Pentecostals as well as Russian Orthodox. The intense Russian Pentecostal focus on community has, in some ways, marginalized them and resulted in introversion in their fellowship and religious experience. Church growth and evangelism often center around familial ties and conversion of non-believing loved ones and close acquaintances who are invited to attend a church service or Bible study. Finally, like Orthodox, who view the liturgy as the ultimate means and expression of the gospel story, Russian Pentecostals likewise tend to view evangelism as a “calling in,” rather than a “going out.”

Thus, theological motifs in the Orthodox context have influenced Russian Pentecostals. Worldview, theological approaches, the significance of experience, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the nature of evangelism are all inextricably linked. Best viewed as an organic whole, these issues interact with and influence Russian Pentecostals who live out their Christian existence in the Orthodox context. ♦

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, *Washington Post*, 25 October 1997, H12, quoted in John Witte, Jr. and Michael Bourdeaux, *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia, The New War for Souls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 20.

<sup>2</sup>Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 6. See also Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, “The Churches of the East,” Appendix A in *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004).

<sup>3</sup>Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy*, 5-8.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>6</sup>For example, see Bradley Nassif, James J. Stamoolis et al., *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 15; John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), vii. See also James R. Payton Jr., *Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 15; John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian*

*Orthodox Churches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), vii. See also James R. Payton Jr., *Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2007), 57-58.

<sup>7</sup>Translations for *orthos* and *doxa* are suggested in Stamoolis, Binns, and Payton, *Three Views*. A variety is included here for completeness.

<sup>8</sup>Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 266. The quote is attributed to George Every, *The Byzantine Patriarchate* (London: S.P.C.K., 1947), ix. See also Timothy (Kallistos) Ware, “The Earthly Heaven” in *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed by Daniel B. Clendenin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 13.

<sup>9</sup>Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 266.

<sup>10</sup>Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism on Becoming Like Christ* (Bletchley, Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 5-6.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>13</sup>Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 32.

<sup>14</sup>Staley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 1.

<sup>15</sup>Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, 17.

<sup>16</sup>Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharmalov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 1. An excellent account of the historical and theological development of *theosis* can be seen in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

<sup>17</sup>Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation*, 17.

<sup>18</sup>James J. Stamoolis, *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 21-22.

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Jonathan C. Frazier, “Preparing for Service: A Resource for Western Missionaries Working with Russian Pentecostals,” D.Min. dissertation, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2009.*

Jonathan C. Frazier has been a missionary serving with Assemblies of God World Missions in the former Soviet Union—Russia, Belarus, and Latvia—since 1995.

Theological motifs in the Orthodox context have influenced Russian Pentecostals.

## Russians and Koreans East of the Urals

John McNeill

### European Russian Culture East of the Urals

Siberia and the Russian Far East, the largest territories in Russia, are geographically part of Asia, but this label itself is somewhat confusing. Answering the question, “Have you ever been to Asia?,” helped me to see this clearly. My first impulse, when a student asked, was to answer, “No, I have never been in Asia.” But as I thought a moment, I realized that I had, of course, been to Asia, in fact many times. My teaching trips had taken me geographically across the

Ural Mountains or the Caspian Sea to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and various parts of Siberia, even as far as Kamchatka. However, in none of those crossings had I ever encountered physical signs of entrance to a different cultural world. Just how significant this difference is became clear when I first crossed the Siberian-Chinese border on the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Moscow to Beijing. At the Chinese border the traveler is faced immediately with massive evidence of architectural and other reminders that China contrasts sharply with the West. The first border city on this

(continued on page 10)

## Russians and Koreans East of the Urals (continued from page 9)

route in China, Manzhouli, is unmistakably different from all the cities and towns in nearby Siberia. All of those Siberian settlements are clearly of a type, resembling one another and similar towns and cities in European Russia. So, it seems, my confusion over the original question reflected a genuine difference that exists between the geographic and physical-cultural borders of Europe and Asia.

Although the borders between Europe and Asia south of the Urals and in the Middle East are the subject of much disagreement, the Urals themselves are practically universally accepted as defining the northern border between Asia and Europe. This less-than-dominant mountain range, however, has been of no consequence in thwarting the eastward spread of European Russian culture. During centuries of tsarist and Soviet imperial expansion, Russia managed to extend its culture all the way across Asia to the Pacific Ocean. Russians succeeded because of the temporary weakness of the Chinese and the relatively sparse population of the various indigenous Asiatic peoples in the region. Some southern cities such as Tashkent, situated on prosperous trade routes and supporting larger population densities, had developed the economic strength that permitted the building of enduring architectural monuments. Imposing mosques and tombs that still stand provide material cultural evidence of the historic Asian roots of present-day Uzbeks.

