



EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

Fall 2012

Vol. 20, No. 4

Kazakh Church Dependence upon Foreign Support and Ways to Overcome it

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A Picture of Dependency

When I arrived in Central Asia a decade ago the church association I was to work with had already existed for eight years. At that time our mission paid salaries to 25 pastors. Earlier, 32 pastors had been supported, but seven had left our association. The reasons for departure included joining another association, corruption, theft, and no longer sensing God's call to ministry. Of the remaining 25 pastors some had been given property for housing and worship while others received monthly allowances to rent space for worship. In addition, we were providing transportation and food for weekly pastors' meetings in Almaty and monthly pastors' meetings in southern Kazakhstan. We also covered expenses for two training events per year and seminary education which included free tuition, room, and board. Our pastors joyfully sent their church members to receive a free education. Unfortunately, our sole resident missionary in Kazakhstan was not able to visit our widely scattered pastors regularly. This was the picture of dependency I encountered when I arrived in Kazakhstan.

Mission leaders told me they had explained to local pastors that their salaries would eventually end, and that they could not depend indefinitely on foreign missionary support. In January 2007 my mission advised me to communicate the news to association pastors that their mission-funded salaries would end in 12 months. At that time they would become bi-vocational (combining outside jobs with pastoral responsibilities) or they would depend solely on local church support. From my previous study of dependency, I understood that the moment outside support ceases, reactions can be extreme. Therefore, I braced myself for the worst and wondered if I would ever experience a day of fruitful ministry in Kazakhstan.

Today, 2012, our association has nine worship groups. Some pastors have quit the ministry and taken their donated houses with them. A few pastors left to join the Russian Orthodox Church and now receive a salary from that source. One pastor moved to the city where she now leads Bible studies from her son's home. A few pastors moved with their congregations to other denominations and now receive salaries from their new affiliations. Even among the nine missionaries who remain in our association, at least one receives a salary from an

independent missionary, while two more receive salaries from parachurch organizations. Finding out from whom pastors receive salaries is an elusive if not impossible task because most people will not divulge such information.

None of our association churches have grown since pastors' salaries ceased. In fact, stagnant church attendance figures were the case long before our mission discontinued salaries. Once salaries stopped, one immediate consequence was that pastors stopped submitting monthly ministry reports.

A House Church Strategy

As I considered the state of our association, I wondered what might be the way forward. Our mission had recently adopted Church Planting Movements (CPM) as a new policy for church planting. I thought a CPM training conference would equip our pastors in their transition from dependent lifestyles to fruitful ministries and economic stability. Thus we prepared a thorough ten-day training seminar and invited all our pastors, their spouses, and seminary students. By this time our seminary had already adopted CPM teaching in its curriculum.

While the conference was very informative, participants did not implement CPM principles. Those in attendance did come to understand CPM, but they simply did not like the house church concept which is an integral part of CPM. Their minds were set on a traditional church worldview, and they could not conceive of anything different. From their perspective CPM offered only the hard work of evangelism and no economic rewards.

By design, house churches reduce costs and increase lay participation for rapid church growth and reproduction. However, when missionaries provide all the costs of ministry, local pastors feel no need to reduce costs, and church members feel no passion for evangelism. Their only concern is to make sure missionary support continues. Therefore house churches do not appeal economically to national workers who are accustomed to receiving foreign support.

CPM strategies are gaining traction in Central Asia, with Southern Baptist missionaries leading the way in terms of vision and training. A house church network that began in 2012 for the purpose of communication among house church leaders continues to grow. However, Western support for salaries still plays a role in some cases and at this

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stage new house churches are often made up of people who formerly attended traditional churches. It may be too early to properly evaluate house church success in this country because second- and third-generation house churches have yet to be produced in any measurable quantity.

