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Christian Media in Russia in Crisis

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Identity Crisis

Christian media in Russia is presently in the midst of a complex crisis. Among its several dilemmas the most serious is a crisis of identity. As with any other media, Christian media is in constant search of ways to reach a larger audience. But in an attempt to appeal to everyone, it is in serious danger of losing its Christian character. On the other hand, if it focuses on programming for Christians, it no longer serves as an evangelistic outreach. Struggling for popularity in a secular world, Christian media is trying to answer the question: How should it promote Christian values in lay terms?

Today, in order to meet its financial requirements and to become profitable, much of Christian media tends to hide its religious character. Attempting to reach new listeners and larger audiences, Christian media wants to speak the language its audience understands, but it does not always know how to do this. Being religious in its essence, Christian media cannot, with integrity, be anything else. Nevertheless, it struggles to reach a secular as well as religious audience. Thus, at present, Christian media in Russia struggles to define its true identity.

Financial Crisis

Most of Christian media still depends upon donations from abroad, but this financial support continues to shrink. Funding should have become domestic as far back as the mid-1990s when local churches should have started supporting Christian media on a regular basis. However, in their everyday struggle for survival Russian churches did not—and do not—have such a priority. Russian churches do not see the importance of Christian media and therefore are consigning it to a gradual death which is happening before our eyes.

A Content Crisis

Another serious crisis now facing Christian media is a crisis of content. The typical attitude among longstanding and well-known Western ministries that still support Russian Christian media is that the sermon is the best evangelistic instrument for proclaiming Christ. These ministries are ready to pay for airtime to have their programs on TV and radio, but they insist upon written listeners' responses from Russian broadcasters. Russian audiences, however, react very poorly to translated sermons because they consider them boring and unappealing. Western ministries do not understand the problem and tend to blame Russian broadcasters for the lack of popularity. The process of finding the proper format and content for Christian programming is still in progress.

Live talk shows have proven to be the most effective, appealing, and entertaining format, but securing funding for such programming is very difficult. It is true that the contemporary audience wants entertainment, not lectures. Nevertheless, funding sources dictate the use of sermons in primetime. Content providers too often provide "leftover goods," material that was created and recorded a long time ago, for which audiences have little interest. Thus, Russian Christian media is not able to be the media that average listeners (both believers and unbelievers) demand. The only possible way out of this situation is to make Christian media independent so that it can pursue its own vision and understanding of what will be effective in its evangelistic mandate. Independence, though, would mean being financially self-supporting and commercially profitable, and that is difficult. To this end, local church support is critical. Unfortunately, Russian churches, which are not always able to meet their own daily needs, are not able even to think of the possibility of increasing their support for Christian mass media.

Hope for the Future

Christian media in Russia, both in print (magazines and newspapers) and electronic (radio and television) formats, is gradually shifting to the Internet. This medium allows expenses to be lowered. In addition, Internet-based social networks open great opportunities for advertising and the development of real time, live relationships with listeners and readers. The Internet also offers prospects for new authors and content providers.

Despite the obstructionism and dogmatism of many churches, the content of Russian Christian media is gradually improving. Media enthusiasts are still holding fast and have not given up hope for the future. It must be admitted and accepted that some Christian media, unable or unwilling to adapt to the times, will not survive. But Christian media that will survive and prosper will develop close and meaningful ties to local churches. Christian media should exist for its audience, and if it does, its audience eventually will support it. Christian media can survive only if it expands its reach beyond the church. This is especially true since most denominations have lacked the vision to see the potential and importance of Christian media and have not helped it in any way.

Those who work in Christian media have a vision that is bolder and more imaginative than that of the average church leader. The Russian church would be well-advised to take advantage of the expertise,

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Christian Media in Russia in Crisis (continued from page 1)

Christian media has the pulse of the times, knowledge that could provide the church with invaluable insights.

experience, and inquisitive spirit of Christian media to find new ways to communicate the gospel to the contemporary world. Through unique and vivid audience responses Christian media has the pulse of the times, knowledge that could provide the church with invaluable insights into the current state of mind of the Russian population that it seeks to reach for Christ. Unfortunately, most churches persistently overlook or refuse to admit the importance of popular perspectives to be gleaned from Christian

media in touch with its audience. Nevertheless, if the church will take heed of Christian media and make the effort to support it, the effect will be amazing in terms of long-lasting cooperation in realizing the common goal of communicating Christian truth to the Russian masses.

Dmitry Vatulya earned an M.Th. degree from Moscow Baptist Theological Seminary in 1999. That same year he began working for New Life Radio (www.nlradio.net) as a disc jockey and writer. He

Selected New Life Radio Listener Responses

What an amazing time we live! I am sitting in the airport in the center of Africa (Uganda) and listening to New Life Radio via mobile Internet. *Alexei, Uganda*

You are real and not narrow-minded. There is no false religious arrogance and extremism. You are not afraid to raise very complicated issues and to admit that you don't have all the answers. It is so rare in the modern Protestant Christian world. *Eugene, Chita, Russia*

I am not a Christian, but I listen to your radio station very often via satellite. I like it very much! *Denis*

This is a victory of Christian creativity! I like to hear good quality Russian music and radio drama (this is something outstanding!), live djs who create a friendly environment, and live interviews that are very interesting. *Ruslan, Rostov on Don, Russia*

Your radio helps me a lot. Every time when I turn it on you say something important. When I feel down you play some stories and music that support me. Your thoughts and topics give me answers. *Dasha, Kiev*

We are missionaries in Armenia. We live and have served here for five years already. Half a year ago we installed a satellite antenna to be aware of church news. We are blessed to listen to NLR. We admire God's work in you—your talents, potential, and most of all—love. We learn from you. We also see how you use all kinds of tools to bring the Gospel to people: Poetry, drama, music—everything that brings glory to our Father. This is great! *Eugene and Elena, missionaries in Armenia*

The Euro-Asian Accrediting Association—Come of Age

Charley Warner

The Euro-Asian Accrediting Association—EAAA (www.e-aaa.info/), held its biennial meeting, “Theological Education—10,” 24-28 October 2011, with representatives from 40 schools in attendance. EAAA and Overseas Council International—OCI, (www.overseas.org/), jointly sponsored this year's meeting at the Center for Christian Life of Ukraine in Irpen, just outside Kyiv. The Religious Information Service of Ukraine (www.risu.org.ua), an Internet news agency based in Lviv, Ukraine, reported online during the conference.

EAA by the Numbers

EAAA is made up of 52 evangelical theological schools in Eurasia (the former USSR). While most member schools are from Russia and Ukraine, representatives from schools in Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan were also present. During the second half of 2012 EAAA will open a Research and Resources Center in Lviv, Ukraine.

EAAA Executive Director Sergei Sannikov opened the meeting with a report on the activities of the Association, noting several landmarks for 2011: the twentieth year since the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, the fourteenth year since EAAA's founding in 1997, and this conference marking the tenth in a series on theological education dating back to 1992.

Sannikov reported that as of October 2011 the 52 EAAA schools with full membership represented over 8,000 students, plus two other associate member

organizations. This is an increase of 21 schools since the EAAA began in 1997. EAAA membership currently includes 24 Baptist, 20 Pentecostal, and 8 interdenominational institutions. Thirteen schools have received full accreditation with three more in the process. Over 1,780 students have received degrees accredited by EAAA and 971 students are presently enrolled in accredited programs. Thirteen accreditation visits have taken place since the last biennial meeting in 2009.

Five Trends

Sannikov listed five important trends that have developed over the last two years which are exerting an influence on evangelical theological education in Eurasia: 1) a growing interest in theological education among Pentecostals and Charismatics; 2) a growing interest in master's-level programs--EAAA hopes to finalize master's degree standards by the middle of 2012; 3) the search for different ways to overcome the so-called “admissions crisis” through, in particular, the development of distance education and extension study centers and new educational programs which are geared more to the needs of the church; 4) significantly increased interest in foundational research and the raising of teachers' academic qualifications; and 5) professionalization of EAAA administrative work and the strengthening of EAAA's influence.

The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education

Australian Roger Kemp updated the conference on

As of October 2011 the 52 EAAA schools with full membership represented 24 Baptist, 20 Pentecostal, and 8 interdenominational institutions.

the work of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education—ICETE (www.icete-edu.org), which is part of the World Evangelical Alliance and one of EAAA's most important international relationships. ICETE is a worldwide fellowship of eight regional associations which altogether represent 872 evangelical educational institutions from 110 countries representing over 110,000 students. EAAA became a member of ICETE in 2004 and is ICETE's regional association for Eurasia. It has benefited greatly from the advice and counsel of evangelical educational leaders within ICETE's network of schools.