In Russian Siberia I have not seen such monuments to an Asian past. Instead, the region's cities are full of typical tsarist and Soviet-style buildings. Although many Asian faces are to be seen there, they are seldom if ever encountered in settings of Asian material culture. The people of Siberia and the Russian Far East live their lives in, and clothe themselves with, the trappings of European Russian culture. While Siberia and the Russian Far East are part of Asia geographically, culturally they are very European. Although it is true that Russia is a Eurasian nation, one in which "multiple layers of identity clash and complement each other" (Sakwa 2006: 215), one which bridges Europe and Asia, it still possesses a largely homogenous culture that does not reflect geographic and ethnic diversity. The imperial capital of St. Petersburg was the entire nation's cultural center, as was the case with Moscow as capital during the Soviet period. This cultural centralism was very pronounced, and leaves its clear marks to this day.

### Russians and "Asians"

A recent *St Petersburg Times* article by Boris Kagarlitsky laments "the return of fascism." He notes that young, prosperous, and well-educated people had formed an "angry, blood-thirsty mob sweeping through metro cars and beating dark-skinned passengers" (2011). While such violence is portrayed as a reaction to the present economic crisis in Russia, it is rather typical of attitudes that are deeply rooted in Russian identity. Just as Africans living in Russia have endured very stiff doses of racist treatment, so too, Asians have often been underappreciated, ignored, and discriminated against by Russians.

Before the arrival of Russians in the Far East, the region was thinly populated. Alexander Petrov notes that scientific expeditions in the Far East in the 1840s

and 1850s reported that "the Amur and Ussurijsky regions were deserted [and] sparsely populated" (2008: 161). Some years later, in 1905, during the Russo-Japanese War, Russian ethnic prejudice was evident in "Russian propaganda [that] described the Japanese as knock-kneed weaklings... a puny kind of monkey" (Merridale 2000: 63). Such attitudes are reminiscent of the attitudes of other Europeans and European Americans toward the indigenous peoples encountered in the Americas. No wonder that indigenous peoples in Asian Russia viewed Russians as colonizers and oppressors.

### The Korean Diaspora and Korean Missionaries

Into this region, with its colonial tensions, the first wave of South Korean missionaries arrived at the end of the 1980s. Previously, a population of about one-half million Koreans had arrived or been forcibly removed into Russia and the Soviet Union and then dispersed across its great breadth. (For more details on this process see John McNeill, "Notes on Korean Mission in the Former Soviet Region," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 2011, forthcoming.)

In view of the rapidly growing Korean missionary movement, the Korean diaspora within Russia and former Soviet territory was a logical extension of earlier missionary efforts. Because of race-based tensions in Russian Asia, Russian believers had made little impact in their attempts to spread Christianity in the region. Their faith tended to be associated with their status as the ones in power, the ones oppressing minorities.

### Korean Missionary Advantages

Korean missionaries, at least initially, had a different profile in the region. Within the Soviet Union Koreans were a persecuted minority, having themselves suffered in a way similar to what many other Asian people groups had also experienced. Thus, the initial reception of South Korean missionaries among minority groups was as representatives of an oppressed population, not as oppressors. Koreans living in the Soviet Union had experienced the same second-class citizenship as many other non-Russian peoples. They were all fellow sufferers.

When South Korean missionaries arrived, their first point of contact was the Korean diaspora, people who were ethnic Koreans but who were largely russified in language and culture. Still, because of the ethnic tie, the missionaries had found people who were naturally inclined to give them a hearing. In fact, Korean missionaries had found the perfect counterparts in the local culture to help them be effective in their Christian outreach. Korean missionaries were able to reach out to their ethnic cousins who then, in many cases, and with their local language and culture skills, became the main helpers in establishing contact with the indigenous population.

Korean missionaries were quite effective in their first years in the region. In numerous instances they were able to plant large churches with many new converts. In cities like Almaty, Kazakhstan, many converts were also drawn from local people groups, groups that had, in many cases, resisted for centuries the outreach of Russian missionaries, both Orthodox and Protestant. A colleague, an experienced international worker from the region, and I have been

Russia managed to extend its culture all the way across Asia to the Pacific Ocean. Russians succeeded because of the temporary weakness of the Chinese and the relatively sparse population.

The initial reception of South Korean missionaries among minority groups was as representatives of an oppressed population, not as oppressors.

The question must be asked: Are the efforts of Korean missionaries to reintroduce their cultural heritage to russified Koreans of any use at all or should they be abandoned?

able to identify only three Russian Protestant churches that successfully reached out to ethnic minorities. Others undoubtedly exist, but are rare. I suspect that these successful exceptions only improved their outreach in the *perestroika* period (the Soviet Union's last years) when not only Russian society but also the church was experiencing restructuring, trying new ideas and approaches. As one African Christian worker in the region told me, Koreans initially were better received than Russians among Kazakhs because of their perceived "Asianness." Kazakhs could more easily identify with Korean rather than Western missionaries, some of whose fellow Soviet Koreans had, like Kazakhs, been second-class citizens in the Russian and Soviet empires.