Hurdles in Overcoming Dependency

Various hurdles must be overcome by local Kazakh leaders in order to produce independent, healthy, reproducing house churches. One difficulty is the financial burden of hospitality. Kazakh culture expects hosts to prepare lavishly for guests, with shame involved if a meager table is set. As a result, Kazakhs fear inviting others into their homes except on special occasions. The first question Kazakh church leaders ask about house church viability is the hospitality question: How will we afford tea-time?

Another hurdle is the question of authority. Leaders of house churches command neither the status nor the financial rewards of traditional church pastors. In addition, in a culture that expects religious activity to take place in religious buildings, the new house church phenomenon may be seen as alien. The current concern over terrorism and new, more restrictive religious legislation (requiring a minimum of 50 members for legal registration) also puts worship in homes at a disadvantage. On the other hand, since house churches emphasize biblical content in a familiar setting, usually tea-time or a meal, a well-planned informal approach has the potential to reach people who otherwise would never visit a church building.

One key to building independent churches is local financial support. House churches have an advantage here because their costs are low. Local support for church pastors ought to be stronger, but the Kazakh concept of giving usually relates to emergencies among friends and family members. Tithing is a behavioral issue, and not a conversion issue. Because converts do not think of themselves as tithers after they have prayed the sinner's prayer, generous giving must be taught and learned. Westerners often advocate tithing, but it appears that few actually practice it. Many missionaries do not even believe that tithing is required by scripture. Therefore, stewardship teaching is weak and giving is weak.

Another house church challenge involves young people who often do not find worship in homes attractive. Youth tend to gravitate to large gatherings. If house churches do not provide some degree of youth networking, young people will instead attend larger traditional churches with youth activities and dynamic music.

Finally, a successful method of theological training for house churches must be developed. Traditional seminary models do not work well with house church strategies, primarily because of the priority placed on developing lay leadership. House church leader training mostly involves on-the-job experience rather than classroom study. Since state repression closed all traditional seminaries in Central

Asia in 2008 except the Russian Baptist Union Seminary, churches must find practical ways to train their leaders. Thankfully, many unofficial church-based seminaries still function.

Korean Missionary Leadership Style

Any discussion of building independent churches in Central Asia must include observations of Korean missionaries and the churches they plant. Korean missionary church plants account for a large majority of all missionary-led churches in Kazakhstan. Korean missionaries, who in Central Asia engage primarily in church planting, hold to an authoritarian concept of pastoral leadership not unlike Central Asian concepts of authority. This Korean-Kazakh parallel tends to facilitate the traditional church model utilized by Koreans. Yet, Jesus was both authoritative and a servant to all, whereas Kazakh culture has virtually no understanding of the concept of servanthood. Therefore, Korean pastors who willingly demonstrate sacrificial love will have many opportunities to teach servanthood to their Kazakh church members.

Korean pastors also emphasize lively worship, aggressive evangelism, and intense prayer, principles that, interestingly, also exist as church planting movement standards. Both Korean traditional churches and house churches tend to multiply when the above principles are employed. These similarities bring to light the fact that building independent churches has little to do with church form and much more to do with biblical principles and faithful people.

New Restrictions

The current situation in Central Asia challenges Korean missionaries to focus on preparing local leaders. As a result of new restrictive Kazakh legislation on religion, many Korean missionaries are temporarily unable to preach in their churches. In addition, Kazakh government officials presently are not honoring the law that gives foreigners permission to engage in religious work. If these restrictions prevail long term, Korean pastors will have to turn over more leadership responsibility to local disciples.

Russian Koreans

One phenomenon of Korean missions in Central Asia involves ethnic Koreans born and raised in Central Asia whose grandparents Stalin forcibly deported from the Russian Far East in the 1930s. Many local Koreans either know the Korean language well or can learn it quickly because they have heard it spoken as children. Korean missionary pastors who prefer to employ translators inevitably hire local Koreans for the job. Some of these local Koreans have even become pastors. They communicate as native Central Asians, and they have a strong work ethic and strong faith, factors desperately needed in the region.

