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New Code of Conduct for Christian Witness

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In January 2011 the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, the World Council of Churches (representing mainline Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches), and the World Evangelical Alliance agreed upon a new code of conduct for ethical, non-coercive sharing of the gospel. These church bodies, which collectively represent approximately two billion members, or 90 percent of the global Christian population, negotiated this path-breaking code of conduct in three consultations spanning a period of five years: May 2006, Lariano, Italy; August 2007, Toulouse, France; and January 2011, Bangkok, Thailand (www.internationalbulletin.org; pp. 194 and 196).

In “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct,” all parties concur that “Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings” (Preamble of “Christian Witness.” All citations to “Christian Witness” are taken from the text online at www.oikoumene.org/eng/a/en/news/news-management/article/1634/christians-reach-broad-co.html. Hereafter, all references are from this document unless otherwise noted.)

The desired practical outcome for “Christian Witness” is to see churches and mission agencies “reflect on their current practices and...prepare, where appropriate, their own guidelines for their witness and mission” (Preamble). The document notes that “In some contexts, living and proclaiming the gospel is difficult, hindered or even prohibited, yet Christians are commissioned by Christ to continue...in their witness to him.” At the same time, “If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the gospel....Such departures call for repentance” (“A Basis for Christian Witness,” Points 5 and 6).

The sections of “Christian Witness” entitled “Principles” and “Recommendations” provide a valuable blueprint for sharing the gospel with integrity. Key affirmations, with accompanying commentary by the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* in italics, may be summarized under five headings: I. fair representation of other confessions and faiths; II. disavowal of all forms of violence and coercion; III. advocacy for government impartiality in matters of faith; IV. calls for tolerance, respect, and inter-religious dialogue; and V. the need to distinguish between acts of mercy expected of all Christians and inappropriate allurements.

I. Fair Representation of Other Confessions and Faiths

To characterize other churches and religions fairly, “Christians should avoid misrepresenting [their] beliefs and practices” (Recommendation 3). “Any comment or critical approach should be made in a spirit of mutual respect, making sure not to bear false witness concerning other religions” (Principle 10). Appendix 3 of “Christian Witness” further urges that “Freedom of religion enjoins upon all of us the...non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming superiority of our faith.” *The ever-present temptation in making comparisons is to commend the example of the most praiseworthy spiritual paragons of one’s own tradition while omitting to mention or minimizing the significance of the shortcomings of one’s own confession. Individuals who have managed to abstain from unfair representations and comparisons include Plymouth Brethren evangelist Lord Radstock who scrupulously avoided criticism of Russian Orthodoxy in his preaching in St. Petersburg palaces; Don Fairbairn in his exemplary, balanced critique of Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes; and Father Alexander Schmemmann in his self-critical judgments as well as defense of his own tradition in The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy and The Journals of Alexander Schmemmann 1973-1983.*

II. Disavowal of Violence and Coercion

“Christians are called to reject all forms of violence, even psychological or social, including the abuse of power in their witness. They reject violence, unjust discrimination or repression by any religious or secular authority, including the violation or destruction of places of worship, sacred symbols or texts” (Principle 6). *Sad to say, the past two decades provide too many examples of violence motivated by religious intolerance in post-Soviet states: the murder of Father Alexander Men and other Orthodox priests; the murder of Korean Protestant missionaries in Siberia; Albanian destruction of Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries (following earlier Serbian destruction of Albanian mosques); an Orthodox bishop in Ekaterinburg ordering the public burning of texts written by “suspect” theologians: Alexander Men, Alexander Schmemmann, and John Meyendorff; and ongoing harassment of Russian Baptists and Pentecostals and vandalism of their houses of worship. (On murdered priests: East-West Church and Ministry Report 7 [Summer 1999]: 1; and Orthodoxy in the World, 28 May 2010; www.pravmir.com/article_987.html; on Korean Protestant missionary murders: East-*

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West Church and Ministry Report 3 [Spring 1995], 4; on destruction of Serbian and Albanian religious sites: East-West Church and Ministry Report 12 [Summer 2004], 1-3; and 12 [Spring 2005], 15; on Orthodox book burning: East-West Church and Ministry Report 6 [Summer 1998], 11; on harassment of Russian Baptists and Pentecostals: Felix Corley, "Fined for Meeting for Worship," *Forum* 18, 28 October 2011, www.forum18.org. For many additional examples of harassment search the *Forum* 18 online archive.)

III. Advocacy for Government Impartiality

Unfortunately, much of the religiously inspired mayhem in post-Soviet states is exacerbated by government partiality toward one or another favored faith. The text of "Christian Witness" speaks at length of the necessity of state neutrality regarding freedom of conscience: Christians are encouraged to "call on their governments to ensure that freedom of religion is properly and comprehensively respected, recognizing that in many countries religious institutions and persons are inhibited from exercising their mission" (Recommendation 5). "Religious freedom including the right to publicly profess, practice, propagate and change one's religion flows from the very dignity of the human person which is grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God.... Where any religion is instrumentalized for political ends, or where religious persecution occurs, Christians are called to engage in a prophetic witness denouncing such actions" (Principle 7).

In post-Soviet territories, especially in the Caucasus and Central Asia, changing one's religious allegiance from a majority to a minority faith is particularly fraught with danger. On this point, "Christian Witness" holds that followers of Christ "are to acknowledge that changing one's religion is a decisive step that must be accompanied by sufficient time for adequate reflection and preparation, through a process ensuring full personal freedom" (Principle 11). Given existing state and societal pressures to maintain one's identification with a majority faith, it must be recognized that freedom of conscience may be violated not only through improper pressure or inducement to change one's religion, but also by improper pressure or inducement not to change one's religion (Mark Elliott, "Evangelism and Proselytism in Russia: Synonyms or Antonyms?," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 25 [April 2001], 72).

Churches enjoying numerical superiority and/or state privilege typically have exploited their advantages in ways that have undermined freedom of conscience. As a rule, in such circumstances, minority faiths have faced persecution or discrimination. It should be pointed out that a lack of government impartiality in matters of faith has been the case not only in states with established churches (for example, Catholic Spain, Orthodox tsarist Russia, Lutheran Prussia, and Anglican England), but also in circumstances of informal church-state compacts, such as Protestant privilege in nineteenth-century America and Orthodox privilege in post-Soviet Russia.

IV. Calls for Tolerance, Respect, and Dialogue

The text of "Christian Witness" repeatedly addresses the need for tolerance, respect, and inter-religious dialogue: "Christians are called to commit themselves to work with all people in mutual respect,

promoting together justice, peace and the common good. Inter-religious cooperation is an essential dimension of such commitment" (Principle 8). "In certain contexts, where years of tension and conflict have created deep suspicions and breaches of trust between and among communities, inter-religious dialogue can provide new opportunities for resolving conflicts, restoring justice, healing of memories, reconciliation and peace-building" (Recommendation 2).

While the above commitments deserve wholehearted support, in the post-Soviet context it must be noted that respect, tolerance, and inter-religious dialogue are extremely rare commodities. In large measure, this sad circumstance is a function, at least in Russia, of a once-privileged Orthodoxy reasserting its claims to spiritual hegemony. Lord Acton's famous aphorism, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely," applies in Russia with a vengeance.

The contrast between Eastern Orthodoxy in North America and in Russia is instructive. As a minority faith in the West, Orthodoxy benefits from, and seems genuinely agreeable to, the concept of full protections for freedom of conscience. In Russia, however, Orthodoxy accepts—and even lobbies the government for—ever-increasing legislative discrimination against Christians outside the fold of the Moscow Patriarchate. The only faiths Orthodoxy tolerates are those that have sworn off witness outside their historic ethnic constituency (Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism), hence their ceremonially privileged characterization, along with Russian Orthodoxy, as "traditional" religions in the preamble of Russia's discriminatory 1997 law on religion.

Generally speaking, those faiths that favor inter-religious dialogue are religious minorities that suffer legal and/or societal distrust and discrimination, for example, Muslims in post-9/11 America and Baptists, Pentecostals, and Methodists in present-day Russia. The fact is that Russian Orthodoxy has little interest in inter-religious dialogue because, in its privileged position, it sees nothing to gain from it. Traveling through Siberia in September 2011, this writer was struck repeatedly by the desire of Russian Protestants and Western missionaries (politically impotent) to dialogue with Russian Orthodox (politically privileged), but the latter will have no part in it. The existing power differential is all the more striking given the fact that Protestantism east of the Urals appears to be demographically much stronger than Orthodoxy. The author's interviews with Professor Andrei Savin, Novosibirsk, and seven missionaries and Russian believers, 6-14 September 2011, provided the following denominational figures: 28 Protestant and 8 Orthodox churches in Khabarovsk; 19 Protestant and 4 Orthodox churches in Komsomolsk na Amure; and 65 Protestant and 27 Orthodox churches in Novosibirsk. The same Protestant majority applies in Sakhalin: Natalia Potapova, "Contemporary Religious Life on Sakhalin Island," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 13 (Summer 2005), 3. (In contrast, Irkutsk, the historic capital of Siberia, is home to 35 Orthodox churches compared to 28 Protestant: <http://iemp.ru/uprav/hram/hram/php>.)