### Reeducation of the Korean Diaspora versus Cross-Cultural Missions

Unfortunately, by the late 1990s significant growth in Korean missions in the former Soviet Union had come to an end. This change was reflected in both flat numbers for local church growth and a sharp drop in the number of students attending the seminary in Moscow where I taught.

If the initial success of Korean mission work in the former Soviet Union was at least in part due to the cultural and linguistic skills of Soviet citizens of the Korean diaspora, to what can we attribute the fact that the same Korean missionaries are less successful today? A mistaken approach in their overall strategy may have played a significant role. One objective of Korean missionaries was to restore the connection between the Korean diaspora and the culture and language of their ancestral homeland. Much effort, time, and expense went toward reconnecting Russian-Koreans, Kazakh-Koreans, and Uzbek-Koreans with the language and culture of their ancestors. This goal seemed a natural one for South Korean missionaries, but it may be seen as something fundamentally wrong, both sociologically and missiologically.

From the social point of view, the question could be asked, "To what end would such a project be undertaken? Were these members of the Korean diaspora being prepared to be welcomed back to Korea?" The answer is clearly no. How then could a reconnection to Korean culture and language help them? While an understanding of their cultural and linguistic roots might, at least for some, be broadening and enriching, it would only be helpful if it did not awaken in them desires to leave their present home and return to a probably idealized life in South Korea. Such desires were and are by definition not able to be fulfilled in the present political climate because South Korea is not prepared to welcome them. The few Soviet Koreans who have ventured to South Korea were initially welcomed but were apparently very uncomfortable there.

The motivation for such cultural and linguistic reeducation must be carefully and critically evaluated. It may have been undertaken by many Korean missionaries based on an unspoken belief in the inherent superiority of South Korean culture. This kind of ethnocentricity should be rejected for both sociological and missiological reasons. If the Korean diaspora is not being welcomed back to the Korean homeland, the question must be asked just how much cultural education is enough to satisfy curiosity about

Korean roots without being too much and awakening desires that cannot be fulfilled?

From a missiological perspective, focusing the attention of Koreans living in the former Soviet Union on Korean culture can become profoundly counterproductive. Because russified Koreans are proficient in the Russian language and conversant with Russian culture, they initially were the perfect partners and helpers for South Korean missionaries. However, to the extent that they become steeped in Korean culture, they may become alienated from the local culture and less effective as missionary workers (Kim 2003-2004: 27-28). By engaging in cultural and linguistic reprogramming of Soviet Koreans, South Korean missionaries have probably rendered less effective the very people who had helped them to be effective in the first place.

### Conclusion

The question must be asked: Are the efforts of Korean missionaries to reintroduce their cultural heritage to russified Koreans of any use at all or should they be abandoned? If good reason exists for them to continue, how can these efforts be adjusted in order to have a constructive impact, rather than culturally alienating the Korean diaspora from the people among whom they live?

The Korean mission effort is blessed with many resources. However, a significant portion of Korean missionary funding is being used for cultural reeducation of the Korean diaspora. Is teaching Korean culture and language given too much emphasis? In much of Central Asia, for a time, Russian may remain the *lingua franca*. However, the Korean diaspora would be well served to learn or improve their skills in local languages and cultural practices. Although it may be counterintuitive to ask Korean missionaries to help their Korean cousins learn Kazakh or Uzbek instead of Korean, it might be a wiser use of mission resources. If Korean mission strategy in the region can move beyond its bondage to Korean cultural priorities, the impact of Korean missions in the former Soviet Union will be greatly increased. ♦

### Sources:

- Kagarlitsky, Boris. *The St. Petersburg Times*, accessed 10 January 2011 at <http://www.sptimes.ru/>.
- Kim, German. "Koryo Saram or Koreans of the Former Soviet Union: In the Past and Present." *The Amerasia Journal* 29 (No. 3, 2003-04): 23-29.
- McNeill, John. "Notes on Korean Mission in the Former Soviet Region." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, forthcoming in 2011.
- Merridale, Catherine. *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*. New York: Viking, 2000.
- Petrov, Alexander I. "Koreans in Russia in the Context of History of Russian Immigration Policy." *International Journal of Korean History* 12 (August 2008): 157-97.
- Sakwa, Richard. "Russia as Eurasia" in *Europe and Asia Beyond East and West*, ed. by Gerard Delanty (New York: Routledge, 2006). Pp. 215-27.