The largest Kazakh church in Almaty has a Korean pastor who recently adopted a cell group model. Korean churches that seek to develop cell groups differ in form from church planting movement house churches. House churches train lay people in biblical knowledge and practical

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ministry with the goal of multiplication: starting new house churches. In contrast, Korean church cell groups focus more on building relationships and shepherding rather than multiplication.

Comparing Traditional and House Churches

Ideological differences exist between traditional and house churches. House churches seek to follow a pattern found in Acts where believers typically met in homes as the infant church spread across the Roman Empire. By following that biblical pattern, house churches expect to multiply rapidly, requiring less financing in the process. On the other hand, traditional churches seek to guard sound doctrine through the use of well-trained, full-time leaders, large group gatherings, and facilities that symbolize the church in community. Both church forms have benefits and challenges, but I maintain that church form is not the key to creating independent churches.

Independence is more a matter of personal ownership than economic ability. The idea that foreign funds must provide for a church until that church can provide for itself is misguided. Rather, local believers must be willing to sacrifice for their believing community and accept a church form that fits the context, rather than an imported form. Items thought to be necessities, such as church buildings, full-time, paid pastors, periodic conferences, and cars for ministry, are in fact luxuries and not necessities.

The Origins of Dependency

When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, many people in Central Asia were impoverished, minimally educated, and looking to the developed world for answers. New religious freedom permitted many evangelists to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in public. Missionaries drew others into churches and seminaries with free education, free transportation, free meals for church attendance, and even jobs. Short-term groups brought free medical treatment and free clothing. Missionaries provided all of these material attractions along with the gospel. At that time unemployment was very high and \$100/month salaries were common. Houses could be purchased for less than \$10,000. An understanding arose from these circumstances that churches must have a building in order to be a church and pastors should never be bi-vocational. They should devote themselves to ministry fulltime. Russian Orthodox and Muslim leaders traditionally followed that pattern, but it was flawed. It presupposed that money would always be available from missionaries and that salaries and house prices would always be easily affordable for foreign donors, assumptions that proved false. In a sense, missionaries had replaced the Soviet Union as nanny.

In Central Asia believers must overcome Soviet-style, learned dependency. But rather than counter that trend, missionary methods seem to have encouraged it. As many people were attracted to the church, the number of decisions for Christ increased. Those decisions were surely genuine, but they may have been limited in scope. Some people started to

believe that the gospel provided not only eternal life, but a job, a house, a car, etc. This dependency trend developed an attitude of selfish faith, always thinking about what God can do for new believers instead of the more biblical concept of what God can do in the life of new believers to change them. The important need of personal character change was overlooked in the quest for material possessions.

The Role of Kazakh Culture in Dependency

In order for independent churches to exist and proliferate, believers must address various aspects of Kazakh culture. A stereotype today is that Kazakhs are lazy and love money. Surely this is not true in all cases, but enough examples can be found that even Kazakhs will agree with this assessment. Therefore, Kazakhs must overcome both the lax work ethic propagated by their nomadic culture and the legacy of communism that ensured equal poverty for all. These sociological factors have served either to introduce or to reinforce unhealthy attitudes, including an obsession with material prosperity. Abai Kunanbaev (1854-1904), beloved Kazakh poet and philosopher, put this longstanding outlook as follows: "It is not learning and knowledge, nor peace and justice, that the Kazakh holds dear—his sole concern is how to get rich." Further, "I have yet to see a person who, having acquired wealth by dishonest means, has put it to good use" (*Abai: Book of Words* [Almaty: EL Bureau, 1995], 107 and 119).

Titus 1:5-16 discusses the problem of laziness. It evidently hindered the faith of believers on the island of Crete, corrupting their minds, promoting a desire for dishonest financial gain among pastors, leading many into heresy and promoting hypocrisy. A case can be made that laziness has had similar effects in Kazakh believers. Kazakh culture embodies many positive characteristics including hospitality, but lack of industriousness will need to be overcome if the country and if new church fellowships are to flourish. Without new attitudes toward work and money, church dependency will continue to be a problem, stunting the spiritual growth of many.