The text of "Christian Witness" urges that "relationships of respect and trust with people

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of different religions” be built “so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation” (Principle 12). *Unfortunately, in practice, Orthodox in post-Soviet states require non-Orthodox to forswear Christian witness as a precondition for tolerance and cooperation.*

V. Distinguishing Appropriate Acts of Compassion from Inappropriate Allurements

Finally, the text of “Christian Witness” commends demonstrations of Christ-like compassion, but not material enticements that could lead to conversions of convenience. “Christians are called to...serve others and in so doing to recognize Christ in the least of their sisters and brothers. Acts of service, such as providing education, health care, relief services and acts of justice and advocacy are an integral part of witnessing to the gospel. The exploitation of situations of poverty and need has no place in Christian outreach. Christians should denounce and refrain from offering all forms of allurements, including financial incentives and rewards, in their acts of service” (Principle 4). Similarly, “As an integral part of their witness to the gospel, Christians exercise ministries of healing. They are called to exercise discernment as they carry out these ministries, fully respecting human dignity and ensuring that the vulnerability of people and their need for healing are not exploited” (Principle 5).

As praiseworthy as Principles 4 and 5 are, they give inadequate guidance in differentiating between biblically mandated compassion and service on the one hand and unjustifiable allurements on the other. The fact is that Russian Orthodox define any Protestant or Catholic educational or medical assistance or charitable act as a means of proselytizing and sheep stealing. In the 1990s a pastor from Florida called this writer outlining his church’s plan for an evangelistic campaign in Russia. Following a short-term preaching mission, those

Russians who made professions of faith and who joined a new church plant were to be given a trip to their sister church in Florida so they could experience an evangelical worship service in America firsthand. To the best of my ability I tried to explain to this well-meaning but misguided pastor that his approach to cross-cultural ministry was bound to produce “rice Christians” drawn to “faith” by the enticing prospect of a free trip to an American vacationland.

Conversely, just as a paid trip to Florida is an inappropriate allurement for new Russian converts, equally inappropriate is Orthodox insistence that no Protestant or Catholic act of charity is legitimate on what Orthodox define as their exclusive canonical territory, even in cases of charity extended to those who have no affiliation with Orthodoxy. In the mid-1990s an Orthodox priest visited an orphanage near Volgograd, advising the director not to accept assistance from Protestants. The director, who was not a believer, reacted angrily, asking the priest why he had not come to help, rather than criticize Protestants who did help.

No fair-minded Christian would want to endorse the example of the Florida pastor or the Volgograd priest. Nevertheless, the line between commendable and exploitative acts of mercy and service can be quite fine and quite gray. Thus, the appendix of “Christian Witness” is right to note that “Each issue” addressed in this unique, multi-confessional document “is important in its own right and deserves more attention than can be given in these recommendations” (Appendix, Point 5). It would be most beneficial to have the text of “Christian Witness” serve as the basis of discussion for the formulation of a more detailed and nuanced code of conduct for evangelical missionaries wherever they may serve.♦

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The line between commendable and exploitative acts of mercy and service can be quite fine and quite gray.

Recommended Reading on Missionary Guidelines

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Correction

In the chart, “Signators to Human Rights Treaties,” in H. Knox Thames, Chris Seiple, and Amy Rowe, “International Religious Freedom Advocacy,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 19 (Summer 2011), 10, Kyrgyzstan should have been included under the column for Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) 1975.

Suicide in Former Eastern Bloc States and the Church's

Response

Dennis Bowen

Of the 10 nations with the highest suicide rates, five are in the former Soviet Union: Lithuania—1st, Kazakhstan—3rd, Belarus—4th, Russia—6th, and Ukraine—8th.

Suicide Rates

About one million people die from suicide worldwide each year. Of the 10 nations with the highest suicide rates, five are in the former Soviet Union (FSU): Lithuania—1st; Kazakhstan—3rd; Belarus—4th; Russia—6th; and Ukraine—8th. Three other FSU republics have suicide rates among the highest worldwide: Latvia—11th; Estonia—17th; and Moldova—19th (Initiative for Mental Health, 2010). While suicide rates increased worldwide in the 20th century, the rise in suicide rates in former Soviet republics has been unprecedented. Ten of the former republics had extraordinary rises in suicide rates in the period 1990-1995. (See table.)

Sociologist Emil Durkheim (1858-1917) wrote that society-wide instability would necessarily lead to a state of alienation and uncertainty, which he named *anomie*. Great changes in conditions of life lead to uncertainty and anxiety on individual and national levels.

Many well-known factors contribute to suicide risk including individual personality factors, access to lethal means (medications, firearms), low levels of life satisfaction, low levels of religious practice, alcohol consumption, mental disorders, divorce, unemployment, poverty, a family history of suicide, and previous suicide attempts (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2001). Other research shows gender, age, latitude, and seasons associated with suicide risk (Windfuhr & Kapur, 2011).

The highest rates of suicide in the FSU are in the Baltic republics and the western republics (Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine). Suicide rates in the Central Asian republics and the Caucasus republics are lower with the exception of Kazakhstan, a Central Asian republic with a high Slavic population (Vamik, Tooding, Palo & Wasserman, 2000).

From 1980 to 1990, suicide rates in 12 of the 15 republics declined, attributable in large part to Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign begun in 1985 (Vamik & Mokhovikov, 2009). Alcohol consumption, especially binge drinking, is associated with higher suicide rates in Belarus during the period 1980-2005 (Razvodovsky, 2011). Regulation of alcohol could be an effective intervention in reducing suicide rates.

Islam, the major religion in Central Asian republics, is associated with low levels of suicide, both due to the tenets of Islam, and the fact that many Muslim countries under-report the number of suicides (Nafees, 2010). Armenian, Azerbaijan, and Georgian suicide rates are as low as or even lower than those of Central Asian republics.

The three large Slavic republics, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, saw sharp increases in suicide rates (of 52, 56, and 37 percent respectively) immediately after 1990. The Baltic republics saw even higher increases in suicide rates between the years 1990 and 1995 (Estonia, 48; Latvia, 56; and Lithuania, 74 percent). In these countries Durkheim's *anomie* appeared in increasing unemployment, uncertainty, increased poverty (Mäkinen, 2000), and "general hopelessness

in segments of the population" (Vågerö, Ferlander, Leinsalu, Mäkinen & Stickley, 2005, 42). Suicide rates in Central and East European states have not been uniform. Rates of suicide declined in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia between 1990 and 1995, while Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania saw dramatic increases in suicide rates during the same period.

Certain demographic and personality factors mediate and protect individuals from risk of suicide. These factors include: having young children, utilizing mental health services, religious practice, possession of coping skills, employment (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2005), as well as limiting access to lethal means, decreasing substance abuse, crisis intervention, and improved mental health services (Beautrais, Fergusson, Coggan, 2007).

Deficient Health Systems

The health systems in the FSU had been deteriorating since before *perestroika*. Mortality rates, especially in the westernmost republics, had been increasing since 1970. By 1974, the average age of death for men in Russia had declined to 57.6 years. Health systems were inflexible and suffered in overstressed economies. Today former Eastern Bloc countries face the need to decrease dependence on large bureaucratic mental health services centered primarily around psychiatric hospitals. Soviet era health care legacies that continue to linger include underfunding, unwieldy and overly centralized direction, and politicized psychiatry.

Eastern Bloc autocratic states encouraged passivity in relationship to authority and people behaved passively in relation to health care as well. Piko wrote that in these countries, "There is a need for converting learned helplessness. . . into learned optimism" (2004, 112). Improvement in health, whether in relation to suicide, tuberculosis, or HIV, cannot be realized simply by fine-tuning the systems currently in existence. Effective health care overhaul must involve community engagement, nationwide policies, and a reorientation of health systems toward primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention agendas (Robles, 2004).

Suicide Prevention

Specific proposals for suicide prevention must include a revamping of health care systems. Three former Eastern Bloc states were part of a recent 21-nation investigation of suicide and health care systems that revealed that only 40 percent of those considering suicide had received any medical or psychiatric treatment. Citizens of poorer nations had even less contact with health care systems. Few contemplating suicide felt the need to seek help, and many held unfavorable attitudes toward the health care system (Bruffaerts, Demyttenaere, Hwang, 2011).