**John McNeill** is professor of anthropology and intercultural studies, Providence University College, Otterburne, Manitoba, Canada.



# Christianity and Folk Religion in Romania

Florin Paul Botica

In Romania witches, sorcerers, and fortune-tellers mix their beliefs and rituals with Christian elements.

Romanian people claim to be Christian, attending church, praying to God, and observing other Christian rites and holy days. However, to deal with daily needs and issues, they also believe in and practice folk beliefs and customs, many of which are unbiblical. This occurs in spite of the fact that in the Bible God promises to save the sinner, heal the sick, lift up the demoralized, guide the lost, give hope to the hopeless, strengthen the weak, take care of widows and orphans, comfort those who mourn, help the poor, and reveal His will and plans for our lives.

This study identifies folk beliefs and practices forbidden in the Bible: casting spells, witchcraft, divination, mediums and spiritists, magic, communing with the dead, and sorcery. The study also examines how folk beliefs and Orthodox theology have become entangled and how local churches can best address this syncretistic Christianity.

Specific folk beliefs and practices were identified through participant observation and interviews with 80 residents of various Romanian regions. Sixty-four of 80 informants were Orthodox, six were Catholic, six Protestant, and four non-religious. Of the 64

Orthodox participants only eight attended church weekly. Of those interviewed 28 were between the ages of 18 and 30, 26 were between 30 and 60, and 26 were between 60 and 90 years old. Also, an equal number of women and men were interviewed. In addition, ten Orthodox priests, eight evangelical pastors, six Catholic priests, and several other church leaders were interviewed about current church ministries designed to address split-level Christianity.

In Romania witches, sorcerers, and fortune-tellers mix their beliefs and rituals with Christian elements. For example, they perform black magic but claim their power comes from God, Jesus, or a church saint. They use several major Christian elements and objects in their rituals and spells such as candles, a picture or statue of a Christian saint or biblical character, as well as recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Romanians believe that certain people possess an evil eye whereby they have invisible powers that can harm others through looking at them. Often an illness or a child acting strangely will be blamed on the evil eye. It is very interesting that the recommended antidote is three recitations of the Lord's Prayer.

Romanian Folk Beliefs	Respondent Answers by Percentage		
	Yes	No	Did Not Know
Can the living contact the spirits of departed family members?	40	34	6
Do you believe that aliens exist and that they use UFO's?	42	25	
Do you believe that different superstitions and intuition can predict good or bad luck?	50	20	
Do you know your zodiac sign?	80	20	
	Often	Never	Sometimes
Do you read your horoscope?	45	26	8

Dr. Nicolaie D. Necula, dean of the Orthodox School of Theology, Bucharest State University, urges every priest to lead specific Bible studies in his parish related to Bible teachings about folk religions and how to distinguish between Christian faith and folk beliefs.

## Orthodox Efforts to Combat Folk Beliefs

Dr. Nicolaie D. Necula, dean of the Orthodox School of Theology, Bucharest State University, and a distinguished Orthodox leader and scholar who has trained several generations of priests, specifically addresses the issue of superstitions in his article, "Are True Christians Allowed to Believe in Superstitions?" He urges every priest to lead specific Bible studies in his parish related to Bible teachings about folk religions and how to distinguish between Christian faith and folk beliefs ("Priorities of Contemporary Pastoral Activities," *Almanah Bisericesc* [2003], 11-14).

Another Orthodox priest, Nicolae State-Burlusi, gave me a small booklet which he makes available at his church: *Prayers for Overcoming Black Magic, Spells, Evil Eyes and Enemies* (Ramnicu-Valcea, Romania: Editura Buna Vestire, 2004), written by an Orthodox priest in Bucharest. It explains what the Bible says regarding the sin of witchcraft, how

those in its bondage will be punished, why people seek the help of witches and sorcerers, and several steps to follow in order to be saved from the power and bondage of magic and spells. One such step is the power of a prayer said in faith. Believers are also encouraged to fast, pray daily, and attend church services and major holy days. In addition, the booklet offers several Psalms that can be used as prayers (37, 50, 53, 139), several relevant prayers by Basil the Great, one by Saint Cyprian, and a short admonition by John Chrysostom, explaining how to overcome temptations related to negative and evil folk beliefs and practices (State-Barlusi 2004:19).

Many Catholics in Romania are nominal Christians who do not attend church regularly. In times of crisis Catholics, especially in rural areas, still show a deep allegiance to local folk beliefs and rituals. Syncretism and split-level allegiance is lower among evangelical believers than among Orthodox or Catholic believers, and in many instances is

completely absent.