The Health and Wealth Gospel

Building independent churches is more a matter of consistent, systematic Bible study than watching popular Bible teachers on TV and DVDs. Kenneth Hagen and Joyce Meyers are very well known in Central Asia. Church-going people often mention their names in religious conversations, primarily because of their health and prosperity messages. These uplifting and encouraging themes touch the hearts of many people world-wide who are hoping for better days to come. However, prosperity gospel teaching poses very real concerns for the church. First, people who do not know the Bible well watch these messages. The sad result is that poor Central Asians actually think that by faith they can achieve the same lifestyle as the preachers on TV. Faith then becomes focused on material goods or a lifestyle rather than on the Word of God.

The Need for Biblical Literacy

Independence is more a matter of personal ownership than economic ability.

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Dependence upon TV preachers rather than personal study of the Bible parallels how most Kazakhs previously came to understand Islam. Many Muslims do not read the Koran because the Kazakh translation is considered inferior to the Arabic Koran and most Kazakhs do not read Arabic. Therefore, many Kazakhs simply accepted what the Mullah told them was the truth. Upon conversion to Christ, Kazakhs therefore do not automatically become students of the Bible. They must, of course, read and study in order to know God's Word, yet, sadly, most churches lack mid-week Bible studies.

Central Asian believers must overcome biblical illiteracy. Thankfully, the first complete Kazakh Bible translation appeared in 2011. Audio versions of the Bible in Russian and Kazakh are also available. These resources assist believers who genuinely desire to know God and do His will. Those who depend on popular TV preachers may experience some blessings, but they ultimately will focus on material goals rather than on God's kingdom and honor. Churches that emphasize comprehensive Bible knowledge and application will increase biblical literacy and promote greater knowledge of God. One can only hope that whole churches seeking a greater knowledge of God will promote dependence upon God rather than dependence on foreign help.

The Issue of Leadership

A Kazakh proverb on leadership says, "A fish rots from the head." Bearing this axiom in mind, changes in leadership that promote church independence in Central Asia will be essential. Unfortunately, a style of leadership exists in Kazakhstan that stresses authority more than responsibility, a phenomenon that is rampant at all levels of society. Corruption runs very deep and is widely accepted. Government officials require bribes to perform basic services. University professors expect students to pay for their diplomas. Police seek bribes rather than compliance with the law, and many businesses expect to receive bribes from job applicants.

Sadly, cases abound of pastors who have left the ministry with golden parachutes they themselves had fashioned. Too many pastors borrowed large sums from their churches with no intention of ever repaying the money. Some took houses; others took money. Missionaries have had to learn not to make loans to pastors.

Most local church leaders have now been believers for at least ten years. Those who accept responsibility gain the respect and trust of their members by reporting ministry activity, disclosing use of church funds, training members to obey the Bible, setting an example by regular fasting, daily Bible reading and prayer, tithing, sharing the gospel, and visiting the sick. Members who observe leaders acting in such responsible ways will respond by following their example. Unfortunately, this type of leadership is rare among Kazakhs.

Kazakh believers must overcome secular forms of leadership in order to build independent churches.

We find three forms of leadership in Kazakh churches. The most common can be described as dictatorial, stemming from power that comes from having more money than anyone else. The vast majority of Kazakh church leaders fit this description. Such leaders feel little need to disclose their use of money because it often comes from foreign sources. They may inflate their evangelism activity when making reports. They generally teach their people to tithe and pray, though their lack of transparency in these areas is a serious problem. They may shine in other areas of leadership, but their churches will never become independent until their obedience is transparently demonstrated in these critical areas. A second type of leader is the facilitator who tends to negotiate in order to set ministry goals and activities. This form of leadership is growing in acceptance and ought to produce more leader transparency, but the goals of its practitioners are usually personal or organizational rather than biblical. A third form of leadership is the servant leader. This form comes from the Bible and is rare. Those who take on this role will go against the current of society and culture, but with perseverance they set a powerful example for their members.