Community-wide prevention programs have been shown to be effective in reducing suicide rates. One such program conducted on Gotland Island in Sweden focused on education and treatment by medical practitioners who had been specially trained in suicide

prevention. Suicides decreased by 60 percent during the years the program ran. However, the suicide rate returned to previous levels when the program ended (Rutz, 2001).

Furthermore, public awareness of mental health results in people being sensitive to those at risk for suicide. Screening for depression and suicide risk can be conducted. Mass media can also play an important role by educating themselves and by depicting mental health issues in a responsible manner (New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2005).

Comparing Nationwide Prevention Measures

Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan have articulated no national mental health policies. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Uzbekistan all have national mental health policies, plans, and legislation. Other FSU republics have policies, but are only now developing concrete plans and implementation. Russia has no nationwide suicide prevention program, although some regions (Omsk, Sverdlovsk, Tomsk, and Irkutsk) have created integrated systems for care and prevention of suicidal behavior (Lyubov, 2011). A three-year project is underway in Belarus to provide physicians with training in the diagnosis and treatment of depression (Karolinska Institutet, 2010).

In Ukraine, suicide was one of the leading causes of death among soldiers. In response, the military command initiated a successful prevention program based on education of officers and representatives of the most vulnerable risk groups and distribution of informational materials to all personnel (Rozaov, Mokhovikov, Stiliha, 2002). In Estonia a current project, "Estonia Free from Depression," sponsors training of school personnel to recognize depression and to intervene to prevent suicide. Families of students also receive published materials on suicide prevention (ESSI, n.d.). In addition, Estonia offers local suicide survivor support services, as do Lithuania and Russia (IASP, 2011). A number of international organizations operate telephone suicide help hotlines using call centers outside the FSU. In the former Soviet Union the greatest concentration of help hotlines is found in the Baltic, the Caucasus, and western regions.

Christian Help Hotlines

Christian ministries sponsor telephone hotlines for spiritual questions and for problems such as addiction, loneliness, and family conflict. Some ministries in the FSU include suicide in their list of concerns, but it appears that no Christian helplines exist exclusively for suicide prevention. Christian counselors confirm that they are not aware of the existence of telephone resources specifically for those contemplating suicide.

One ministry that operates a telephone helpline is the Emmanuel Association, part of the Christian Broadcast Network. Emmanuel provides telephone numbers for material help, adoption services, and a 24-hour spiritual helpline. Toll-free Russian-language calls may be made from Russia, Ukraine, Israel, and the United States. Emmanuel receives several thousand calls per month, but only a few dozen per year come from individuals considering suicide.

Orthodox Efforts

The Ufa Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church hosts an internet site dedicated exclusively to the topic

of suicide (<http://www.k-istine.ru/suicide/suicide.htm>). Several dozen articles written by priests and others present Orthodox positions on various aspects of suicide. The site also provides telephone numbers for local and regional government-sponsored 24-hour hotlines offering social and psychological help. A similar website "Pobedish," meaning "You Will Overcome" (<http://pobedish.ru/>), features articles by clergy and other professionals on various aspects of suicide, such as overcoming suicidal thoughts, the meaning of life, coping with losses, suffering, depression, and anxiety. This site has links and an email address for the Church of the Mother of God of Sorrows in St. Petersburg.

Recommendations for Further Christian Intervention

Given the need for transition to a comprehensive reformation of the health care system, Christian health professionals should take a leading role where possible. Believers with a vision for more responsive health services could model proactive and preventative care.

Soviet psychiatry, psychology, and medicine were suspect in the past, and for good reason. All three served to suppress political dissidents by means of forced hospitalization and mind-altering drugs. As a result church leaders and church members are wary of many non-Christian professionals and their resources. Distrust of the health care system is particularly serious in the case of suicide. As no Christian ministries currently offer direct suicide help, such as suicide hotlines, churches must rely on secular systems for assistance. Church leaders therefore must encourage their members to utilize secular services when they are available in their communities.

Church leaders also need to have an understanding of risk factors for suicide. Pastors and church leaders should receive training in suicide symptoms, mental illness, and crisis intervention. General practitioners have proven invaluable in successful suicide prevention programs, and churches should and could be proactive as well.

To educate the church at large, informational pamphlets and books could be produced to alert believers regarding suicide symptoms. Christian internet sites could do the same and at less cost. Ideally, pastors, lay leaders, and laity could attend seminars that would provide overviews of mental illness and how the church can extend help and care for fellow citizens suffering from debilitating psychological conditions including suicidal tendencies.

Could a Christian organization or coalition of congregations and organizations work together to create an effective response to suicide in former East Bloc states? Yes, it is possible. Although a church or ministry can consider a direct ministry such as a hotline, this type of outreach requires trained staff who are knowledgeable on topics related to psychiatry, psychology, and medicine. Probably, at this point, the best option for the church would be to become better informed, not only about suicide prevention, but about a range of mental health issues, substance abuse, and treatment options. Whatever action the church takes, the goal should be to more effectively serve as salt and light in its community.

Pastors and church leaders should receive training in suicide symptoms, mental illness, and crisis intervention.

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Suicide in Former Eastern Block States and the Church's Response (continued from page 5)

Annual Suicide Rates Per 100,000 Population						
Country/Year	1980/81	1985/86	1990/91	1995/96	2000	2004/05
Armenia	3	2.3	2.8	3.5	1.6	1.8
Azerbaijan	4.6	3.7	1.6	0.7	0.8	1.1
Belarus	24.6	19.1	20.4	31.2	34.9	33.2
Bulgaria	13.6	16.3	14.6	17	16.9	13
Czech Republic		20.9	19.3	17.5	16.1	15.3
Estonia	36.1	22.3	27.1	40.1	27.5	20.3
Georgia	6.2	4.6	3.6	4.1	2.9	2.2
Hungary	45	44.8	40	32.5	29	26
Kazakhstan	22.5	22.4	19.1	28.6	29.9	25.9
Kyrgyzstan	13.8	11.7	12.5	13.5	10.5	9.2
Latvia	32.8	29.4	26	40.7	32.4	24.5
Lithuania	33.6	34.1	26.1	45.6	44.1	38.6
Moldova	19.8	20.3	14.8	18.5	14.9	17.6
Poland	11.2	13.3	13	14.3	15.1	15.8
Romania			9	12.3	12.6	14.1
Russia	34.6	31.2	26.5	41.5	39.4	32.2
Slovakia			15	13.7	13.5	12.6
Tajikistan	3.9	5.9	4.4	3.5	2.9	2.6
Turkmenistan	8.7	7.5	8.1	5.4	8.6	
Ukraine	23.7	22.3	20.7	28.4	29.6	22.6
Uzbekistan	7.2	8.3	7.2	6.5	7.8	5.5

Source: WHO, 2009.

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World Health Organization (2009). World Health Organization: Country Reports and Charts Available. Retrieved from: http://www.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/country_reports/en/. ♦

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Recent Developments in the Southern Baptist International Mission Board's Approach to Theological Education

Preston Pearce

Historical Overview

The Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board¹ (IMB) has a long history of emphasizing theological education as a part of its missionary efforts. In many countries around the world, its missionaries established and engaged in a wide variety of ministries for the preparation of church planters, pastors and other leaders—from informal lay training programs to degree-granting seminaries.

During the Communist era, Baptists in Eastern Europe faced severe challenges in their efforts to gain access to theological training. This led to a situation in which the number of Baptist churches often far exceeded the number of trained pastors. After the collapse of Communism, many Baptist Unions in Eastern Europe experienced a surge of church planting and growth, which further intensified the need for the preparation of church planters, pastors, and leaders. With new freedom came the opportunity in many countries to begin, reopen, or expand local seminaries and Bible institutes for this purpose.

The IMB was eager to help. Dr. John Floyd, IMB Regional Leader for Central and Eastern Europe (1993-99), felt that having IMB missionaries serving in seminaries was vital for influencing church planting and growth. Among the many personnel who were commissioned or transferred to Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, a significant number were directly involved in theological education. Floyd also initiated the Decentralized Theological Education project in an effort to meet the needs of leaders who did not have access to formal training. Through the 1990s, IMB personnel were teaching full or part-time in seminaries or extension work in Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, and Croatia.

Paradigm Shift and Its Impact

In the late-1990s, the IMB underwent a radical paradigm shift known generally as "New Directions." The organization moved from a focus on cooperation with existing Baptist work around the world, to one primarily facilitating church-planting movements (CPMs)—the rapid multiplication of indigenous churches²—among unreached people groups.