In my interviews only two evangelical church leaders were aware of the need for church instruction on folk beliefs. One, Rev. Vasile Talos, pastor of Good News Baptist Church of Bucharest, said,

This is a critical issue we need to address nowadays in Romania. We need to learn how to do critical contextualization and do it. We need to address nominal Christianity and Christian syncretism as much as possible. I have been trying to do it in my church through my teaching and small groups in particular, where one is discipled. (Talos, 12 April 2004).

## Recommendations for Better Addressing Romanian Split-Level Christianity

### I. Biblically Based De-contextualization/Re-contextualization

Critical contextualization represents an appropriate tool for examining split-level Christian beliefs and practices and evaluating them in the light of biblical norms, as well as replacing them with contextualized Christian ministries. During my field research I participated in *Pastele Blajinilor*, the Easter of Dead Ancestors. It is celebrated on the Sunday of Saint Thomas, one week after Easter Sunday, commemorating Jesus' appearance to the twelve disciples when Thomas was told to believe that Christ was risen. The Monday after *Pastele Blajinilor* Orthodox believers visit the cemeteries of their deceased relatives. Priests come to each grave and perform a commemoration liturgy, after which family members of the dead throw offerings of food and wine on the ground and give what remains to those gathered, including many poor people. Orthodox believers keep this custom because they believe their deceased need food in heaven.

In de-contextualizing Easter of Dead Ancestors, believers should keep the form and some of the meaning. The liturgy of commemoration should be performed because it is proper to remember family members and commemorate them for their faith and devotion to God. Food offerings should still be offered to participants and thrown on the ground, but the meaning at this point should be reinterpreted in light of scriptural teachings.

In re-contextualizing Easter of Dead Ancestors, Orthodox believers should be reminded that those who died in Christ do not need food in heaven. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) Jesus explained that the departed cannot influence the living. The same principle may be applied in reverse: we can do nothing for those who have died. Thus, after we commemorate the departed and learn from their life of faith, we partake of the food brought, knowing that they died in Christ, and that they are much better off now. Some of the food can still be thrown on the ground to feed the birds which are part of God's creation. The goal, in summary, is to keep the main parts of the ritual but change the meaning according to scriptural teachings and

doctrines. The same principle of contextualization/decontextualization can be applied to other split-level or syncretistic church customs and beliefs.

### II. *Sodzo* Evangelism

In evangelization, churches in Romania tend to focus on the spiritual aspect of salvation (forgiveness of sin and eternal life), while neglecting the physical and emotional well-being that is part of God's shalom. Many Romanians accept Jesus as savior, but apparently do not trust Him when they need physical or emotional healing. In times of crisis, they often rely upon folk beliefs and practices, many of which are forbidden in the Bible. Local church leaders should therefore engage their churches in what I call *sodzo* evangelism.

The Greek word *sodzo*, which occurs 102 times in the New Testament, describes salvation in spiritual terms such as forgiveness of sins, but also in physical terms such as healing, deliverance from evil and harm, recovery, remedy, rescue, and welfare (Matthew 1:21; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:36, 48, 50; John 3:17; Acts 4:9, 12, 27:34; Romans 5:9; Ephesians 2:5, 8; and Hebrews 5:7). *Sodzo* in Hebrew translates as *shalom*, which means wholeness, that is, spiritual, physical, emotional, and social well-being (NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon at <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/sozo.html>).

Romania's present context is similar to that of 18<sup>th</sup> century England in which John Wesley successfully evangelized split-level and nominal Christians. Asbury Theological Seminary Professor George Hunter attributes the success of early Methodism to its preaching and its systematic pastoral care. Regarding the latter, Wesley designed ministries to fit human needs after careful study of the ills of the day. As Hunter writes, "Wesley visited, observed, interviewed, and corresponded.... He visited persons who were possessed, obsessed, and oppressed. He visited persons in prison, persons who had seizures, prisoners on death row, sick persons, anxious persons, guilt-stricken persons, grieving persons, persons on their death beds.... In each situation, he was there to minister, but also gather data" (*To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987], 131-32). Based on his findings, Wesley sought to address all manner of problems.

In the same vein, Asbury Seminary theologian Howard Snyder explains, "Wesley set up loan funds for the poor.... He opened a dispensary and gave medicines to the poor; worked to solve unemployment; sometimes set up small businesses. He personally raised and gave away considerable amounts of money to people in need" (*Decoding the Church: Mapping the DNA of Christ's Body* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002], 95-96).

As the Wesleyan movement helped revive the Anglican Church, so the Lord's Army became a successful renewal movement within the Romanian Orthodox Church. It originated in 1923 when Iosif

Many Romanians accept Jesus as savior, but in times of crisis they often rely upon folk beliefs and practices, many of which are forbidden in the Bible.