Believers Marrying Believers

Another key to building independent churches in Central Asia is for believers to marry believers. This need may seem obvious, but Kazakh believers often marry non-believers. In Kazakh churches young women outnumber young men by such a large percentage that congregations face crisis as a result. Young men often look outside the churches for a marriage partner. Young women begin praying for a believing husband, but if one does not appear after years of prayer, they marry non-believers. Many factors are at work in this process and the solutions are not easy, but progress must be made. Marriage between believers and non-believers severely hinders church growth. Every aspect of church activity suffers because the unbeliever holds back the believer in faith and church participation.

Kazakh believers must overcome selfish desires for marriage and trust God either to help them find a believing spouse, or to find joy in singleness. Biblical teaching on this subject is undeniably clear (Genesis 24:3; Exodus 34:16; Nehemiah 13:25; 2 Corinthians 6:14), yet personal desire and weak faith stand in the way. Legalism is not the answer but clear teaching, focused prayer, and gentle persuasion from parents and churches.

A Season of Testing at Hand

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, when churches came into being in Kazakhstan, few could have imagined that within 20 years the government would pass legislation restricting freedom of religion. In October 2011 a new era of religious discrimination came into being in Kazakhstan. Harsh restrictions now exist on Christian literature publication and importation, public preaching, and holding religious meetings. Churches with fewer than 50 members

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cannot legally be registered. The government has withdrawn educational licenses for seminaries and Bible schools. Now is the time when followers of Jesus must be wise, biblically literate, and willing to sacrifice in order to advance the gospel.

By contrast, dependence on foreign support does not produce the kind of spiritual strength needed for the days ahead. Local church independence must be a paramount goal if the church is to survive in the new, more restrictive environment. In 2012-13 believers expect government officials to close many

churches that do not meet the minimum requirement of 50 members. They also expect that some churches will be refused registration during the mandatory re-registration process. The beginning of a season of testing for the young evangelical community in Kazakhstan clearly is at hand. The people of God in all likelihood will rise to the occasion, showing themselves to be faithful followers of Christ. However, many will have to make changes in their lives in order to stand fast in the midst of the trials of this new era. ♦

Recent Developments in Orthodox Journalism in Russia

Anna Briskina-Müller

At the end of the 1980s the Russian Orthodox Church began to be asked more and more for its views. The church itself also felt a need to become more vocal. At first only individuals and small groups started to print church leaflets and newspapers. Their content basically consisted of sermons, texts from the church fathers, catechisms, reports on the way to faith, and stories of miracles and martyrs. The archaic style of language charmed readers; the solemn tone seemed dignified; everything was new; everything seemed important, thrilling, and exciting.

Background: 1988-2009

This was not yet journalism in the usual sense, but first of all the transmission of quotations and of not-fully-processed opinions of church people who suddenly were free to express themselves publicly. In 1995-96 I myself worked with one of the Christian information agencies that were emerging in Russia, the Catholic “Blagovest-Info” (Brussels; Moscow). In spring 1996 I was able to participate in a first meeting of journalists specializing in religion. Although only 10 persons were in attendance, it was clear already in the mid-1990s that we journalists must work together to develop our own journalistic strategies. The idea for the gathering came from Alexander Shipkov who today is editor-in-chief of the portal “Religare.ru” and president of the Association of Chief Editors of Orthodox Mass Media in Russia, founded in March 2011. This association fulfills dreams first formulated in our initial meeting in 1996.