"New Directions" significantly affected the IMB's approach to missionary deployment in general and to its involvement in theological education in particular. IMB leadership determined that because of its status as a missions agency, its highest priority—reflected in personnel placement—should be engaging people groups untouched by the Gospel rather than assisting in established work such as seminaries. IMB leadership recognized the value of those ministries but felt their operation should be the responsibility of existing churches and unions. Dr. Rodney Hammer, IMB Regional Leader in Central & Eastern Europe (1999-2008), did not rule out IMB involvement with seminaries in Eastern Europe but expected it to be in alignment with a CPM-oriented strategy that had as its objective planting churches that multiply.

The paradigm shift led to a reduction of the number of personnel directly involved in theological education. Few were appointed in the 2000s for full-time theological education in Eastern Europe; some who had been in theological education transitioned to other ministries; others left the field because of "New Directions." The IMB maintained a reduced presence at institutions in Romania, Albania, and Ukraine, and in other places some personnel continued to be involved with local seminaries through adjunct teaching.

This shift did not, at least in principle, mean that the IMB placed less value on theological education. However, "New Directions" did question whether residential training was the best context for the preparation of church planters, pastors, and leaders.³ In some cases IMB personnel came to consider seminaries as a hindrance to reaching people. Given the IMB's history of involvement in the establishment and operation of many of these institutions, the issue was sensitive. Regardless of how IMB leaders tried to affirm their support of theological education, their actions and priorities indicated otherwise to national partners in Eastern Europe.

IMB's East European partners had their own concerns about the new paradigm. The emphasis on rapid multiplication and "on-the-job" training for leaders required more leaders than the typical seminary could possibly prepare even through extension work. In addition, "New Directions"

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Mission Board's Approach to Theological Education *(continued from page 7)*

aroused concern over potential problems that could arise with untrained men in leadership, especially in light of Paul's charges to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:6, 5:22).

The IMB's paradigm shift was painful for many of the seminaries to which it related worldwide. Some found themselves in staffing and funding crises and felt abandoned. In some cases national leadership could see the value of the paradigm shift but considered the timing lamentable. To them the change seemed abrupt, as they had not been in the long internal discussions that led to the IMB's shift and were not prepared for sudden defunding. Further, in the paradigm shift some IMB personnel communicated negative attitudes toward formal theological education. Some felt that they were being criticized by the IMB for using leader training methodology that IMB missionaries had taught them.

Seminaries responded in a variety of ways to meet staffing and funding needs created by IMB withdrawal. Aside from developing limited local support, some found foreign churches, mission boards, or other organizations that were willing to help; others continued to struggle, and some of these eventually closed.

Renewal of Commitment

Recent years have brought a growing desire within the IMB to renew its commitment to theological education. In 2008, the IMB asked Dr. Chuck Lawless, Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, to serve as a global consultant for theological education.⁴ Lawless traveled to various parts of the world to assess the status of theological education overseas. In 2010, the IMB established a new position, theological education consultant, with the intention of appointing one each for Africa and the Middle East, Asia, South America, and Europe. These consultants are tasked with "building relationships with overseas seminaries and Bible schools, developing programs for leadership training... [and working] with Southern Baptist seminaries to encourage and facilitate partnerships with national Baptist seminaries."⁵ In April 2011, at the recommendation of newly-elected president Tom Elliff, IMB trustees elected Lawless as Vice-President for Global Theological Advance.⁶

New openness now exists in IMB for the appointment of personnel in theological education. However, stewardship during the American economic downturn led to a reduction in the number of IMB personnel globally and has forced IMB leadership to strictly prioritize needs. Thus, the likelihood of IMB personnel being appointed to serve in a seminary is affected by a number of factors, including the priority the institution gives to church planting and the potential for a professor to be directly involved in church planting.

Currently several IMB personnel relate to seminaries and Bible institutes in Eastern Europe. In Ukraine, Joel Ragains and Dan Upchurch direct the church planting major (B.Th.) at Kyiv Theological Seminary (KTS), while Russell Woodbridge serves as acting dean. Mike Ray teaches regularly at Kremenchuk Regional Bible College. Ed Tarleton, who arrived in Russia in the early 1990s and taught

at the Moscow Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS), is now in IMB strategy leadership in Russia. Though he no longer teaches, he serves as a trustee of MBTS. Andy Leininger teaches a course at the Novosibirsk Bible Theological Seminary.

In Romania, Richard Clark teaches at the Baptist Theological Institute in Bucharest while Cornel Tuns provides theological training for Roma church planters and leaders. Lee Bradley directs the Albanian Bible Institute. Kyle Kirkpatrick, Mike Tullis, and Eric Maroney have been directly involved with the Baptist Bible School in Novi Sad, Serbia. Also, Tim Berry works with a Bible institute in Krapina, Croatia. Additional informal relationships exist between IMB personnel and institutions in other places. This writer serves as the IMB's Theological Education Consultant for Europe and has visited and/or consulted with seminaries and Bible institutes in Serbia, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Ukraine, and intends to continue building relationships and identifying potential places and ways IMB can be involved where church planters and leaders are being prepared for service.

Dr. Mark Edworthy, who served as Dean of the Polish Baptist Seminary in Warsaw from 1993 to 2000, currently leads IMB work in all of Europe, including the former Soviet Union. The three-fold mandate of every IMB worker in Europe, he maintains, is to "make disciples, initiate new groups and churches, and train national leaders." Edworthy believes that effective work in all three areas is required for a long-term positive impact.

The IMB also desires to offer help where appropriate in facilitating partnerships with Southern Baptist seminaries in the US. Potential exists for guest professors to teach in Eastern Europe (perhaps through a sabbatical leave) to assist in faculty development or to consult in curriculum development.

Conclusion

It would be too simplistic to say that the IMB was completely right or wrong in every decision regarding its paradigm shift, and consequently, regarding theological education. Different paradigms and ways of training obviously have advantages and disadvantages,⁷ and the solution does not need to be one or the other. IMB leaders continue to strive to align the organization's structure with what they believe to be the Lord's purpose and will. Evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and leader training (in its various forms) will remain priorities. IMB leadership still recognizes that ongoing foreign funding is ultimately detrimental, so it is not returning to the days of financial support. At the same time, the IMB does desire to affirm the value of, and its commitment to, thorough preparation of church planters and leaders. ♦

Notes:

¹ Before 1997 the IMB was known as the Foreign Mission Board (FMB). Though some portions of this article refer to the time before the name change, IMB will be used throughout for the sake of consistency.

² David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 21.

³ Garrison, *Church Planting*, 269-70.

⁴ "IMB Taps Lawless for Theological Ed. Post," Baptist Press, 6 May 2008; accessed online, 8 August

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2011, at <http://bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=27995>.

⁵ Don Graham, "Theological Education Team Named by IMB," Baptist Press, 8 April 2010; accessed online, 21 April 2010, at <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=32667>.

⁶ Alan James, "Elliff to 'newly introduce' IMB to young pastors at SBC," Baptist Press release, 22 June 2011, accessed online, 22 June 2011, at <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=35359>.

⁷ See Mark Elliott, "The Current Crisis in Protestant Theological Education," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 30 (November 2010), 15-17.

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Mere Christianity: Teaching Ethics in Ukrainian Public Schools

Mary Raber

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Promoting Respect for Others

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."

Voluntary and Popular

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.¹ The elective status is prized. "As soon as you make Christian ethics a requirement, it loses its appeal," Sannikova claims.

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.

Threats and Shortcomings

Yet ambiguities remain. The creation of a curriculum without a confessional slant is a remarkable accomplishment, but it is not universally supported. The politically powerful Moscow

Patriarchate promotes the introduction of a basic Orthodox catechism, *Zakon Bozhiy* [*The Law of God*], as a national requirement. Significantly, their representative withdrew from participation in inter-confessional curriculum groups in April 2010. Some fear that President Victor Yanukovich favors the Moscow Patriarchate and has appointed officials to the Ministry of Education who will bypass the carefully constructed inter-confessional Christian ethics structure and eventually dismantle it. Meanwhile, in places where Greek Catholicism predominates, moral education in the schools goes hand-in-hand with church-based religious instruction and a confessionally neutral approach may be considered superfluous.