Kemp announced to participants that the 12th triennial ICETE consultation will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, 15-19 October 2012. EAAA hopes to send approximately 20 participants to the meeting. Kemp also took note of ICETE's Program for Academic Leadership (IPAL). This service provides specialized training seminars for academic deans and others in academic leadership at evangelical theological schools. EAAA hopes to participate in upcoming IPAL training.

Religious Trends in Ukraine

Another participant, Yuri Reshetnikov, former head of the Ukrainian State Committee on Nationalities and Religion in the governments of Yulia Tymoshenko and Victor Yanukovich (June 2009-December 2010), gave a plenary address on the current state of religious affairs in Ukraine. Reshetnikov, a lawyer by training, is a member of the Christian Democratic Union political party (<http://kds.org.ua/en/>) and is also a graduate of Odessa Theological Seminary, a Baptist Union seminary in the Black Sea city of Odessa.

Reshetnikov's presentation on "Religious Tendencies in the Context of Ukraine" included statistical information on Ukrainian denominations and theological training institutions as well as on important legislation concerning religion. He noted the importance of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, which represents 19 religious associations and 95 percent of all religious organizations in Ukraine. He also made reference to over 200 religious-related schools in Ukraine with over 19,000 students, some 3,000 of whom are studying at Baptist schools.

EAAA Administrative Changes

Several important issues were discussed during the meeting. For many years EAAA has been growing and expanding its ministry. While maintaining its core work in the accreditation of post-secondary, evangelical theological schools in Eurasia, EAAA finds that research, training, and online resources (both courses and libraries) have become increasingly important. In order to meet these needs, EAAA announced during the meeting a change in its leadership structure, shifting from a single executive officer to a "3 + 1" arrangement consisting of three directors and one president.

Dr. Sannikov, formerly the executive director of EAAA, now serves as president, overseeing all operations of the Association. Taras Dyatlik is now the EAAA Educational Development Coordinator, based in Rivne, Ukraine. Since January 2011 he has worked part-time with EAAA and part-time as

regional director for Eurasia for OCI. Roman Soloviy is director of EAAA's Research and Resources Center, based in Lviv, Ukraine. At the end of the meetings a new EAAA Board was chosen which will serve for the next two years.

The Development of National Authors

EAAA increasingly emphasizes the development of national authors. EAAA's publishing effort, the Bible Pulpit Series, has been strategic in translating key evangelical theological textbooks into Russian. Since it began in 1993 the Bible Pulpit Series has assisted in translating and publishing over 40 key textbooks with over 260,000 books in print. Now the focus has shifted to the development of books by national authors from the region. Several of these books have already been published with more on the way. The EAAA journal, *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniya/Theological Reflections*, also provides national authors with opportunities for publication. In addition, EAAA is partnering with Pieter Kwant of Langham Partnership Literature to produce the *Slavic Bible Commentary*. This major work by evangelical scholars in Eurasia should be ready for publication by the fall of 2015.

Accreditation Issues

Government recognition of theology as an academic subject was another topic discussed at the conference. In this regard, Ukraine continues to be the frontrunner of countries in Eurasia, with recognition of theology as a separate subject in which a student may receive a government-recognized degree. (The Russian government also recognizes theology degrees but not at the doctoral level.) On 14 December 2011 the Public Council of the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science established a working group to develop standards for the profession of theology. EAAA's Taras Dyatlik serves on a government ministry committee which recognizes theological education diplomas.

Overseas Council International

Another important international relationship for EAAA has been its long-term partnership with Overseas Council International, Indianapolis, Indiana. One of OCI's ministries is holding training institutes for evangelical theological schools around the world. This year's OCI Institute for Excellence in Christian Leadership Development centered on the theme of "Financial Sustainability and Organizational Change." The goal was to assist theological schools in maintaining their stability while developing more flexibility in responding to the needs of churches and the spiritual needs of society. Issues addressed in this year's Institute included modern trends in the religious context; the basis for organizational change and financial sustainability; and theories of and practice in organizational change and the achievement of financial sustainability.

Special Institute guest speakers from abroad included: Ted Rodgers, Executive Director of Russian Leadership Ministries, spoke on fundraising; and Phill Butler, author of *Well Connected*, addressed the development of creative partnerships; Jason Ferenczi, who at the time was OCI Vice President of International Partnerships, spoke on "Worldwide Tendencies in Theological education;" and OCI

The Bible Pulpit Series has been strategic in translating key evangelical theological textbooks into Russian. Now the focus has shifted to the development of books by national authors.

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Euro-Asian Accrediting Association *(continued from page 3)*

Dean of Leadership Development Scott Cunningham discussed "Finding the Sweet Spot: Financial Sustainability of the Seminary."

Next Steps

EAAA will face several challenges before its next scheduled biennial meeting in October 2013, which most likely will be held in Russia:

1. Successful implementation of its leadership transition. (At this point signs are positive, but much work still needs to be done.)
2. The effective launching of a large-scale network of online courses in theology. (Early enthusiasm has been tempered by economic, educational,

technological, and time constraints.)

3. The prospect of post-Soviet Eurasian government accreditation of evangelical schools. (What might such accreditation mean for EAAA's program of accreditation?)
4. The prospect of EAAA's continuation as a transnational association or its breakup into national accrediting associations. (Presently approximately 60 percent of EAAA member schools are located in Ukraine.)♦

Charley Warner was the International Assistant for the EAAA from 1998 to 2011. He and his wife, Cheryl, have been missionaries to the former Soviet Union since 1987.

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Russian Molokans: Their Roots and Current Status

J. Eugene Clay

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The Soviet Era

During the Soviet period, Molokans, like other religious groups, suffered official persecution and discrimination. Although in the 1920s the Soviet government initially tried to court Molokans, offering them conscientious objector status, permitting them to hold congresses, and encouraging them to create their own communal farms, by 1929 such privileges were rescinded. Molokans ceased to hold congresses, and registration of religious communities became more difficult. The Union of Spiritual Christian Molokans founded in 1921 was dissolved in the 1930s.¹ Molokan leaders were imprisoned and suffered and died in Stalin's camps. Collectivization and de-kulakization (Stalin's campaign against successful peasants or

kulaks) also hurt Molokans who were predominantly rural. Despite all of these disadvantages, in 1962 one group of Molokans living in Kars, Turkey, decided to return to Russia, the land of their ancestors, where they settled in Stavropol' district.²

New Freedoms

Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991, ended religious persecution in the USSR. Molokans were quick to take advantage of the new freedoms. They reestablished a congregation in Moscow, and their elder, Ivan G. Aleksandrov, worked to revive the movement. In 1990, he began publishing a new version of the pre-revolutionary journal, *The*

Spiritual Christian [*Dukhovnyi khristianin*], created a Union of Spiritual Christians-Molokans [*Soiuz dukhovnykh khristian-molokan*], later called the Union of Spiritual Christian-Molokan Congregations, and prepared for a new congress of Spiritual Christians, held in Moscow in June 1991. Attended by delegates from over 60 communities, the congress was able to persuade only 40 of those congregations to join the new union. The Union also failed to unite the various branches of Molokans; only Constants agreed to participate in the Union. The Congress adopted a constitution and elected Aleksandrov senior presbyter.

With many important Spiritual Christian communities in the volatile Caucasus, in 1991 the new union created a Committee to Aid Molokan Settlers [*Komitet sodeistviia pereselentsam-molokanam*] to help find land for those Spiritual Christians fleeing from the growing conflicts in the Caucasus. A substantial number of Molokans and Dukhobors fled to Tula province, where a series of newspaper articles bemoaned the inadequate help they received from the government.³

In 1992 another Molokan congress was held in Astrakhanka, a village in the Melitopol' region of Ukraine that Molokans had settled under Alexander I. Molokan representatives from the United States as well as the former Soviet republics participated.⁴ By the fall of 1993, however, other Molokans held two rival congresses: one led by Timofei Vasil'evich Shchetinkin (1938-2011) in Kochubeevskoe village, Stavropol' district, the other led by Ivan Aleksandrov in Moscow. Soon Aleksandrov was accused of mishandling funds that he had received from sympathizers abroad, and in 1994 he was removed from the Union's leadership altogether. Shchetinkin, the presbyter of Kochubeevskoe, was elected senior presbyter of the Union, and the Union's headquarters effectively moved from Moscow to Kochubeevskoe. In 1997, a Molokan congress celebrated the opening of a new thousand-seat prayer house in Kochubeevskoe.⁵ Eight years later, in 2005, an international gathering of Molokans celebrated the bicentennial of Alexander I's 1805 decree with a major successful congress in Kochubeevskoe. In the wake of Shchetinkin's death in 2011, the council of the Union elected his son, Vasilii Timofeevich Shchetinkin, to serve as interim senior presbyter until the next congress.⁶

Difficult Challenges

Molokans face many difficult challenges. Over the course of the twentieth century, the number of Molokans has dropped precipitously from 1.2 million to about 40,000. Many Molokans have returned to Russia from Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, but they do not always receive a warm welcome. In Moscow, local municipal authorities prevented them from constructing a prayer house.⁷ Many Molokans have left the movement to join more aggressive Baptists, Pentecostals, or Jehovah's Witnesses. Molokans remain a small movement, often reluctant to undergo the burden of registration. As of 2006, Molokans had registered a single centralized religious organization, the Union of Spiritual Christian Molokan Congregations, and 26 local congregations, scattered across Russia.⁸ The Union, however, maintains a significant web presence at its official site, <http://www.sdhm.ru>.