(continued on page 14)

## Christianity and Folk Religion in Romania *(continued from page 13)*

Trifa, an Orthodox priest from Sibiu, experienced true conversion and began to preach the gospel, challenging people to have a true relationship with the crucified Lord. The Lord's Army formed small groups for the purpose of worship, spiritual growth, and discipleship, and ministered to the felt needs of its members and those being evangelized (Vasile Talos, "Church in the Apostolic Spirit: A Strategy for Building Indigenous Apostolic Congregations in the Eastern Orthodox and Post-Communist Cultural Context of Romania" [Doctor of Missiology dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2007], 233-38).

In order to successfully evangelize split-level Christians, Romanian churches should take into consideration holistic, *sodzo* evangelism, as was the case with early Methodism and the Lord's Army. In keeping with these models, I propose a range of evangelistic methods and outreach ministries.

### Improvements for Worship Services

Through word and song, worship should stress both spiritual and physical aspects of salvation. In addition to preaching and performing the sacraments, Romanian church leaders should, like Wesley, focus more on discipling and "building up" believers in the faith.

### Prayer Services for Healing and Deliverance

Many Assemblies of God churches in Romania practice a healing ministry. (I myself was healed of an illness in an Assemblies service.) Other evangelical churches, as well as Orthodox and Catholic, should practice this biblical ministry, as described in James 5:14-16.

### Health Clinics

Several Romanian churches provide free medical consultations, usually conducted by doctors who are members of local churches and who donate one day of service a week. Often clinics, such as Koinonia Clinic run by the Baptist Church in Galati, provide free medicines donated by West European and U.S. churches, missions, and NGOs. Short-term medical missions from the West also form a component of *sozdo* outreach.

In several villages of Bacau County in southeastern Romania I have observed grateful people starting to attend churches after receiving free medical care. Many were nominal Christians who previously mixed their faith with folk beliefs and practices in order to find help for health problems.

### Assistance with Employment

Local churches can be of assistance to many

Romanians seeking employment. One Baptist minister in Bucharest learned of several job openings from a member of his church who was a factory worker. The minister shared this information with people he knew who were in need of work. The factory hired four of these workers as a result of the cooperation between the pastor and his church member. This minister is considering a formal employment service as a ministry of his church.

### Christian Counseling and Guidance

Many people struggling physically or financially should be assisted by the church as they experience loneliness, stress, and depression. The church also has a role to play in ministering to those experiencing divorce, those mourning the death of loved ones, and those living alone. As Christians meet such needs, fewer Romanians will seek relief and answers from witches and sorcerers.

Professional Christian counselors, as well as pastors and priests, now provide advice and guidance to those in distress. A member of Golgotha Baptist Church of Bucharest (my home church), for example, is a professional counselor who offers her services at no charge at Holy Trinity Baptist Church one day a week.

### Other Compassionate Ministries

Christians should be good Samaritans caring for people passing through difficult times. Churches in Romania should expand ministries providing basic food and clothing for those in need, help people struggling with financial crises by giving short-term help with utility bills, help fix a broken car, or start a small business. Other examples of care might include shopping for the elderly or infirm, painting or helping rebuild houses damaged by storm or fire, giving rides to people whose cars are being repaired, helping new mothers with household chores, and comforting those who have lost a family member and are grieving. ♦

*Editor's note: The second half of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 20 (Winter 2012).*

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Florin Paul Botica, "Toward Addressing Split-Level Christianity: A Study of the Interaction Between Christianity and Folk Religions in Romania," Ph.D. dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2010.*

**Florin Paul Botica** is senior pastor of Cedarcrest Community Church, LaGrange, Georgia, and a church ministry consultant for the National Association of Christian Congregational Churches in America.

As Christians meet needs, fewer Romanians will seek relief and answers from witches and sorcerers.



---

## The Revival of Russian Iconography *(continued from page 16)*

that can lead in the end to the creation of something authentic—that will lead to an iconographic style adequate to today’s faith, instead of a mindless reproduction of prior patterns.

One of Father Zinon’s most recent works, painted in 2002-2004, is a two-tiered frescoed iconostasis prepared for the Church of Saint Sergius of Radonezh in the village of Semkhoz (not far from Sergiev Posad). This church was raised on the place where Father Alexander Men was murdered in 1990. In profound respect for this pastor, preacher, and theologian, Father Zinon created a highly original iconostasis.

The artistry of Archimandrite Zinon occupies an important place in the Russian iconographic tradition. His authority is recognized even by those who do not agree with his theology or the direction taken by his creativity. His great achievement is having been the first to blaze a path forward during the tumultuous and chaotic process of reviving Russia’s iconographic tradition. His current work provides ongoing grounds for optimism about the future of Russian iconography.