Moreover, Christian ethics has not been implemented everywhere. Many parents are not even aware that the subject exists as an option for their children. Some school directors may simply ignore the Christian ethics elective because of the extra work of assigning a teacher, or out of a sense of caution, or perhaps because of lingering Soviet-era anti-religious attitudes, or because they fear potential conflict. However, Anna Solomina, a teacher in Kyiv, blames indifference and lack of unity among Christians for hindering the implementation of Christian ethics: "We have failed to recognize God's mercy for Ukraine.... This has been available since 2005. By now we should already have Christian ethics in all the schools."²

Christian Ethics as Life Choices Education

At about the same time that Tetiana Sannikova was starting to teach biblical ethics to Odessa fifth graders, Nadiia Malicheva, trained as an artist, was visiting high school classes in Kyiv to talk to teenagers about making wise decisions. Like many Ukrainian women, Malicheva had undergone an abortion that caused her great physical and spiritual suffering, and she wanted to help others avoid her experience: "I didn't want to scare them, but teach them how to think." In addition to abortion, she addressed narcotics, alcohol, and other topics, connecting each issue to biblical principles. Eventually she collected information on 60 themes, which became the basis for teaching materials now prepared and distributed by Nove Zhittia [New life], a "cultural-educational center" with affiliates in several major cities.³ Malicheva is one of the forerunners of professional and volunteer teachers who entered public schools in increasing numbers during the 2000s to give instruction in *stanovlenie lichnosti*, that is, character formation, or life choices education. Like many others, Olena Prokhorenko became involved because of a direct call for help from a school director who was overwhelmed by the complex and dangerous issues her pupils faced. "I started with drugs and

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alcohol,” Prokhorenko remembers. “Then I tackled pre-marital sex, abortion, HIV-AIDS, and getting along with parents.”

Some schools rely on doctors and other professionals to speak on such topics from a strictly informational perspective, but because of their morally based approach, some teachers refer to life choices education as “Christian ethics” in a kind of shorthand. The national Christian ethics curriculum touches on the same issues, but from the standpoint of developing a framework for a comprehensive moral system and with direct reference to the Bible. Life choices education is more immediate, focusing on the needs of young people to confront serious day-to-day challenges. Here the emphasis is on presenting clear, reliable information from a moral perspective that may or may not be directly identified as Christian.

Examples of Life Choices Instruction

Prokhorenko, a member of a Charismatic church, and her Orthodox colleague, Svitlana Lopata, are employed by Charitable Fund “Good Shepherd Shelter” in Makiivka (Donets’k Province). Their original assignment was to maintain contact with children who had lived briefly at the organization’s shelter before being permanently assigned to state-run boarding schools (*internats*). Now, besides teaching life choices in the *internats*, they present regular classes at numerous area middle schools and have also given seminars to local government officials and parents. “It helps that we’re identified with a social service organization,” Prokhorenko observes. “If we said we were from a church, we couldn’t get in.”

Baptists, Adventists, Greek Catholics, and others are doing similar work around the country with good results, but because they are working in public schools their church affiliation is downplayed. If a teacher has been engaged to lecture on AIDS prevention, for example, he or she must do that competently without reference to faith. Yet conveying the basics of Christian morality in a non-intrusive, informational way is not ruled out. Much depends on an individual teacher’s relationships with school administrators and pupils. “As trust develops,” Prokhorenko says, “I add more biblical material.” Occasionally, when she is challenged by Orthodox laypeople, her partner Lopata takes the lead. In general, however, no matter what their confession, life choices teachers are able to agree on “mere Christianity,” acknowledging that truth is in Christ and that schoolchildren desperately need clear information and a moral structure for making decisions.

Through life choices education young people sometimes ask to study the Bible or seek further opportunities to explore a Christian worldview. In order to accommodate them, Nove Zhittia offers clubs or discussion groups outside of school. For eight years the Christian youth club, *Tvoia perspektiva* [Your Perspective] in eastern Ukraine, headed by Viacheslav Khalanskiy, has organized a summer camp around Christian worldview themes. Many of the participants first became interested in the camp through contact with life choices teachers. Several times a year *Tvoia perspektiva* brings together interested teachers, students, parents, church leaders, government officials, and others for day-long seminars on character formation, sexual morality, family relationships, and

other topics.⁴

Resources and Networking

Obviously, teaching life choices/Christian ethics demands considerable tact, skill, and knowledge. “You can’t just stand up there and lecture,” warns Prokhorenko, “If you do, none of these kids will listen to you. You have to be able to get their attention.” Fortunately, many resources have been developed for teachers in Ukraine since the 1990s. No central clearing house exists for information nor, rather surprisingly, any standardized requirements for teacher competence or even curriculum, although many teaching materials have been approved by the Ministry of Education. Instead, individuals and organizations seem to manage to locate each other through word of mouth or specialized seminars offered around the country.

Many volunteer teachers valiantly continue to collect their own material, drawing on newspapers, popular films, internet, and classical literature. As mentioned above, Nadiia Malicheva teamed up with professional educators to create comprehensive lesson plans illustrated with DVDs of film clips, slide shows, and music. Often teachers make use of translated materials from international organizations that provide teaching resources on specific issues, such as those offered by AIDS Care Education and Training (ACET).⁵

Nove Zhittia, ACET, and others also sponsor regular training seminars for educators in order to introduce resources, practice teaching, and discuss problems. The international organization Hope in Education (<http://hopeineducation.com>) presents seminars on the integration of a Christian worldview into the educational process. Confessional lines are frequently crossed. Baptists might attend a training program on HIV-AIDS at a Charismatic church, or an Orthodox priest might address a gathering of teachers held at an evangelical theological school.

Conclusion

The websites of numerous organizations working in the area of Christian ethics in Ukraine usually include positive testimonies from students, teachers, and school administrators concerning the usefulness of a given program or resource. Most groups conduct some kind of informal assessment of their work, and seminar participants almost always fill out evaluation forms. Some school administrators have noticed an improvement in children’s attitudes and behavior where Christian ethics is taught. However, to my knowledge, no formal study has yet been made documenting the long-term results of teaching Christian ethics in Ukraine. Nevertheless, even without hard statistical evidence, the consensus is that such courses can only help. Whether they will continue depends on the wisdom, commitment, and goodwill of people at all levels of the educational process.

Of the two broad Christian ethics trends, the national inter-confessional curriculum is more vulnerable to dismantling because of its public character, its dependence on government policy, and the plain hard work of maintaining relationships among various confessions. Life choices education with a Christian perspective is probably more

Confessional lines are frequently crossed. Baptists might attend a training program on HIV-AIDS at a Charismatic church, or an Orthodox priest might address a gathering of teachers held at an evangelical theological school.

sustainable because of its informality. It is locally based, draws on a wide variety of resources, and meets an undeniable need. The development of a national life choices curriculum might be advisable, but it could end up stifling the role of Christian volunteers. On the other hand, greater efficiency and unity among life choices practitioners are probably needed to consistently deliver quality moral education to schools countrywide.

Before he was crucified, Jesus prayed for believers that “all may be one” (John 17:21). Without doubt, that prayer will be fulfilled in the future Kingdom. In the meantime, however, in the Ukrainian context, a truly inclusive Christian ethics curriculum and the consistent witness of teachers of all confessions may be some of the best evidence for the Holy Spirit’s presence. These social projects offer genuine hope for the formation of moral values among the young and also create space for much-needed inter-confessional dialogue. Incidents of religiously motivated violence have occurred in Ukraine since independence, but if the country continues to be spared the armed conflict that has crippled other countries, perhaps future historians will point to instruction in Christian ethics

as one of the mitigating factors. ♦

Notes:

¹ Alternatives are philosophical ethics, which takes a secular approach, and religious ethics, which explores the moral values of other religions besides Christianity.

² Quoted from a presentation at a conference on spiritual-moral education held in Odessa, 17-18 March 2011.

³ Based on notes from a presentation and personal conversation at a conference on spiritual-moral education held in Odessa, 17-18 March 2011. *Nove Zhittia* may be accessed at www.nlc.org.ua.

⁴ Information on Tvoia perspektiva may be accessed at <http://www.mxx.artangel.org.ua>.

⁵ Available at <http://acet.org.ua>.

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Truly inclusive Christian ethics curriculum and the consistent witness of teachers of all confessions offer genuine hope for the formation of moral values among the young and also create space for much-needed inter-confessional dialogue.

New Strategies for Church Planting in Romania

Vasile A. Talos

Baptist-Pentecostal Comparisons

According to national polls, between 1992 and 2002, the total number of Baptists in Romania increased by 15.7 percent (from 109,824 to 126,639) and Pentecostals by 46.9 percent (from 220,824 to 324,824) in the context of a decrease in the Romanian population by 5.2 percent (Constantin Cuciuc, *Religiozitatea Populatiei din România la începutul Mileniului 3* [Bucharest: Editura Gnosis, 2005], 11). The more rapid growth of Pentecostal churches could be largely due to the fact that Pentecostals have large families, with 4 to 11 children. The text from I Timothy 2:15 is interpreted literally, in the sense that women shall be saved in childbearing.

During Communism, trained pastors represented the most important asset for Baptist churches, while Pentecostal churches relied heavily on small prayer groups. Due to this practice, Pentecostal churches involved massive numbers of lay people in ministry and developed a missionary mentality in the process.