Orthodox media—newspapers, journals, radio, attempts in television, and internet projects—all came to pass “from below.” At first the church created no new structures to further develop its public relations. Responsibility for press work fell primarily to the Department of External Relations and the Publishing Department (Izdatel’skii soviet), which from 1945 until the beginning of the 1990s was the only church publishing house on the territory of the USSR. This department’s publications included the well-known *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchy* (*Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*). In the first decade of the 21st century the Publishing Department expanded its work, creating an “Internet Catalog of Orthodox Mass Media” (www.ormedia.ru), as well as an Orthodox Encyclopedia website

(www.sedmitza.ru). This department also launched annual scholarly-theological “Christmas Lectures” (Rozdestvenskie chteniya), with one section addressing “church mass media.” In addition, it organizes “Faith and Word” (Vera i Slovo), an annual festival of Orthodox mass media. Belatedly, in 2005 the Moscow Patriarchy finally launched its own large-scale press service (Press-sluzba MP).

Various synodal departments with public relations functions have competed with each other, first of all, the staff of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Department of External Relations. The websites of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Department of External Relations both declare themselves the “official website of the Russian Orthodox Church.”

For a long time the church did not have a department devoted exclusively to information work. That changed on 31 March 2009 as Patriarch Kyrill announced the establishment of a new Synodal Department of Information (Sinodal’nyi informatsionnyi otdel). (For a complete overview of Orthodox media prior to 2009, see the author’s article, “Zum Zustand der Orthodoxen Massenmedien im heutigen Russland,” *Ostkirchliche Studien* 58 [2009], 168-81.)

The New Synodal Department of Information

The new Synodal Department of Information (SINFO) is now responsible for the official Russian Orthodox Church web page, www.patriarchis.ru. For now, www.mospat.ru is the “official web page of the Department of External Church Relations.” Nevertheless, both websites provide important official church information, archives, and documents.

At the time of his appointment as head of the new synodal department Vladimir Legoyda was a 35-year-old journalist, lecturer in journalism, and editor-in-chief of *Thomas (Foma)*, the best-known independent Orthodox journal. Legoyda sees the task of SINFO to correct faulty images of the church held by the public and to centralize, harmonize, and ensure the accuracy of existing media that call themselves Orthodox. What does this mean in practice? SINFO, for example, has decided upon an obligatory imprimatur (official license to print) from the Moscow Patriarchate for all Orthodox media, similar to the Roman Catholic “nihil obstat.”

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The necessity of such a measure is justified by the limited basis of judgment among Orthodox readers and the uneven quality of Orthodox media. To obtain the imprimatur—that permits distribution through church channels—all Orthodox mass media are obliged to submit to SINFO’s scrutiny. The Patriarch’s imprimatur is said to be granted “only to such mass media whose production does not misrepresent Orthodox doctrine, does not contradict the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church, and does not contain unchecked and ethically unacceptable information.” (For a list of approved media consult www.patriarchia.ru/grif.)

The new rules have caused some disquiet. According to Legoyda, airing controversial discussions should not affect a publication’s ability to obtain the Patriarch’s imprimatur (www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/126882.html). However, it is considered important that facts and perspectives “established in official church documents” are represented. An additional restriction concerns media that publish materials that are insulting or damaging to the reputation of the church or the clergy. In practice, however, the imprimatur is meant to eliminate nationalistic and pseudo-Orthodox materials and to prevent their sale in church-owned shops, this according to Archpriest Aleksandr Stepanov, editor of *Grad Petrov*, the official radio program of the St. Petersburg Diocese and a member of the SINFO commission. The imprimatur is also a pragmatic instrument to coordinate media that consider themselves church-related.

According to Legoyda it is also the task of SINFO to dispel “myths about the church” such as the “myth” of church leaders operating in tandem with state power or the “myth” of the great wealth of the Russian Orthodox Church. Legoyda also emphasizes that SINFO does not concern itself with politics. The church would not be entitled to make any utterance in that direction.