Sergei Petrov in the city of Tambov also provides important Molokan documents on his web page at <http://molokan.narod.ru>. In other republics of the former Soviet Union, Molokans also maintain important communities, often preserving Russian traditions (such as oven-building) that have been lost elsewhere. In Armenia, the villages of Fioletovo (the former Nikitino, home of the prophet Maksim Rudometkin), Lermontovo (the former Voskresenka), and Tashir (the former Vorontsovka) retain a significant, although declining, Molokan population.⁹

In 2006, the Union of Spiritual Christian Molokan Congregations sent a missionary delegation that visited and encouraged ten Molokan congregations in Azerbaijan (Baku, Sumgait, Ivanovka, Chukhuriurd, Kirovka, Kyz-Meidan, Chabany, Khil'mili, Marazy, and Altyagach). In Ivanovka, Molokans run one of the last remaining collective farms in Azerbaijan.¹⁰

U.S. Molokans

Molokans in the United States, who have prospered economically, face other challenges. Unlike their brethren in Russia and the Caucasus who were primarily Constant or Ukleinite Molokans, immigrants to the U.S. were overwhelmingly Jumpers and followers of Maksim Rudometkin. From 1910 to 1928, Maksim's followers in California succeeded in publishing the writings of their prophets in several editions; the 1928 version, known as *Spirit and Life* [*Dukh i zhizn'*], published in Los Angeles, has become the canonical text for Molokans who accept Rudometkin as an inspired prophet.¹¹ Although *Spirit and Life* includes the work of three prophets beside Rudometkin, his 14 notebooks of prophetic writings comprise the major portion of this sacred book, which is placed beside the Bible in worship services.

Today American Molokans are divided over Rudometkin's role and message. His revelation includes many passages that are difficult to reconcile with contemporary Evangelical Protestant Christianity: himself as King of Spirits, the Son as subordinate to the Father in the Trinity, and extra-biblical stories of creation, demonic rebellion, and the fall. Some Molokan communities, such as the Christian Molokan Church of Woodburn, Oregon, reject Rudometkin's prophecies as heretical or even demonic; while keeping Russian food, singing, and clothing, they prefer American Evangelical Protestant theology to that contained in the *Spirit and Life*. On the other hand, other Molokans, such as members of the Old Molokan Spiritual Church at Clark Avenue and 9th Street in Hacienda Heights, California, jealously guard Rudometkin's legacy and authority. American Molokans debate these issues in print and online in forums such as <http://www.molokan.net> and Andrew Conovaloff's site: <http://molokane.org>.¹²

The *Russian Molokan Directory* of 2000 listed 23 Molokan churches in the United States and Australia. The major American Molokan community organization is the United Molokan Christian Association of Los Angeles, 16222 East Soriano Drive, Hacienda Heights, CA. Although most American Molokans descend from the Jumper branch of the faith, Constant Molokans, who rejected Jumper prophets, established the main Molokan church in Los

Over the course of the twentieth century, the number of Molokans has dropped precipitously from 1.2 million to about 40,000.

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Russian Molokans: Roots and Current Status *(continued from page 5)*

Angeles, the First Russian Molokan Church on Potrero Hill.

Russian-U.S. Molokan Comparisons

With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russian and American Molokans have had greater opportunities to contact and support one another. Molokans from the United States and Australia have participated in Molokan congresses in the former Soviet Union, visited relatives, shared histories and genealogies, and found spouses among their co-religionists. However, denominational differences present a significant challenge to increased cooperation between the Molokans of the former Soviet Union and those abroad. Rudometkin's legacy in both Russia and the United States remains controversial. Most Molokans in Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are Constants who reject *Spirit and Life*, whereas most Molokans abroad descend from Jumpers and Maksimists who are strongly committed to Rudometkin's prophetic vision and his *Spirit and Life* where that vision is most fully expressed. In the former Soviet Union, Rudometkin's followers have refused to join the Union of Spiritual Christian-Molokan congregations. Often stricter than their American co-religionists, Maksimists in Russia and the Caucasus reject television and photography—the making of images—as a form of idolatry.¹³

Myriad Issues under Discussion

Now a global phenomenon, Russian Spiritual Christianity is being rethought by its adherents. Through their congresses, web sites, journals, and electronic forums, Spiritual Christians across the world are discussing both practical and theological questions, ranging from congregational registration, Molokan immigrant aid, prayer house construction, eschatology, the authority of the Bible, and the gift of prophecy. Should Molokans be pacifists? Was Maksim Rudometkin a divinely inspired prophet? What is the proper relationship of a Christian to the state? How should Molokans relate to Orthodox and Evangelical Protestants? Through their answers to these questions, Molokans will shape Spiritual Christianity in the twenty-first century. ♦

Notes:

¹Ivan Aleksandrov, “‘Vozliubivshie slovesnoe moloko’: Molokane Op Molokane otprazdnovali

iubilei darovaniia svobody veroispovedaniia,” *NG-Religii*, 5 October 2005.

²T. Vardanian, “40 let na rodine,” *Stavropol'skaia Pravda*, 29 January 2002.

³Arnol'd Pushkar, “Molokane vozvrashchaitusia na zemliu predkov,” *Izvestiia*, 11 April 1992, p. 2; Vagif Kochetkov, “Anglichane inspektiuiut tul'skikh molokan,” *Novye Izvestiia*, 14 July 1999.

⁴Irina Malakhova, “Chaepitie molokan bliz Melitopolia,” *Izvestiia*, 21 July 1992, p. 8.

⁵Svetlana A. Inikova, “The Dukhobor and Molokan Ethnodenominational Groups,” *Russian Studies in History* 46 (Winter 2007-08): 78-96.

⁶“Izbranie i. o. st. presvitera SODKhM,” 14 January 2012, <http://sdhm.ru/news/>.

⁷“Molokane - russkii faktor,” *Zavtra*, no. 27, 4 July 2007, p. 6.

⁸“Svedeniia o religioznykh organizatsiakh, zaregistrovannykh v Rossiiskoi Federatsii po dannym Federal'noi registratsionnoi sluzhby, dekabr' 2006,” http://www.religare.ru/2_36302.html.

⁹Sergei Bablumian, “Poslednie iz molokan,” *Izvestiia*, 24 October 1997; Ida Karapetian, “Molokane uidut oni, i nasha kul'tura stanet bednee,” *Respublika Armenia*, 14 September 2001, p. 26; Iuliia Grishina, “Pro zhizn' na Pogrebal'noi ulitse, kapustu i semei'nye sunduki molokan,” *Novoe vremia*, no. 118, 9 November 2010, p. 5.

¹⁰“Otchet o missionerskoi poezdke v resp. Azerbaidzhan, iun' 2006,” 24 April 2008, http://sdhm.ru/sous_v_russian/_; Evgenii Krishtalev, “Zdes' russkii dukh, zdes' Rus'iu pakhnet,” *Izvestiia*, no. 75, 27 April 2006, p. 7.

¹¹*Bozhestvennyia izrecheniia nastavnikov i stradal'tsev za slovo bozhie, veru Iisusa i dukh sviatoi religii dukhonykh khristian molokan-prygunov*, ed. Ivan Gur'evich Samarin, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: “Dukh i zhizn',” 1928).

¹²Elders of the Church of the True Spiritual Molokans, “A Letter to You from the Holy Spirit,” 22 August 1998, http://www.molokane.org/molokan/Dogma/Clark_Ave_Letter.htm; Michael Lediaeov, “Open Letter,” 15 September 1998, http://www.molokane.org/molokan/Dogma/Clark_Ave_Reply.htm.

¹³Grishina, “Pro zhizn' na Pogrebal'noi ulitse,” p. 5.

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With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russian and American Molokans have had greater opportunities to contact and support one another.

No longer shackled by Communist political correctness, Russia's citizens, believers and non-believers alike, have once again rediscovered and reclaimed the icon.