When planting new churches, Baptists rely primarily upon pastors and church planters who travel back and forth to unevangelized villages and towns. Rural Baptist churches are in decline not only because young people are migrating to cities, but because their pastors usually live in cities and visit these churches only on weekends. Pentecostals, however, have one or two families move to a village that has no evangelical church with the goal of becoming integrated into village life.

In planting churches, Baptists are not always successful in reproducing the liturgy of urban mother churches. For example, Holy Trinity Baptist Church in Bucharest sent Aurel Cojoc to spread the gospel in nearby Fundulea. He gathered people in a private house for Bible reading, answering people’s questions, and prayer. In about two years more than 20 people received Jesus Christ and were baptized. When attendance grew to over 30 people, the mother church built a chapel. Pastor Cojoc started to introduce a

worship service on the pattern of the mother church, but church attendance soon started to decline. Despite the missionary’s efforts, church attendance in Fundulea diminished to about five people.

Pastor Vasile Tamas from Cluj-Napoca had a similar experience. Every week the pastor and two other Christians went to a nearby village and gathered people in a small group for prayer and Bible reading. They prayed, answered people’s questions, and taught them the Bible and Christian songs. Very soon more than 40 people received Jesus and were baptized. Soon after that, Pastor Tamas organized traditional Baptist worship services and provided a chapel. However, following the chapel dedication, the church stopped growing and no new believers were baptized in the following three years. Unfortunately, such experiences have been repeated many times in Romanian Baptist church planting.

In contrast, Pentecostals have used a simpler worship format based on prayer and discussions about problems faced by villagers. Moreover, in rural southern and eastern Romania, locals appreciate Pentecostal songs inspired by folk music, while Baptist churches typically use American and German songs translated into Romanian. In the Moldavian region of Romania villagers have been more deeply moved by folk-inspired Christian ballads than by band music from Baptist churches in Transylvania or contemporary Christian music from Bucharest.

Pentecostal churches allow for greater administrative flexibility than do Baptist churches. Thus, small Pentecostal prayer groups multiply easily at the grass roots level, and ordinary people are more involved in serving in the church. In addition, the several branches of Pentecostals in Romania allow for different ways of doing church, in contrast to greater conformity in Baptist structure and worship. Pentecostals stress the gifts of the Holy Spirit for all believers, whereas Baptists rely on a small number of ordained and lay ministers.

Between 1992 and 2002, Baptists in Romania increased by 15.7 percent and Pentecostals by 46.9 percent in the context of a decrease in the Romanian population by 5.2 percent.

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New Strategies for Church Planting in Romania *(continued from page 11)*

The field research in this study focused on three churches from three major cities in Romania. Their senior pastors, lay leaders, and church members were interviewed. These churches were selected because they were attempting to employ new ways of doing church.

“The judge who fined me in 1985 because I was distributing Bibles is now one of the clinic’s patients.”

Holy Trinity Baptist Church of Braila

Josef Stefanuti has been the pastor of Braila Baptist Church since 1974. The city of Braila was a Communist stronghold before 1989, while today it represents a very traditional Orthodox area. Pastor Stefanuti has a vision for a mature church with a holistic ministry and a strong impact locally, nationally, and internationally. He believes that a church’s ministry has to fulfill the physical, social, educational, cultural, and spiritual needs of people.

Putting this philosophy of ministry into practice, Holy Trinity Baptist Church built House of Hope Orphanage, Diakonia Medical Clinic, and a youth center for social, cultural, sport, and spiritual activities. Also, Holy Trinity built a new sanctuary with 1,200 seats, one of the most impressive buildings in the city, and a Bible college for training church planters. In addition, the church has developed communal projects for elderly people and brings medical teams from the United States throughout the year. During the Christmas and Easter seasons, Holy Trinity organizes Christian concerts advertised throughout the city featuring the finest and best known Romanian choirs, singers, and artists. During the summer, the church organizes Christian youth rallies on the shore of the Danube River. Teams of short-term missionaries from the United States are also involved in these events.

Pastor Stefanuti declared:

I looked at the needs of this city and I was shaken by the dramatic reality in the orphanages. My wife grew up in an orphanage, so she knows how these kids feel. We as a church need to show Christ’s love to this city through the ministries that we do among the people. Thus, I proposed a model for taking care of these children, a model that could be followed by others in the city. We were able to build an orphanage for 50 children called the House of Hope. We built it with the help of churches from the U.S. At the inauguration of the orphanage, the American ambassador told the city’s mayor: “This is what I want to see in Romania, people who work together for the good of others.”

House of Hope not only offers care for orphans, it also helps parents who are on the verge of abandoning their children because of their economic circumstances.

The second project was Diaconia Medical Clinic. “We want people to know we care,” Pastor Stefanuti said. “We want to show people Jesus’ love by providing quality medical care.” To date, the clinic has served more than 10,000 patients. It has been able to penetrate all levels of society as people from all walks of life seek care there because of the quality of tests as well as the competence of the staff. Among those who have received medical care at this clinic are Braila’s vice-mayor, the police chief, the mother of a former finance minister, professors, judges, prosecutors, politicians, and other important

individuals. “The judge who fined me in 1985 because I was distributing Bibles is now one of the clinic’s patients,” Pastor Stefanuti shared. The clinic is now self-supporting even with approximately ten percent of patients receiving free medical care and medicines. It is involved in the education of people who live in the city of Braila as well as the surrounding villages in regard to diet and drug dependence (alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs). Together with the Braila Red Cross Chapter, clinic doctors have given free tests for blood sugar and blood pressure.

The Youth Center was envisioned as a bridge connecting Diaconia, House of Hope, and the church. Young people cared for by Diaconia and House of Hope are invited first to the Youth Center and from there to the church. The Youth Center offers computer training courses, youth meetings, and various discussion groups. Non-Christian youngsters play tennis with the young people from the church. Here is the testimony of a young man reached through Diaconia and the Youth Center Ministries:

I came to the Diaconia Clinic for dental care. There, someone recommended that I go to the Youth Center so I can learn Christian songs and how to pray. I also went to the church. I stayed there for about 10 minutes as I did not understand the sermon. I was doing the same thing in the Orthodox church which I was visiting from time to time. At the Youth Center, however, the situation was different. As I continued to go there, the young people were very friendly and eventually they invited me to play in a drama during the worship service. That day I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior and now belong to this church.

Because of its social actions, Braila Baptist Church has become known not only in the city but all the way to the President of Romania. “The President of Romania has recently congratulated us for our humanitarian work. The press has also published several articles about our ministries as well as about our partners from the U.S.,” Pastor Stefanuti declared.

“The church building project was a step of faith,” Pastor Stefanuti said. “We did not have the money. All we could accomplish with our money was to dig a large hole in the ground. We prayed that God would send people from outside to help us and He provided.” However, Pastor Stefanuti acknowledges some mistakes in his approach and in church people’s attitude. Between 1990 and 1997 their focus was on building the sanctuary. “Unintentionally, I placed projects before people,” Pastor Stefanuti admitted. All that time the church did not grow. Since 1990 the membership of Braila Baptist Church has increased from 320 members to 445 members in 2007.

Social Impact

Braila Baptist Church attained a huge visibility in the city due to its efficient social programs, its fruitful partnership with American Christians, and its impressive facilities. Its partnership with evangelical churches and Christians from the United States made it possible for the church to accomplish much more

than could have been attained by local resources only.

However, relying heavily on financial support from abroad creates problems. "It is difficult now to find volunteers in the church when we have so many full time employees in all these programs," a board member explained. About 70 percent of new converts come through the ministry and through the influence of the Diakonia Medical Clinic. Most others are reached through special evangelistic events organized with help provided by short-term mission teams from the United States.

Pastor Stefanuti admits that church members are falling behind in all these efforts, while only a few are fully involved in the task of reaching the city. He is now concerned that most church members do not share the gospel and do not invite people to the church. They are hesitant to welcome new people and some of them have an unfriendly attitude toward lost people. He would like to focus on motivating church members to keep up with what is going on. Pastor Stefanuti's vision, faith, heart, and entrepreneurial gifts make him a leader difficult to reproduce.

In February 2008, however, the church experienced a struggle due to a divergent opinion among leaders and church members in regard to U.S. church involvement in their mission. As a result, Assistant Pastor Marius Mezin started a second Baptist church in Braila. *Editor's note: Josef Stefanuti died in 2010. Today, the second Baptist church in Braila employs contemporary worship while the mother church,*

Holy Trinity Baptist, is more traditional in its form of worship.