### The Revival of Monastism

Father Zinon’s work also underscores the revival taking place in Russian monasticism. Over the past 20 years hundreds of monasteries and hermitages have been revived, many literally on top of their own ruins. In many cases, neither walls nor support structures nor even the church buildings had been left standing. Today, the traditional monastic arts-and-craft traditions are also being revived. And in many monasteries, including the Optina Hermitage near Kozelsk, Novospassky Monastery in Moscow, and Saint John the Theologian Monastery in Ryazan, so too is the monastic iconographic tradition.

The Novo-Tikhvinsky Monastery in Ekaterinburg is particularly successful in this regard. Founded in 1810, then shuttered in the 1920s, the monastery was reopened in 1994. The residents include more than 150 sisters, of whom five have reached the highest spiritual rank of the Great Schema and 48 are novices. The former traditions are gradually being restored here, including a monastery choir and studios for iconography and embroidery work. Monastic iconographers here produce individual icons and have created several entire iconostases.

Prior to the revolution some 100 sisters worked in the Novo-Tikhvinsky icon studio. The icons created by the nuns, as well as their handmade miniature and painted souvenirs, were very widely known, and sometimes even given as gifts to members of the royal family. Today seven nuns work in the convent’s icon workshop.

The iconographic works created by the Novo-Tikhvinsky sisters show the influence both of the canonical foundations of the icon—with special attention to classical Byzantine prototypes—and of the folk art aesthetic, for which ornament and decoration are of such great importance. Great attention is given to folding icons, such as triptychs and diptychs, as well as to the manufacture of beautiful icon-cases. In sum, the elegant iconographic style of the women artists at Novo-Tikhvinsky Monastery represents a

revival of a worthy tradition.

---

### New Saints and New Artistic Freedom

Over the past two decades a great many new images have made their appearance within Russian ecclesial art. This has happened because the church now has the freedom—of which it had been deprived for many years—to canonize saints. It now is working actively to make up for lost time. During the church councils in the 1980s and 1990s, dozens of persons were canonized. And during the Jubilee Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church in the year 2000, some 1,154 new saints were sanctified, most of whom were either new martyrs or confessors who suffered through the Soviet period (1917-1991). Tradition dictates that a new icon be created for every saint. It is difficult for the Church to cope with this sudden large increase in the number of saints and to properly study the person and personality of each. Never a hurried, assembly-line affair, the creation of new icons takes time.

In considering the work of contemporary iconographers, it is important to note that they have more freedom than any previous generation of artists, and they are also better informed. Modern means of communication, whether print, audio-visual, or media, provide artists with almost unlimited opportunities to learn about preexisting traditions. Artists today can bring into their studios the complete spectrum of iconographic models that have been created in every different region or time period, whereas iconographers in ages past were limited to their local school, or at most to the small number of icons that might happen to find their way into their village or city of residence.

In the world of iconography, we frequently come across debates between proponents of the Russian and the Byzantine (Greek) styles about which style or school is more appropriate or relevant to contemporary iconography. To be sure, within the Orthodox world these styles were never seen as being in opposition. After all, the art of Old Russia was born out of the Byzantine canon, and only over time acquired its own style and personality. What is more, Greek art has always been valued in Russia, just as Greek icons were always held in high esteem. Even after the fall of the Byzantine Empire Russian iconographers continued to respect and learn from Greek master iconographers. Today the choice for Byzantium or ancient Rus’ amounts essentially to an aesthetic preference. Some artists favor the classical precision of the Byzantine style, others the gentle colors and softness of the Old Russian style. Arguments about which is better become pointless because in the end it is the talent of the individual artist that is all-defining. ♦

*Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Irina Yazykova, Hidden and Triumphant: The Underground Struggle to Save Russian Iconography (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010).*

**Irina Yazykova** is an art historian who lectures at St. Andrew’s Biblical Theological Institute, Moscow, and Kolomna Orthodox Theological Seminary.

The artistry of Archimandrite Zinon provides ongoing grounds for optimism about the future of Russian iconography.

# The Revival of Russian Iconography

Irina Yazykova

*Editor's note: The first part of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 19 (Summer 2011), 5-7.*

## Father Zinon in Pskov

In 1994, the ancient Spas-Preobrazhensky (Christ's Transfiguration) Mirozhsky Monastery, located in Pskov, was transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church, and an international school for iconography was founded there, headed by Father Zinon. There several monks and novices assisted him in his work, some specializing in preparing the boards, others in painting the icons. In this way, the inhabitants of this monastery formed not simply a monastic community, but a fraternity of iconographers—a wholly unique phenomenon in Russia. Little by little, through the efforts of this fraternity, the monastery, formerly in a state of utter collapse, began to revive.