The Russian Icon: Finding Its Way through Sacred, Modern, and Post-Modern Space

Vera Shevzov

Far from being relegated to the annals of antiquity or marginalized as a symbolically repressive ecclesiastical trapping, the icon in Russia found new life in modern times. Although remaining a dynamic phenomenon within its “natural habitat”—the environs of church and prayer—the icon emerged as a valued commodity in the global world of art historians, artists, and commercial entrepreneurs. Debased, destroyed, or driven underground in the Soviet period, the icon nevertheless remained a prominent fixture in the

native worlds of ethnographers, museum curators, and Russian statesmen as well as a charged symbol that hovered just beneath the surface of official art and Communist propaganda. The millennial celebration of the Baptism of Rus in 1988 and the subsequent fall of Communism helped to pull the icon “from under the rubble” back into the sphere of Russian life. No longer shackled by Communist political correctness, Russia's citizens, believers and non-believers alike, have once again rediscovered and reclaimed the icon and have done so (and

continue to do so) in often daring and dramatic ways.

A Mix of Piety and Patriotism

Icons played a crucial role in sacralizing historical memory and undergirding the notion of the chosenness of the Russian nation. Drawing on a deep tradition shared by church and state of associating icons with major political events in Russia's history, tsar and people alike, with a complex mix of piety and patriotism, often embraced icons as national monuments. A famous case in point at the end of the ancient regime involved an icon found by Evdokiya Andrianova, a peasant woman from the Kolomensk region outside Moscow, on 2 March 1917, the day of Tsar Nicholas II's abdication. Within days, believers, first locally, then nationally, interpreted Evdokiya's discovery as a collective sign: in the absence of a tsar, Mary, Mother of God, had assumed sovereignty over Russia. Portraying a seated empress with a scepter and orb in her hands and the Christ Child on her lap, the icon *She Who Reigns* joined a wide array of prerevolutionary Marian images that affirmed Russia's special status among the nations.

The icon *She Who Reigns* has re-emerged in contemporary mythmaking that links post-Soviet Russia with the political glories and cultural lure of its imperial past. In 2007, this icon was featured in an ambitious, highly publicized year-long procession to celebrate reconciliation among Russians whose histories have been severed by the 1917 Revolution and subsequent civil war. Organized by the Orthodox Church and endorsed by President Vladimir Putin, the procession had unity as its guiding theme—the unity of Russians at home with those abroad. It was a sociopolitical march as much as a religious pilgrimage, with thousands joining and departing, and often rejoining again. The procession began in eight different regions in May—Vladivostok, Yakutsk, Barnaul, Rostov-on-Don, Arkhangelsk, St. Petersburg, Jerusalem, and Mount Athos in Greece—and eventually converged in Moscow a year later. Each procession was led by an image of the icon *She Who Reigns*.

Day of National Unity

Attempts to capitalize on the icon's unifying power are widespread in contemporary Russia. Commenting on a 2008 exhibit at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow titled "The Orthodox Icon: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus," Sergei Kroletvets, director of the National Kyiv-Pechersk Historical Cultural Preserve, noted that "icons are an entire world that unite our peoples. For centuries the icon was a consolidating principle." Given such sentiments, it is little wonder that Russia's newest state holiday, the Day of National Unity on 4 November, falls on the date of the celebration of one of Russia's most famous icons—the Kazan Mother of God. Signed into law by Vladimir Putin in 2005, the new holiday, a direct response to the tragic events in Beslan in September 2004, commemorates Russia's victorious emergence from the Time of Troubles at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century. Recalling an event from Russia's deep prerevolutionary past, the holiday is meant to reinvigorate historical memory among

the peoples of the former Soviet Union "to fill the gap in [that] memory." Aiming to delineate a latent "national ideal," the rhetoric surrounding the Day of National Unity calls on "civil solidarity," "civic responsibility," and "civil society" in the face of foreign threat. Once again, an icon, by virtue of its centuries-long association with pivotal events in Russia's past, has become involved in the discourse and rituals of post-Soviet Russian state building.

Although the icon in post-Soviet Russia has proven to have tremendous ability to unify and consolidate people, hopes, and identities, it has also revealed its potential to arouse sharp discord. The iconic underpinnings of the Day of National Unity, for instance, prompted almost immediate dissent. Journalists quickly pointed to the "camouflaged" nature of the new holiday and questioned the propriety of having it so closely linked with a prominent Orthodox and imperial symbol. Others, including the head of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and the Communist Party leader, openly called the Day of National Unity a provocation that would lead only to divisions. Tatar nationalists referred to the Kazan icon as "a symbol of the colonial yoke."

Competing Claims of Ownership

Certainly the position of the icon in contemporary Russia is sensitive and complex. The ideological vacuum left by the demise of the Soviet Union has resulted in an environment of heightened cultural competition in which no one group can claim to "own" the icon. Since the time of its decoupling from church in late imperial Russia, the icon has become a globally recognized art form that can be altered, adapted, and appreciated by many different audiences. As a result of competing claims to its ownership and interpretation, the icon can often be found at the forefront of post-Soviet cultural wars.

The "Caution! Religion" Exhibit

The infamous exhibit "Caution! Religion" was a recent example of such a battleground. Consisting of approximately 45 works by contemporary artists from Russia, the United States, Europe, Japan, and Cuba, the 2004 show at Moscow's Sakharov Museum ignited heated public debates. Installations such as an image of Christ on a Coca-Cola billboard with the message "This is my blood," as well as a life-size icon into which the viewer could insert his own face, demonstrated that disputes over the relationship and differences between art and icon continue to be a source of contention. The icon in post-Soviet Russia has become a part of the broader contemporary discourse concerning civil liberties. Supporters of the short-lived "Caution! Religion" show included such human rights activists as Elena Bonner, physicist Lev Ponomarev, Orthodox dissident Gleb Yakunin, and Sergei Kovalev, a founding member of the Moscow chapter of Amnesty International. They defended the exhibit's participants as "critical, prophetic voices against abuses of power." One artist compared the exhibit's participants to John Huss, Lev Tolstoy, and archpriest Avvakum; they too were social critics warning of the dangers of religion and religious institutions. The museum's

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The Russian Icon: Finding Its Way *(continued from page 7)*

director, Yury Samodurov, who was eventually charged by a Moscow court with inciting religious and ethnic hatred by allowing the exhibit, insisted that the artists rightfully protested a false religious consciousness that they believed was being instilled in citizens in post-Soviet Russia.

The exhibit also had its equally passionate detractors. They felt repulsed by what in their eyes was little more than hackneyed iconoclasm and blasphemy publicly displayed under the canopy of a human rights center. A group of intellectuals that included such well-known figures as filmmaker Nikita Mikhalkov, mathematician Igor Shafarevich, and writer Vasily Belov referred to the exhibit as a new level of “conscious Satanism.” The Moscow Patriarchate issued a statement protesting the exhibit and the stereotypes of Orthodoxy that it

believed were fostered. In part, church officials were disturbed by the artistic use of icons to advance an essentially political and social agenda. Artistic license that condoned “playing with the holy,” in their estimation, posed potential harm to the human soul. ♦

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Persecution of Christians in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet and Post-Soviet Union

Mark R. Elliott

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Protestants, 1917-1939

Protestants initially benefitted from the fall of the Romanovs and Bolshevik fixation on the perceived threat of Orthodoxy. The new regime’s relatively benign neglect permitted dramatic evangelical growth in the 1920s. Baptists and Evangelical Christians, who together numbered just over 100,000 members in 1905, grew to 250,000 by 1921, and to 500,000 members with up to one to two million counting children and adherents by 1929 (Elliott 1981: 17; Elliott 1992: 192; Elliott 2003: 26; Sawatsky 1981: 27; Sawatsky 1992: 240).

The 1930s, however, brought crushing repression in the form of wholesale church closures, arrests, prison and labor camp sentences, and executions. The ruthless, indiscriminate antireligious campaign of that decade led to the total elimination of institutional life for Baptists, Lutherans, Mennonites, Methodists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists. In the Leningrad Region in 1937-38 alone, 34 Evangelical Christian and Baptist pastors and activists lost their lives (Nikol’skaia 2009: 105). A single Evangelical Christian church in Moscow may have been the only Protestant congregation still legally functioning in 1939, down from over 7,000 in 1928 (Elliott 1981: 17; Elliott 2003: 26; Sawatsky 1981: 48; Sawatsky 1992: 243).

The 1930s also witnessed a crescendo of state-sponsored antireligious propaganda directed against all faiths. The Soviet regime went to extraordinary lengths and committed prodigious resources in this effort, for example, in its League of the Militant Godless, whose membership reached 5.5 million in 1932. While the antireligious campaign obviously succeeded in closing churches, it failed to make atheists of millions of believers, so many that results of the 1937 census were suppressed on this account (Powell 1975a: 35 and 134).

The partitions of Eastern Europe precipitated by the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 included Red Army occupation of Eastern Poland (1939) and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (1940). These territorial gains temporarily brought into the Soviet Union many millions of Latin- and Eastern-Rite Catholics and Protestants, including Lutherans, Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Pentecostals, Moravians, Methodists, Churches of Christ, and Reformed. Religious repression quickly commenced in these newly annexed lands but was cut short by the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. In most respects Nazi occupation policies were as draconian as the Kremlin’s, but the Germans did permit thousands of churches to reopen.