General Insights

Several church growth insights may be gleaned from the life and mission of this church. First, a visionary leader challenged the status quo. Second, a church started to fulfill its mission when it moved to the streets of the city to serve people. Also, a church created opportunities for evangelism through ministering to people's felt needs, and in turn created evangelistic opportunities for churches even in a hostile environment. Third, church leaders must keep a balance between successful programs and the vitality of the congregation as a whole. Pastor Stefanuti admits: "We gain visibility due to our social programs, but we do not penetrate the society due to the lack of dedicated people in the church." ♦

Edited excerpts published with permission from Vasile Alexandru Talos, "Church in the Apostolic Spirit: A Strategy for Building Indigenous Apostolic Congregations in the Cultural Context of Eastern Orthodox and Post-Communist Romania," Doctor of Missiology, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2008.

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 (Spring 2012).

Vasile Alexandru Talos is pastor of Good News Baptist Church, Bucharest, Romania.

A church created opportunities for evangelism through ministering to people's felt needs, and in turn created evangelistic opportunities for churches even in a hostile environment.

Christianity and Folk Religions in Romania

Florin Paul Botica

Editor's Note: The first half of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 19 (Fall 2011): 12-14.

III. Kathairo Discipleship

Churches in Romania, in their efforts to disciple their members, use several methods such as catechesis classes for the young and for new members, as well as Bible and topical studies dealing with a variety of issues. However, I discovered by interviewing church leaders that no specific discipleship ministries have been developed to address folk beliefs and practices. A solution I would propose may be called *kathairo* discipleship. The Greek word *kathairo* means to purge, clean, and wash. In non-biblical texts this word was used by farmers for washing grain (William McDonald and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Believer's Bible Commentary* [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999], 134). One biblical example may be found in John 15:1-2; "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, purges, and cleans, (*kathairo*) so that it will be even more fruitful." *Kathairo* discipleship studies would help split-level Christians experience God's cleansing from dependence upon folk beliefs and cures.

Romanian church leaders need to master biblical teachings that reject folk beliefs and practices. Scripture clearly condemns casting spells (Deuteronomy 18:11; Micah 5:12), witchcraft (Deuteronomy 18:10; Micah 5:12; II Kings 21:6), magic (Ezekiel 13:8; Acts 19:19), communing with the dead (Deuteronomy 18:11), mediums and spiritists (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, and 20:27; Deuteronomy

18:11; I Chronicles 10:13; II Kings 21:6 and 23:24), divination (Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:14; Isaiah 2:6; Nahum 3:4; Zachariah 10:2), and sorcery (Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:10; II Kings 21:5-6; Nahum 3:4; Malachi 3:5; Acts 13:8-10; Galatians 5:19; Revelation 21:8 and 22:15). In addition to these Bible passages, *Prayers for Overcoming Black Magic, Spells, Evil Eyes and Enemies* by Nicolae State-Burlusi, and *The Bible and the Occult: Witchcraft, Wizards, Sorcery, Spiritualism, Paganism, and Psychics* by David E. Pratte, available at <http://www.gospelway.com/religiousgroups/witchcraft>, can serve as the basis for a detailed Bible study for discipling believers in overcoming folk practices and beliefs.

IV. Contextualized Worship and Mission

Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Daniel understands the need for change. A scholar educated in Switzerland as well as a church leader, he is very knowledgeable about the importance of critical contextualization as a tool for mission. In addition, renowned priest and scholar Ion Bria, who served as the Romanian Orthodox Church representative to the World Council of Churches, continuously challenged his church to initiate change in a relevant way. Several years before his death, Bria wrote:

A collection of prayers should be developed, keeping in mind the special needs of contemporary society. Beyond this, new forms of worship should be developed for mobile populations, travelers, children, and young people in industry, foreigners, refugees, and non-Christians in the

(continued on page 14)

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

vicinity of our congregations—all of whom have no permanent roots. . . . To make parish worship more comprehensible and inviting to young people, special services or catechetical explanation could precede the liturgy (*The Liturgy after the Liturgy* [Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996]: 28-36).

Romanian churches that will contextualize their worship services and their ministries will help many split-level Christians become genuine followers of Christ who will be dedicated and active members of their local churches.

V. Leadership Training

Another step necessary in addressing the issue of split-level Christianity in Romania is specific missiological training for local church leaders. In Romania 60 percent of pastors were trained during Communism when schools and seminaries were poorly equipped and lacked trained professors. This is especially true in the field of missiology and the contextualization of the gospel.

Since the collapse of Communism in 1989, priests, pastors, and other church leaders have had increased opportunities to update their training. For example, many evangelical ministers have studied in West European and North American seminaries. Many have obtained master's and doctoral degrees in biblical and theological studies, but few have sought advanced training in missiology. One exception, Baptist pastor and leader Vasile Talos, received his doctoral degree from the E. Stanley Jones School of Mission and Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary. He is having a tremendous influence on other ministers and future leaders in Romania in the field of missiology, specifically in regard to leadership, church growth, and evangelism. The Good News Baptist Church that Pastor Talos planted in downtown Bucharest is an effective New Testament Christian community that can serve as a model for other Romanian churches.

Rev. Talos has taken major steps to help update training in the field of church growth and evangelism, teaching seminars in different regional churches and has invited scholars including George Hunter and Ron Crandall from Asbury Theological Seminary and Samuel Kamaleson from World Vision to hold training seminars for Romanian evangelical leaders. Due to these efforts, as well as the efforts of other pastors and leaders, Romanian church leaders are better trained and more effective in leading their churches to reach the unchurched.

Many Orthodox and Catholic priests have also studied abroad during the last decade or have received additional training in local conferences and seminars. For example, in June 2007 the Romanian Orthodox Church held a seminar in Arad in western Romania addressing "The Ministry of the Church in a Post-Modern Romania." Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Daniel, who is very mission-minded, encourages priests to pursue additional training. The Patriarch has founded a mission institute called Trinitas in order to train priests in the field of mission and evangelism, and he has invited Samuel Kamaleson of World Vision on several occasions to lead training seminars for Orthodox priests in Moldova.

These various initiatives have been excellent. However, with a heavy heart I have to say that, unfortunately, they have not addressed the issue of split-level Christianity. Pastor Talos has shared with

this author that no training conference or seminar he has attended has specifically addressed the need to overcome folk beliefs. Nor is he aware of discipleship studies being taught in local churches that relate Bible teachings regarding the occult and other folk beliefs (Talos, 15 June 2007).

Romanian translations of several essential English-language books would be helpful, including Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou's *Understanding Folk Religion*, three studies by Paul Hiebert: *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, *Incarnational Ministry*, and *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Translations of Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Stephen Bevans, *Model of Contextual Theology*, and Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, would also provide essential help for Romanian church leaders facing the challenge of Christian syncretism.

VI. Theological Education

Just as there is a specific need to train church leaders to deal with the issue of split-level Christianity and to address it biblically through critical contextualization, so there is a similar need in the field of theological education in schools preparing future priests and pastors. Romanian Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants all place heavy emphasis upon theological education in their colleges, seminaries, and universities. Unfortunately, no courses in the curricula of any of their institutions deal specifically with folk religions, the issue of split-level Christianity, the field of contextual theology, or even the larger field of missiology.

The strongest Romanian Baptist institution of higher education, Emmanuel University in Oradea, offers majors in pastoral theology, social work, music, management studies, theology, and social work. However, Emmanuel offers no course dealing with the issue of split-level Christianity or the importance of critical contextualization in mission and evangelism. This author's brother, Aurelian Botica, an Old Testament languages professor at Emmanuel with a master's in theology from Asbury Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from Hebrew Union College, nevertheless sees the need for courses in missiology in Romanian theological seminaries: "I realize our students would benefit more if they could take courses dealing with the more missional aspects of Christian life and ministry" (28 July 2009).

Babes Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca is the most diversified institution of higher education in Romania. Enrolling over 12,000 students in 55 majors, it offers master's and doctoral degrees in theology for priests and pastors in its School of Reformed Theology, School of Orthodox Theology, School of Romano-Catholic Theology, and School of Greco-Catholic Theology. However, only two courses in the curricula, biblical anthropology and theology and culture, seem to be related to the field of missiology. Romanian theological schools and seminaries need to provide specific courses dealing with folk religions, the issue of split-level Christianity, and the larger field of missiology in order to facilitate better contextualization of the Christian message.

VII. Ecumenical Cooperation

Another means of addressing split-level Christianity in Romania centers on improved ecumenical dialogue

Romanian theological schools and seminaries need to provide specific courses dealing with folk religions, the issues of split-level Christianity, and the larger field of missiology.

and cooperation among Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches. For centuries Catholic-Orthodox antagonism had a serious negative influence on the population. Many Romanians lost hope in the church, turning as a result to folk religions in times of need and hardship. Later, Catholic and Orthodox persecution of Protestants reinforced many Romanians' lack of confidence in the church.