Among other achievements, these iconographers restored the Church of Saint Stefan the New Martyr. Father Zinon constructed an original stone iconostasis for it and painted icons of the Savior, the Theotokos, and several saints in medallion (circular or oval-shaped) icons. Over the course of three years, dozens of artists completed apprenticeships there, and many icons were painted. The school became a focus of the iconographic renaissance and acquired an international reputation. In 1995, Father Zinon, in recognition of his mastery of the art of iconography, was awarded the State Medal of Russia.

However, in 1997, Bishop Eusebius, the ruling hierarch of Pskov and Prilutsky, placed a disciplinary ban on Abbot Zinon and his brother, forcing Father Zinon to leave the Mirozhsky Monastery. In the absence of its founder, the school was hard pressed to continue functioning. Father Zinon moved, along with a handful of other monks, to the village of Gverston, located in the west of the Pskov Region. He lives there to this day. Since the 1990s Father Zinon has received

invitations to work in a variety of other countries including France, Finland, Belgium, and Italy.

To an extent, Father Zinon was influenced by his interaction with Maria Sokolova (Mother Juliana), who during the 1970s had worked in the Trinity Lavra where he too had been invited to work by Patriarch Pimen. Sokolova, who esteemed before all else the Moscow School of the days of Rublev and Dionisius, considered this period not only the high point in medieval Russian art, but the gold standard for iconography of any time or place. This was likewise Abbot Zinon's initial point of reference, as can be seen, for example, in his icon of Saint Daniil of Moscow painted for the Saint Daniil Monastery.

## A Growing Byzantine Influence

But even during this Moscow phase we can see, in certain of his icons, that Father Zinon was drawn to an even earlier style, evident in icons such as *The Baptism of Russia*, created for the millennial celebration of 1988. Decorative elements typical of the Russian school of the pre-Mongol invasion period were integrated into his treatment of the painted surface. The faces in his icons produced for the Pskov-Pechersk Monastery remind us of images from the pre-Mongol period. In his iconostasis for the Saint Serafim of Sarov side chapel of the Trinity Cathedral in Pskov, we find movement toward the monumental style of the twelfth century. The central image of the Savior, Christ in Majesty, is clearly modeled after the famous twelfth-century Sinai Icon.

Father Zinon's gradual retreat from the generally accepted, more-or-less standardized iconographic style and his adoption of Byzantine and early Christian art as his point of reference, may be observed in the iconostasis for the Church of Saint Stefan the First Martyr, located in the Mirozhsky Monastery. Here we find an image of Christ inspired by the Ravenna (Italy) mosaics. Even the face of the Savior has been made youthful, as was the accepted practice in the pre-iconoclastic period. And the image of the Mother of God on her throne recalls early Roman icons. Also in this church, Father Zinon painted a number of saints' medallions that are bold and energetic, even exhibiting a degree of naturalism, as was typical for early Byzantine frescoes and encaustic icons (painted with hot wax). The iconostasis, assembled from roughly cut stone and with deep niches for icons, was modeled after altar barriers found in some Greek churches. All of this speaks eloquently of the artist's high degree of freedom and mastery of form.

The general trend of Father Zinon's creative search is a movement toward the very heart of Church tradition, toward those early sources of holy tradition within which lie hidden a great many possibilities of which history has never made use. Contemporary iconographers, he believes, should once again go through the steps of mastering their Byzantine heritage, just as was done at the dawn of Russian iconography. This, he now believes, is the only path

Father Zinon was drawn to Byzantine and early Christian art as his point of reference.

The quarterly *East-West Church & Ministry Report* examines all aspects of church life and mission outreach in the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe as a service to both church and academia. Letters to the editor are welcomed. Annual subscription rates are \$49.95 (individuals, U.S. and Canada); \$59.95 (individuals, international); \$53.95 (libraries, U.S. and Canada); \$63.95 (libraries, international); and \$22.95 (e-mail). Reprint and photocopy policy: 1) Quantity photocopies or reprints of up to three articles from a single issue may be distributed or reprinted at no charge. 2) Written permission is to be secured for each distribution or reprinting. 3) The following statement is to be carried on each photocopied article reproduced and each article reprinted: Reproduced (or Reprinted) with permission of the *EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT*. Currently indexed by American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies (ABSEES), OCLC Public Affairs Information Service (formerly PAIS), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Zeller Dietrich (formerly Zeller Verlag), and Christian Periodicals Index.



ASBURY  
UNIVERSITY  
Established 1890

Mark R. Elliott, Editor  
*EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT*  
Asbury University  
One Macklem Drive  
Wilmore, KY 40390  
Tel: 859-858-2427  
E-mail: emark936@gmail.com  
Website: www.eastwestreport.org

©2011

ISSN 1069-5664