Stalin’s Compromise with Religion

In 1943 Stalin made a surprising about face, granting concessions to believers that seem to have been motivated by a desire: 1) to facilitate the war effort; 2) to counteract the enthusiasm that accompanied church revival in German-occupied territories; 3) to utilize the Orthodox Church in the suppression of Eastern-Rite Catholicism in lands to be annexed at the end of the war; and 4) to employ the church in the furtherance of Soviet foreign policy. Following Metropolitan Sergei’s summons to a late-night meeting with Stalin in September 1943, Soviet authorities, on Stalin’s orders, actually expedited the convening of an Orthodox Council a month later that elected Sergei patriarch.

By 1950 Stalin had permitted the Moscow Patriarchate to reopen over 14,000 churches led by some 12,000 priests (Davis 2003: 126 and 130). In addition, the Russian Orthodox Church was able to reestablish 67 monasteries and nunneries, eight seminaries, and two theological academies (Beeson, 1982: 58). For convenience of control, Stalin also

In 1943 Stalin made a surprising about face, granting concessions to believers. By 1950 Stalin had permitted the Moscow Patriarchate to reopen over 14,000 churches.

engineered a merger of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in October 1944. State recognition for this new denomination was such that by the 1950s it could claim 5,400 churches and 512,000 members, with the number of adherents reportedly “many times greater” (Sawatsky 1981: 67. See also Brandenburg 1974: 198; Newton 1990: 83). At the same time, Roman Catholicism within Soviet borders managed new growth, not from Kremlin concessions, but simply through the absorption after World War II of western Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, and Latvia that included many more Catholics than could be completely eliminated.

Continued Repression of Eastern-Rite Catholics

Eastern-Rite Catholicism, however, Moscow once again destined for total annihilation with, once again, the willing collaboration of the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1946 in those portions of western Ukraine seized from Poland and in 1949 in Transcarpathian Ukraine seized from Czechoslovakia, Eastern-Rite Catholicism once more ceased any legal existence. Russian Orthodoxy thereby gained millions of unwilling adherents and thousands of churches. In the process thousands of Eastern-Rite priests were “converted” to Russian Orthodoxy, went into hiding, or were arrested and deported to Siberian labor camps (Bociurkiw 1996: 148-228; Chaplitskii and Osipova 2000: liv-lv; Elliott 1985: 214-16; Solchanyk and Hvat 1990: 54-56). All seven of the church’s bishops were arrested and dispatched to Soviet camps with only one, Cardinal Joseph Slipyi, ever leaving Siberia alive (Chaplitskii and Osipova 2000: lviii; Elliott 1985: 214; Pelikan 1990: 169).

Baltic Repression

Stalin’s wartime compromise with religion, which did not extend to Eastern-Rite Catholics, did not apply to the newly annexed Baltic states either. Rather, following their reoccupation by the Red Army in 1944, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania experienced systematic religious repression. Closure of churches, arrests, brutal interrogations, executions, mass deportations to Central Asia and Siberia with high rates of death in transit—these were the lot of Baltic Catholics, Lutherans, and smaller Protestant communities as well. In 1940 a strong Lithuanian Catholic Church numbered 1,180 churches, just under 1,500 priests, 1,530 monks and nuns in 158 monasteries and convents, and four seminaries. By 1979 only 574 churches still functioned; by 1969 only some 700 priests still celebrated mass; and by 1982 all monasteries and convents had been closed and only one embattled seminary remained open in Kaunas (Beeson 1982: 120 and 125-26; Bourdeaux 1979: 152 and 166). In Latvia after World War II the number of Catholic churches fell from 500 to 179 in 1964 (Pospelovsky 1988: 152; Solchanyk and Hvat 1990: 59).

Khrushchev’s Antireligious Campaign

Nikita Khrushchev, one of Stalin’s chief lieutenants in the postwar suppression of armed resistance and religious opposition in Ukraine, ultimately succeeded his mentor in the Kremlin. His antireligious campaign of 1959-1964 accounted for the

second-most intense persecution of Christianity in the Soviet era, surpassed only by the even more repressive 1930s. Of the 13,325 functioning Orthodox churches in 1959, only 7,600 remained open in 1964, a drop of 47 percent (Davis 2003: 126. See also Tsy-pin 1994: 160). State actions reduced the number of Orthodox priests from 12,000 in 1950, to 10,237 in 1960, to 6,800 in 1966 (Davis 2003:130-31. Tsy-pin 1994: 160, gives slightly lower numbers.). The number of Orthodox seminaries fell from eight in 1955 to three in 1964 (Davis 2003: 181-82; Ellis 1986: 120), while Orthodox monasteries and nunneries fell from 64 in 1957 to 18 in 1964 (Davis 2003:165). Paralleling Orthodox losses, Evangelical Christians-Baptists saw their functioning churches reduced from 5,400 in 1960 to 2,000 in 1964 (Steeves 1990: 84).

The Beginnings of Organized Religious Dissent

Khrushchev’s antireligious campaign involved not only widespread utilization of the country’s administrative and police apparatus in wholesale closure of churches, monasteries, and seminaries, it entailed mass mobilization of the media, schools, universities, even psychiatric hospitals, in the denigration of largely defenseless believers. Nevertheless, what most clearly set Khrushchev’s repression apart from Stalin’s assault on the church was the emergence of Orthodox and Protestant opposition movements that the Kremlin proved incapable of eliminating.

Even before Khrushchev’s campaign, Eastern-Rite Catholicism had set the precedent, from 1946 on, by refusing to disappear. In western Ukraine a defiant catacomb church competed vigorously with state-imposed Russian Orthodoxy. In a remarkable challenge to a police state, Eastern-Rite Catholics participated in clandestine worship, supported—and were supported by—underground monks and nuns, operated secret seminaries, and circulated protests against the multiple violations of freedom of conscience they endured (Elliott 1985: 216-18; Zuger 2001: 443-44). The same can be said for Lithuanian Catholics who, despite grievous state attacks, organized determined opposition to Soviet antireligious campaigns, fueled by a fusion of longstanding Russophobia and faith, much as in neighboring Poland.♦

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Tragedy and Hope—A Balkan Itinerary with Dr. Peter Kuzmič

Stephen Hendrickson

Editor's note: Peter Kuzmič is president of the Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia; founder of the charity, Agape Ministries, and professor of world missions and European studies, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts.

"I'm going to make it. I may not look like much when I get there, but I'm going to make it." These words have greeted family, friends, and acquaintances of the oft jet-lagged, sleep-deprived, emissary of the evangelical church of the Balkans, founding pioneer of Croatia's Evangelical Theological Seminary (ETS), my friend, the Reverend Dr. Peter Kuzmič. They have borne the truth of the determination of this esteemed leader, with innumerable crises of every variety and kind interrupting at all hours of the day and night, along with dogged determination, in spite of everything, "to make it."

Traveling the Balkans

It has been my privilege to travel with Peter on several occasions throughout the Balkans. Spending 30 hours in a car together over seven days on one journey with Peter gave me an up-close and personal education from this renowned friend. Traveling the Balkans Peter Kuzmič requires more from his cell phone than from perusing local maps. He has traveled these roads sufficiently to know them thoroughly, with his datebook giving the contact information of his ministry

colleagues, many of whom are graduates of ETS. The home-grown knowledge of the back roads and byways of the now seven countries that formerly constituted "Yugoslavia" serves him well. The roads are more single lane than highway, particularly when winding through the mountains, with perilous drop-offs on the side of the road that require the full attention of the driver. It is sometimes a matter of safety as well as to know where "not to travel" or where to travel expeditiously with nonlocal license plates. Peter's innate gifts of diplomacy and ambassadorship are also on display when the local enforcer of speed limits is encountered.

In town after town and city after city, ministerial colleagues are found, eager to see this renowned church leader. Peter greets each person with such joy, exuberance and enthusiasm, as to make any person feel good for having seen him. These are jovial greetings, with laughter, hugs, and broad smiles all around. Seeing this, one cannot imagine even the apostle Paul, who himself ministered in this area, receiving a warmer or more heart-felt greeting of mutual affection

from those he had helped teach and nurture. Stories are shared of the challenges, and even perils, of being ministers of the gospel in this part of the world, wars now over, but with serious tensions occasionally still coming to the surface. And often, people come seeking the sage advice of this seasoned, experienced church leader for a particular situation or problem. On leaving town, one feels that a palpable sense of blessing is left behind, having witnessed ministry, particularly through the gift of encouragement, in action.