In contrast, in the first decade of the 21st century Romanian churches cooperated on several major projects, including prison, hospital, and orphanage outreach; help for the poor, homeless, and street children; and religious instruction in public schools. From time to time ecumenical conferences foster common understanding, dialogue, and further cooperation. For example, a seminar on "The Ecumenical Movement in the Twentieth Century: The Role of Theology in Ecumenical Thought and Life in Romania" was held in the city of Iasi in northeastern Romania, 27-30 April 1998.

In Summary

This study has identified the range of folk beliefs and practices present, not only within Romanian

culture at large, but also as a component of a Romanian Christian-folk religion syncretism. Biblical injunctions against folk religion also are delineated. Based on interviews with over 80 Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant believers, the research suggests the considerable extent to which folk beliefs undermine Christian values and practice in Romania today.

Finally, the study provides recommendations for overcoming split-level Christian syncretism in the Romanian context: I. biblically based de-contextualization and re-contextualization of folk customs; II. comprehensive, holistic evangelism addressing material and emotional as well as spiritual needs; III. thorough-going discipleship; IV. contextualized worship and mission; V. leadership training; VI. theological education; and VII. ecumenical cooperation. ♦

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.

Research suggests the considerable extent to which folk beliefs undermine Christian values and practice in Romania today.

Book Review *(continued from page 16)*

status of Muslim Chechnya—while proclaiming Russia's progress towards "real democracy" (p. 110). This is a shame because Patriarch Kyrill's sermons, as his track record in Smolensk demonstrates, reveal a different man, caring for his own society.

Within the Russian Orthodox Church itself, both at home and worldwide, much reconciliation needs to be done, and it is unlikely that this can be undertaken without a thorough examination of the role of the Church during the Communist period, especially

its political compromises. Those such as Father Gleb Yakunin who have called for this are treated as pariahs. Disappointingly, though, in this book the new Patriarch fails in his "search for harmony" (his subtitle), appearing to sit on a throne, seeing nothing at his feet, while finding much to his dislike in the wider world. ♦

Michael Bourdeaux is the founder and president of Keston Institute, Oxford, England.

Letter to the Editor

Several issues of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* featured articles on the crisis in theological education in Russia and other New Independent Countries by Mark Elliott and Insur Shamgunov. As a person who is no stranger to higher theological education (in 1999 I graduated from the Moscow Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christians-Baptists with an M.Th. degree), I can't agree with highly respected experts mentioned above about reasons for the crisis which is obvious to modern-day observer. Yes, crisis is present: enrollment in resident programs is getting close to zero, and schools are closing or changing emphasis to non-residential and distance learning. Both authors argue that the primary reason that has led to this situation is the adoption of the western theological education model, lack of contextualization, and a "transfer of knowledge" approach. I've been observing the development of theological education in Russia pretty closely and would like to state that I personally see only two primary reasons for the failure that we see in Christian education. These reasons are: a decline in faculty quality and (as a result) a decline in students' and graduates' qualifications.

I studied at Moscow Theological Seminary back when there was competition among candidates to be admitted. We had to go through three exams to be chosen. Only every second applicant became a student. It was considered very important for pastors and ministers to send students to study. For us students, theological education was like a mystery, a dream come true. What was different back then? We had the expertise and experience of professors who were the best in their field. We highly respected them. We soaked in what they had to share. It was important not only for obtaining a degree; it was important for our lives. We changed every day as we

learned to think and understand theology, biblical languages, and philosophy. We were boiling that soup; we were at the beginning of something new. I am thankful to so many great teachers for making me a thinker. They taught me not to be afraid of asking questions and doubting the basics. My faith became stronger; the search was vital; and my understanding was deepened.

But then, when there was a transition to local faculty (praised by the above-mentioned authors), things started to change. These recently graduated teachers were less experienced. This was the point of no return when it stopped making sense to listen to new professors who were teaching from a strictly denominational perspective. At that point it looked like a bad experiment. But then it became clear that this was a new strategy a long time in the making. The meaning and prestige of theological education was ruined. Theology was transformed into what was proudly called "practical theology" and "ministry-focused education." The cart was put before the horse. In all branches of science basic research always comes before state-of-the-art application. Research precedes application. Our educators decided that there is no need for high-quality, basic research (Of course, it doesn't lead to practical results!). We only need technologically equipped ministers. Thus, Protestant theological education became irrelevant. (Who needs a technology with no proper explanation of its origins?) Potential students don't understand why they need to obtain this kind of education. And so theology became a joke. I'm sure of one thing: theological education must begin anew, first of all by allowing people to become theologians, philosophers, and philologists. To succeed there must be freedom to think, to doubt, and to argue.

Dmitry Vatulya, Director, New Life Radio, Moscow

Book Review: Patriarch Kyrill. *Freedom and Responsibility: A Search for Harmony – Human Rights and Personal Dignity*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd and the Publishing House of the Moscow Patriarchate, 2011.

Editor's note: Following is the full text of a review published in abridged form in The Times (London) 4 May 2011. Used with permission.

The meteoric rise to high office of a Russian priest in Soviet times had only one meaning: collaboration with the KGB. It also helped to have a relative who was the formidable Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad. So Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev, with his new monastic name of Kyrill, became rector of the Leningrad Theological Academy at the age of 28 in 1974, younger than some of his students. In the same year he was appointed a member of the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches (Geneva). Three years later he was a bishop.

However, Communist authorities could make a mistake—and often did—in a sphere where they had little competence: control of the Russian Orthodox Church. Kyrill soon shone as a man of immense talent, both academic and entrepreneurial. He began to exercise influence in Leningrad, and so (many people believed) the authorities prevailed upon the weak Patriarch Pimen to sideline him to provincial Smolensk, where he flourished. He honed his skills and built a new power base, but also retained his position as head of the Department of Foreign Relations in Moscow, according him worldwide recognition as a leading figure in international church affairs. After the collapse of Communism he established a theological seminary, a school for training female choir directors, rebuilt his cathedral, and—not without some irony—regained the episcopal palace, previously the KGB's headquarters.

Metropolitan Kyrill's election as Patriarch of Moscow, head of the Russian Church worldwide, in January 2009 was inevitable. There was no other candidate of remotely his caliber. Therefore, the appearance of a book by him, for the first time in English, is significant. This collection of speeches and published articles is, however, a major disappointment.

Darton, Longman & Todd, the British half of the enterprise, seems to have taken over, unedited, a text provided by the co-publisher, the Moscow Patriarchate. Little thought has been given to presentation to a Western audience of a fascinating and challenging biography. The Bishop of London has written a page-long foreword, alluding to the Patriarch's "acute intelligence," but warning that the book "will infuriate many of the high priests of 'universal values'."

More important is the content. Many readers will look for enlightenment on a topic of importance in Russian affairs: in what direction would the new Patriarch—the strongest since the death of Tikhon in 1925—take the Church? But there can be no answers, as the most recent article dates from 2008, the year before his election.

Whether or not one agrees with the main thrust of the Patriarch's arguments, he is a greater—and I think a subtler—man than he presents himself in this selection. There are no sermons, making him appear to be a man obsessed by a semi-political agenda: traditional Russian values are superior to those proclaimed in the "liberal" West, which has betrayed its Christian heritage. Except for the Roman Catholic Church, that is.

Patriarch Kyrill, of course, has every right—indeed, the duty—to proclaim the traditional values of Russian Orthodoxy and in this he will find support on a wider front, too, in promoting a vision of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Vatican as co-guardians of Christian tradition. He agreed with Pope Benedict on this in a talk they had the day after the latter's enthronement: "We can join with Catholics in defending Christian values," he writes. The Patriarch seems to have had a change of heart since his earlier criticism of Catholic expansion in Russia.

He aims his scattergun indiscriminately, targeting Protestantism in the broadest of terms. Again, the Patriarch has the right to a point of view, but the crudeness with which he formulates his thoughts is unworthy of the leader of one of the world's largest churches. Acceptance of the ordination of women and of gay marriages is allegedly part of one mind-set (p. 6). The banning of public Christmas trees in California is only another expression of the attitude which encourages euthanasia and produces a political party in the Netherlands which lobbies for the legalization of pedophilia. Condemning homosexuality is a *leitmotif* of the book, and I counted no fewer than 11 instances.

The Patriarch's scathing attacks against Western liberal society seem to blind him to shortcomings in his own country and its values. There is no attempt to examine the controversial role the Moscow Patriarchate played during the Communist period. He claims that "In those days only the Church and cultural worlds were able to create their own space, free from spiritual diktat," which is the opposite of the truth. Worse than that, he nowhere mentions the realities of Russian society—corruption, the murder of journalists, Putin's clawing back of democratic freedoms, the refusal to engage in any kind of dialogue over the

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