Compassionate Ministry in War-Torn Sarajevo

In one town, you hear stories from Sarajevo about a Bosnian couple who opened a “restaurant” in a basement during the war. Elderly widows and men, all Muslim refugees, including some of the last to leave Srebrenica before the ethnic cleansing atrocities, were given a hot meal for lunch. Although there was only enough food to provide one meal a day, for many their only food, they would return in the evening to socialize. These folks, who had fled from their homes often with no more than a small plastic bag carrying what little they could of their belongings, were provided with clothing, shoes, and lunch. Maybe more importantly, having a place and time to talk in the evening gave them a community. They had seen knives pulled and throats cut; many had lost more than one of their sons. Although some could not retell their stories because of the trauma, others gathered to ask, “How do we survive, where do we go from here?” Remarkably, one woman, who had lost two children, prayed for, even blessed, the perpetrators: “May God give them what He should have given my children.”

“We wanted to provide a good meal and befriend them, to offer something that would restore their dignity so they knew there was someone who loved them,” recounts this amazing couple. And so the love of the universe, expressed through the hands of two humble people, reaches God’s creation. Threatened with physical harm on more than one occasion by those afraid of Christian “proselytizers,” they continued their ministry for over two years nonetheless, even within earshot of shelling and gunfire. Their ministry has moved to a different city, but their witness is ongoing, a beacon of light, hope, and love. Surely these people were “angels”—messengers of God—to a people in distress. And Peter was, and still is, their teacher, their encourager, their supporter. It was these urgent and basic needs for human survival during and after the wars that led Peter to found Agape, the ministry of humanitarian aid, compassion, and social justice, which provided relief to thousands in need, including refugees gathering in a basement “restaurant” in Sarajevo, and which continues its work today.

Enlarging Evangelical Borders

It is not just ministry colleagues who respect Peter’s work. The mayor of Tuzla, a Muslim, who received international acclaim during the war in Bosnia, had great admiration in particular for Peter and the work of Agape, and considers him a good friend. In this part of the world, evangelicals who only talk to other evangelicals will have a small circle of conversation. Peter has enlarged the borders of ecumenical, and even political, dialogue through his personal witness and

example. Concerning those in need, he says, “We must give them bread for their stomachs in order that their ears may hear our words about the bread of life.” At the judgment day described in Matthew 25, one can imagine thousands offering testimony of the Agape ministry: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

Lessons of History and Culture

At his core, however, Peter is a teacher. Traveling with him one receives lessons of history and culture, the trials and travails of the current generation, and centuries of history. Discover the palace of Roman emperor Diocletian in Split, walk by the location of the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo that instigated the First World War, and hear the eyewitness accounts of the story of the survival of Osijek, the home of ETS, some of its buildings still pockmarked from the 150,000 artillery shells trained on the city during the Serbian “Aggression.”

Roadside Genocide

And then there was the cemetery. “You need to see this,” was the understatement of the day. We had pulled off the main road from Pristina, Kosovo, to Skopje, Macedonia, there to find a cemetery. Unfortunately, it was unlike any cemetery I had ever seen. In characteristic local fashion, many of the gravestones had pictures of the dead, but all were young, mostly men in their twenties, along with a few women, whose only common characteristic was that they had been massacred together, likely in haste, just off the main road, in one of many wartime atrocities. Nearly 90 identified victims in all had life cut short: a robbery, a flagrant violation of what it means to be human, their faces and eyes staring out from their gravestones, seeming to ask, “Why did this happen?” Sadly, this haunting site was one of all too many, from Ovcara (200 sick and wounded people taken from a local hospital and killed—this place just a half-hour drive from the seminary in Osijek) to the Srebrenica massacre (over 8,000 killed in the worst genocide in Europe since World War II).

Added to the frenetic, sometimes even chaotic, whirlwind of activity that characterizes a “normal day for Kuzmič,” perhaps these are the scenes, these are the moments from a lifetime of ministry interrupted by civil strife and war that cause this ambassador to say, “I may not look like much when I get there.” While his heart may be aching, it is almost inevitable to see a twinkle in his eye with his greeting, surely from a wellspring of divine joy. “I’m going to make it.”

The Congregation Gave the Sermon

A final story. The setting is a small church service on a Sunday evening in October. Peter was the preacher; however, in a real sense it was the congregation who “gave the sermon” that evening. The church building, very modest in size, was packed wall to wall with about a hundred people for this, their second service of the day. It was around harvest time, and the small room was beautifully decorated with a great variety of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. During the service several people read their own poetry, which gave thanks to God for the gift of creation.

For context, the previous day had included a visit

"We must give them bread for their stomachs in order that their ears may hear our words about the bread of life."

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to nearby Vukovar, the city that was destroyed in the “Aggression” (most would call it war), which in this region involved fighting between Serbs and Croats. This city, located on the beautiful Danube River, had suffered enormous destruction. A population of 50,000 had been reduced to less than 3,000. Virtually every building had been substantially destroyed by the constant shelling. Although walls were still standing, most of the roofs were blasted through, and rubble was everywhere. A number of areas were roped off, indicating potential minefields or unexploded shells. Substantial looting had also occurred, even to the extent of ripping the electrical wiring out of the walls of homes. And yes, this was the town whose hospital had several hundred people taken and killed in the mass grave of Ovčara. It is one thing to observe the physical destruction to buildings. It is yet another to imagine the human suffering, tragedy, and distress that those who lived through this carnage must have experienced.

They had seen the awfulness of war, the devastation of homes destroyed, of bodies wrecked, yet these people were encouraging each other to "Count Your Blessings."

Amidst Destruction—Counting Blessings

Back to the service, specifically its second hymn. About ten instruments, a variety of guitars, violins, and keyboard, lent a distinctively native sound to the music. Although the Croatian language was unfamiliar, the tune of this gospel song was unmistakably recognizable:

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.
Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings—every doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by.
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your blessings, see what God has done.
Count your blessings, name them one by one,
Count your many blessings, see what God has done.

“Count your blessings?” This admonition sung by people who, although not in an area that had been occupied by “the enemy,” had been close enough to hear the bombs exploding and shells flying. They

had been in the shadow of war, and indeed, if the intruding Serbian army had not been stopped at nearby Osijek, this community would have been easily overrun. Virtually everyone in that small room knew someone—family, friends, or neighbors—victimized by the “Aggression,” either dead, injured, homeless, or missing. Industries had been destroyed, buildings were still silent, causing massive unemployment of over 25 percent, and likely to continue for some time.

They had seen the awfulness of war, the devastation of homes destroyed, of bodies wrecked, of families with gaping holes due to the foolishness of humanity destroying itself. And yet these people, all of whom seemed to be quite happy and content, were encouraging each other to “Count Your Blessings,” genuinely and earnestly.

After the service, a side door was opened to an ample display of food—sandwiches and desserts that were shared by all. This was an amazing display of abundance, sharing, and generosity by this small community of faith. And yet, its abundance was not in the bounty of food and harvest, but rather in its warm spirit, being able to appreciate the simple joys of being together as a community, and encouraging each other to “Count Your Blessings.” Quite a sermon indeed, and yet, likely, one repeated throughout this region with the many lives influenced, nurtured, and blessed by this evangelical patriarch.

Throughout the Balkans, there are many, many other stories and people who, when they reflect on the ministry of Peter Kuzmič, will certainly count him among their many blessings. And some day, hopefully in the far distant future, when he stands before Christ, one can imagine this being said: “I made it. My Lord, I may not look like much, but I made it.”♦

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The Roma (Gypsy) Pentecostal Movement in Bulgaria

Miroslav Atanasov Atanasov

Editor's note: The first portion of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 20 (Spring 2012): 11-13.

A Climate of Care

Pentecostalism, much more than Orthodoxy or Islam, has made Roma feel equal and cared for. The miracle of the Pentecostal movement is that ethnic Bulgarians and Roma in a context of strong prejudices have become one family in Christ through God's love and the power of the Spirit.

Roma family members from Dobrich shared their reasons for choosing evangelical faith:

We go to this church because the pastor considers us equal with Bulgarians, because he speaks of human suffering and views us as human beings equal with others. This is not done by anyone else in the city. Also we go because the services are

interesting—like watching a film. People around us think that we are only able to steal and fight, but in the church we have been assured that we are normal human beings as all others, and that God will help us.¹

The Witness of Friends and Family

Many Roma come to Christ as families and attend church together with their brothers, children, and relatives. For example, all the 200 Gypsies living in Kovachevtsi are relatives. About half of the Gypsies in this village are members of the Church of God. As church growth researcher George Hunter notes,

The miracle of the Pentecostal movement is that ethnic Bulgarians and Roma in a context of strong prejudices have become one family in Christ.

Typically, the church grows when it spreads to the friends, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers of its members, especially its new members and converts. Churches grow when they periodically survey their members and identify all the...

undisciplined people who are linked to believers.² Roma believers often point to a close relative or friend whom God used to invite them to church. This personal relationship is an important factor in the rapid growth of the Pentecostal movement among Gypsies.

Roma Churches in Roma Neighborhoods

The phenomenal growth and impact of the Pentecostal movement among Roma has not happened because Roma have gone to Pentecostal churches, but because Pentecostal churches have gone to Roma. In most Roma quarters, these are the only churches present. One may find some Baptist, Adventist, Methodist, or Congregational Roma churches, but Pentecostal churches are by far the majority. I have yet to find an Orthodox Church in a Roma *mahala* in Bulgaria.

Some Bulgarian church leaders believe Roma need to come to Bulgarian-led churches because there they could learn more. While Roma pastors do need more theological education and training, the strength of the movement resides precisely in the fact that Roma churches are located in the Roma community. Roma go to church to be among their own people, to speak their own tongue, to belong.

Although many mixed Roma-Bulgarian churches still exist, the greatest growth has occurred as Roma have developed their own, mostly homogenous, churches. This principle has not been deliberately enforced in church-planting, but often simply has been the way congregations have developed. Part of the explanation is that most Roma in Bulgaria live in ghettos separated from the rest of the population. Thus, establishing Roma churches has had a revolutionary effect upon evangelistic outreach to Roma.

Elevated Status of Women

The status of women, which traditionally has been low among Roma, has changed as a result of Pentecostal faith. Historically, Roma families in Bulgaria have been unstable, making life for women precarious. Several factors contributed to women at risk among Roma.

1. Early marriages for girls, even as young as 12-13, meant that very young mothers often could not effectively manage the responsibilities of family life and raising children.³
2. Roma traditionally have not had official marriages performed by Bulgarian civil courts.
3. The high crime rate among Roma men has often led to long prison sentences with, as a result, many Roma families being left destitute.
4. A tradition of strong male domination in the Roma family has been accompanied by domestic violence against wives and children.
5. Finally, adultery has been a major problem in the *mahala*. Roma have had a double standard in this matter: a wife's unfaithfulness is considered a major crime, whereas, if a man cheats on his wife, it is typically dismissed: "Well, that is how

men are!"

In summary, Roma women, hardly considered human beings, were perpetual victims of their husbands' lies, unfaithfulness, and violence. They were abused both physically and mentally. In marked contrast, Pentecostal ministry has radically changed Roma family life and raised the status of women.⁴ The massive turning of Roma men to God has reduced alcoholism, which has led to reduced violence in the home. One Roma sister from Samokov shared:

Before I became a Christian, my husband and I fought violently at home. It was so bad that the house never had any windows because we kept breaking them; all of our neighbors knew about our situation. Since we both believed on Christ, we have peace in the home; we have built a second floor in our house and now... all the windows are in place.⁵

There is more faithfulness among spouses. Adultery has been decreased significantly in many Roma quarters. The *mahala* in Perushtitsa had been notorious for its immorality. "All the neighboring villages knew us for our fornications and adulterous affairs. That is not the case anymore since we turned to Christ."⁶ That is the story I heard in many of the Roma *mahala* during my field research.

Overcoming Alcohol and Drug Addiction

The positive transformation of Roma family life—and community life—is also a consequence of the reduction of drug addiction. Revitalization brought about by Pentecostalism has caused many addictions to be broken. Many Roma testify to being free from alcohol, drugs, and nicotine as a result of faith.

In the Roma *mahala* of Perushtitsa alcoholism is a thing of the past. "We are a town with many acres of vineyards for wine-production. In the wintertime people did not have much to do, so there was a lot of drinking. This is no longer the case since the [Pentecostal] movement has occurred and the church is present here."⁷

Historically, many Roma youth, influenced by their peers, became involved with substance abuse at a very young age. Because of faith many of them have been prevented from falling into addictions. "The church made me better and kept me from vices so widespread, like drugs and alcohol."⁸ The Fakulteta quarter of Sofia for years had a serious problem with drugs, but people testify that as a result of newfound faith, drugs are gradually becoming a thing of the past there. Similarly, in the Roma quarters of Razlog prostitution and drug addiction are now virtually non-existent.

Likewise, overall crime rates and violence have been reduced, as noted by Ivan Zahariev, pastor of a Roma Baptist Church in Berkovitsa:

Before the church existed in Rakovitsa *mahala* there were many murders, fighting among various clans. But when God began to work in this quarter even the worst people joined the church. They accepted evangelical faith and even former criminals became witnesses for the Lord. The atmosphere is radically changed.⁹

Brother Kolio, speaking of the town of Chirpan,

Pentecostal ministry has radically changed Roma family life and raised the status of women.

Many Roma testify to being free from alcohol, drugs, and nicotine as a result of faith.

(continued on page 14)

Pentecostal churches have attracted a significant number of the Muslim population in Bulgaria, including Muslim Roma.

related:

Before the churches were here, things in the quarter were terrible. Chirpan Gypsies are notorious: they take up the knife and kill. Now things are much better as God's mercy came and many were saved. In many cities and villages there is change and reconciliation. It is not perfect—bad things still happen, but the crimes and wickedness have decreased significantly.

Muslim Roma Conversions

Pentecostal churches have also attracted a significant number of the Muslim population in Bulgaria, including Muslim Roma. According to Pavel Ignatov, Bulgarian Muslims are more easily converted to evangelical Christianity than to Catholicism or Orthodoxy because of image veneration associated with the latter faiths. Certain elements of Islam resemble Bulgarian Protestantism, especially in its ultra-conservative version: women placed on a lower level than men, head-coverings for women, and the absence of image veneration. Protestant churches, however, have transformed some of these cultural elements, for example, giving former Muslim women a higher social status. While in Islam their role is to keep silent and bear children, in Pentecostal churches women can evangelize and exist on a more equal level.

According to a 1994 survey, 44 percent of Roma respondents claimed to be Orthodox; 39 percent, Muslim; 15 percent, Protestant; one percent, Catholic; and 0.5 percent, Jewish.¹⁰ By 2008, the number of Protestant Roma had risen drastically while the number of Orthodox and Muslim Roma had declined. Field researchers like Evgeniia Dolapchieva have taken notice of this massive shift. The Kazanlak *mahala*, where the majority population used to profess Islam, serves as an example. Kazanlak Roma previously identified themselves as ethnic Turks, but no longer. While according to a 1992 survey, 95 percent of Roma in Kazanlak were Muslim, in 2003 the majority, over 90 percent, identified themselves as Christians.¹¹

The transformation may be credited to the local Roma Pentecostal Church pastored by Mitko Banev; it serves as a typical picture of changes throughout Bulgaria. In the Kazanlak *mahala* the active religious life, the self-motivation and organization of the church, and the striving for positive accomplishments, have raised the self-esteem and produced positive changes in the mentality of Roma there. Roma researcher Magdalena Slavkova describes some of the changes that have taken place among Turkish Roma as a result of evangelical faith: "They give up fighting, swearing, and the use of addictive behaviors like smoking, drinking, and immorality. Believers have cleaner homes."¹²

Conclusion

It is clear that the impact of Pentecostal Christianity on Bulgaria's Roma population has been revolutionary and that Pentecostalism is responsible for a revitalization of Roma culture. Evidence includes improved moral standards, deliverance from addictions, lower crime rates, better education, more

honesty in business, and increasing opportunities for employment—a significant social lift. Islam, fortune-telling, and pagan customs like the *courban* (ritual animal sacrifice) are less and less a part of Roma cultural life. The Pentecostal movement has improved manners, relationships, and the whole lifestyle of Bulgaria's marginalized Roma population.

The leading human factor in this revitalization process has been the work and vision of Roma Pentecostal pastors who feel the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to bring about community transformation. A number of Roma Pentecostal leaders have become participants in the political process in Bulgaria, speaking out for social justice for Roma. As a result of this revitalization phenomenon, Roma have found a new reason to live and a hope for the future. They now see themselves as a valuable group of people and have better self-esteem. Pentecostalism has given them a new identity: instead of being social outcasts, they are beloved children of God. This radical transformation has made them better and more responsible citizens of their country.♦

Notes:

- ¹ Maria Simeonova and Stoian Tsenov, *Cultural Problems of the Roma in the Process of Affirmation of the Bulgarian Ethnic Model: Tendencies and Ways for Their Solution; Motivation for Their Cultural Elevation and Integration into the Main Values of Bulgarian and European Culture* (Sofia: International Center for Minority Issues and Intercultural Cooperation, 2003), 97.
- ² George Hunter III, *To Spread the Power* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 77.
- ³ Evgeniia Dolapchieva, "The Roma *Mahala* in Kazanluk: History, Tradition, Present," M.A. thesis (in Bulgarian), Sofia University, 2003, p. 116.
- ⁴ Fakulteta interview, 2006.
- ⁵ Samokov interview, 2006.
- ⁶ Salcho Salchev interview, 30 July 2006.
- ⁷ Salchev interview.
- ⁸ Ludmila Petrova, Radostina Antonova, and Teodora Pencheva, *Just a Way of Life* (Sofia: Drakon Publishers, 2004), 123. (In Bulgarian.)
- ⁹ Lom Church Sinai Church Journal.
- ¹⁰ Ilona Tomova, *The Gypsies in the Transitional Period* (Sofia: IMIR Press, 1995), 14.
- ¹¹ Dolapchieva, "The Roma *Mahala*," 50-54.
- ¹² Magdalena Slavkova, "The Turkish Gypsies in Bulgaria and Their New Religious Identity" in D. Todorovich, *Evangelization, Conversion, Proselytism* (Nish, Bulgaria: YUNIR, 2004), 87-100. (In Bulgarian.)

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More Responses to New Missionary Code of Conduct

Editor's note: The cover article of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 20 (Winter 2012), 1-3, summarized and critiqued a path-breaking new code of conduct for missionaries developed by the World Evangelical Alliance, the World Council of Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church. The next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 20 (Spring 2012), 3-6, carried multiple responses. The present issue publishes two additional responses.

Religious Discrimination Is Official

In Russia, religious discrimination is *official*, indeed mandatory, in view of the 1997 law, which replaced Gorbachev's liberal law of 1990. Although the 1997 law pre-dates Putin and Medvedev, they fully endorse it. As far as I can judge, the signatory nations of the Office for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe, of which Russia is one, have made little or no effort to call Russia to account for its treaty obligations under the rubric of religious freedom.

Further, looking at the way in which this legislation proclaims the right of Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism alone to be classed as historic religions, one notes its inaccuracy: after all, Protestantism and Catholicism are also historic religions on Russian soil. Lutherans were present in the 18th century. Catholics were widespread – if thinly – well before 1917 (witness the “Street of Tolerance” - Nevsky Prospect – in St Petersburg).

I regard the Moscow Patriarchate's contention that Russia is its “canonical territory” as entirely spurious.

I have one query about the [“Christian Witness”] document itself, which emanates from the highest sources in the Vatican, the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the World Evangelical Alliance. It is not clear whether the Moscow Patriarchate (MP) had any input into the WCC discussions on the subject. One suspects not, given the weakened MP presence in Geneva these days. In any case, as such a major player, one might have expected the MP to have been one of the bodies most fully represented in the discussions which produced this document. Did it take part? If so, did it produce a dissenting report or has it in any way endorsed it? We are not told. ♦

Canon Michael Bourdeaux, *Keston Institute, Oxford, England*

Another Response to Missionary Code of Conduct

The new code of conduct for Christian witness is indeed a historic document. It is the result of cooperation among a very broad range of confessions, yet it neither attempts to redefine the gospel nor restrict evangelism. Rather, it affirms both proclamation and demonstration of the gospel, and urges all to do so according to gospel principles of love, respect, and honesty. Churches, confessional bodies, and missions organizations would be wise to take an honest look at their practices in these areas. “Christian Witness” is a good start down a long road.

Further dialogue or clarification regarding missions in contexts that have a majority *Christian* faith would be helpful. The “EWC&M Report” article rightly said that respect, tolerance, and dialogue are extremely rare commodities, particularly in majority Orthodox countries. To what extent were Orthodox representatives involved in producing “Christian Witness”? It is the result of consultations *organized* by the WCC and the Roman

Catholic Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, *in collaboration* with the WEA and had *participation* from the largest Christian families of faith. I wonder if this is in descending order of involvement, and perhaps, acceptance. Until there is public acceptance of “Christian Witness” at high and influential levels of Orthodox leadership, I doubt much will change in the former Soviet Union.

Dialogue is also needed in order to arrive at mutual agreement on the meaning of terms. What one group calls “persuasion” another calls “coercion.” What some call “freedom” others call “freedom from divisive sects.” What one group calls “biblically mandated compassion” is viewed by another as “exploitative allurements.” And what some call “Christian” others call “patriotic”. Without greater understanding, I doubt much will change. ♦

Preston Pearce, *Southern Baptist International Mission Board, Prague*

What one group calls "biblically mandated compassion" is viewed by another as "exploitative allurements."

New Russian Philanthropy *(continued from page 16)*

are made under conditions of strict anonymity.

Helsinki Watch, the oldest human rights organization in Russia, also receives most all of its support from Western sources such as the European Community, the MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Open Society Institute, and USAID. A source at Helsinki Watch reported that several persons approached the organization recently, interested in organizing a fundraising campaign to support the organization's basic mission. The money, as a rule small donations from private Russians, would be given anonymously.

On the surface it appears as if the greater part of charitable giving in Russia is now being done by a handful of famous oligarch-businessmen. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that their activities may kick-start philanthropy in Russia. ♦

Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Lada Bakal, “The New Russian Philanthropy,” Russian Life 55 (January/February 2012), 54-59.

Lada Bakal, *born in Kishinev, Moldova, and now living in Moscow, has been Russian Life photo editor since 2009.*

The New Russian Philanthropy

Lada Bakal

The Philanthropy Shortfall

On average, just 18 percent of adults in Russia engage in some form of charity, according to the Charities Aid Foundations. Only 6 percent of adults give money, and some 20 percent participate in volunteer work, while 32 percent give some type of direct assistance to those in need. In 2010, an estimated \$3 billion was funneled to 107 Russian charities, not including long-term, multi-year support for projects.

There are 301 charity organizations in Russia, yet only 107 of them open their books for outside auditing. The turnover of these 107 organizations in 2010 was R23.4 billion. The largest sphere of activity was environmental protection: R3.6 billion, followed by health and medicine (R1.3 billion) and education (R524.1 million).

On the whole, Russia's humanitarian rating is woefully inadequate and ranks 138th in the world, just above Egypt and Turkmenistan. Yet we should not forget that, thanks to the Bolsheviks' bizarre totalitarian experiment, the notion of humanitarianism was all but eradicated in Russian society. Thus, in modern Russia, philanthropy is really only in its infancy.

Volunteerism: Modest but Growing

Volunteerism in Russia today is also abysmally low. But that is changing, and rather rapidly. In just the last year there has been a spate of actions indicating a waking of civil society: the nationwide cleanup (15,000 persons in 120 cities) initiated by blogger Sergei Dolya; Alexei Navalny's donation drive for Rospil—a grass roots battle against corporate and governmental corruption; the defense of Moscow's Khimki Forest; the public firefighting

activity during the summer of 2010; the efforts of Moscow's Dr. Liza Glinka to aid the poor and homeless; and the activation of websites like together.ru. Each successful initiative of this nature becomes an example to others, encouraging yet more collective action. As Denis Volkov recently noted in his Levada Center report, "Prospects for Civil Society in Russia," based on interviews with leaders of non-governmental and civil organizations in 2010-2011, "It is significant that the number of citizen initiatives is growing, that more charitable, altruistic, and volunteer organizations directed at helping people and animals are being started up and are developing."

Distrust of Non-Profits

An important factor restraining the growth of humanitarian activity in Russia, however, is the fact that Russians simply do not trust non-profits. Nearly 64 percent of Russians are convinced that the money they give to charities will not be used as designated. This is the legacy of charity actions like "The Federation Fund," which in 2010 and 2011 held gala concerts attended by glittering VIP stars from the West, at one of which Prime Minister Putin infamously sang *Blueberry Hill* in English (bit.ly/putinsings). The recipient of millions of rubles from the state budget, the Federation Fund was reputed to be raising money for 20 medical clinics for children. Only later was it revealed that the Fund was not raising money for the clinics but merely raising awareness of their situation.

Oligarch Benevolence

Oil and metals magnate Viktor Vekselberg and his wife created the fund "Age of Good," which focuses on healing psychological ailments. Nikolai Tsvetkov, president of the UralSib finance corporation, founded the Viktoria Fund, which aids children's shelters. While the generosity of such funds is notable, it is also indicative of the limits to charity. None of the funds noted above advertises any giving to "civil society" or "human rights" causes. The imprisonment of oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who gave some \$60 million to civil society causes, serves as sufficient warning that humanitarians should keep their giving non-political.

Western Aid

At present, American and European governments and foundations finance human rights groups in Russia almost entirely. For example, Memorial, which preserves the memory of gulag victims, receives support from the Soros Fund, the Ford Foundation, the Adenauer Fund, the Solzhenitsyn Fund, and others. A spokesperson from Memorial said that donations from Russians, both private citizens and funds, are small and as a rule designated for research, education, and historical activities, not for human rights. All donations for human rights purposes given by Russian citizens, Memorial said,

Russia's humanitarian rating is woefully inadequate and ranks 138th in the world, just above Egypt and Turkmenistan. Thanks to the Bolsheviks' bizarre totalitarian experiment, the notion of humanitarianism was all but eradicated in Russian society.

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