Well-suited to the “modern” missionary style of Patriarch Kyrill is SINFO’s development in 2010 of an Orthodox video channel on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/russin-church>), the establishment of a chair of religious journalism and public relations in the Orthodox Institute of St. John the Theologian, and the preparation of a church journalism textbook including instructions for the establishment of press services in the dioceses. SINFO also has initiated regular compilations of terminological and factual mistakes made by the media in dealing with church issues. SINFO records errors provided to it by email, categorizes them, prepares corrections, and makes practical recommendations to journalists writing on church affairs. A compilation of such media errors is forthcoming.

Patriarch Kyrill himself proposed another media initiative which SINFO now oversees: having bloggers accompany him on his official trips, writing their immediate impressions in their respective

blogs. While not expressing misgivings directly, Legoyda has criticized the blogosphere as the most prolific source of misinformation about the church (Interview of Legoyda with Xeniya Luchenko, “Pravoslavnye SMI,” *Tatianin den*, 11 October 2010, www.religare.ru/2_79554.html).

In 2009 the Russian Orthodox Church Synod created an Inter-Conciliar Agency (www.msobor.ru) which in turn established a “Commission for the Resolution of Questions Concerning Church Information Work and Relations with Mass Media.” This commission has appointed a working group charged with drafting a document “Concerning Information Policies of the Russian Orthodox Church.” Notwithstanding its clearly defined character as a department of ideological propaganda, I recognize that SINFO undertakes some more or less reasonable missionary and journalistic endeavors.

The “Faith and Word” Festival of Orthodox Mass Media

The church-sanctioned biennial “Faith and Word” Festival of Orthodox Mass Media (*Vera i Slovo*; www.ortho-media.ru) is an international gathering that provides training in journalism, missionary outreach, management, and public relations. Its final documents provide helpful insight into the mood, interests, and developments in Orthodox journalism over the last few years.

The final document of the first festival in 2004 framed ethical principles for Orthodox journalists: They should follow common journalistic guidelines but should abstain from conclusions that disagree with the tradition of the church fathers. Furthermore, statements and themes should be avoided that could lead to a division in the church. Rather, Orthodox journalists should always keep the interests of the church in mind and should resist anti-church campaigns in the secular press.

The fourth festival in October 2010, held after Patriarch Kyrill took office, included almost 400 participants from 67 dioceses. One theme of discussion was the role of blogs in Orthodox journalism. Festival organizers also unveiled the church YouTube channel and projects to produce YouTube video spots. Matters of discussion at the festival included the enmity of secular media toward the church, opportunities for cooperation with secular media, and for the first time, the secretiveness of church structures as a cause of mistrust of the church.

Credo.Ru Versus Patriarchia.Ru

Presently the Russian government has registered more than 1,000 Orthodox media outlets, but not all under the auspices of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the main, they focus on the same themes but differ in approach, style of reporting, and interpretation. This may be illustrated by comparing the web portal Credo.Ru (www.portal-credo.ru) and the official web page of the Russian Orthodox Church (Patriarchia.Ru). Credo.Ru, which presents itself as an independent religious

In practice the imprimatur is meant to eliminate nationalistic and pseudo-Orthodox materials and to prevent their sale in church-owned shops.

information agency, nevertheless has as its main subject the Russian Orthodox Church, which it considers to be the most significant religious entity in Russia today. Credo.Ru, whose editor-in-chief is Aleksandr Saldatov, cooperates closely with the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC). One of its main contributors, Bishop Grigori (Vadim Lurye), a church historian and specialist in Oriental studies, left the Moscow Patriarchate for the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1987 and affiliated with the ROAC in 1999. His post as bishop actually came about through an election conducted by a ROAC splinter group in 2007. Despite Credo.Ru's affirmation that it is independent, a random sampling of its website reporting clearly reveals that its abiding theme is this: The church of the Moscow Patriarchate is dying, whereas true Orthodox believers are looking for alternatives and sooner or later find their way to the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church.

In contrast, it is the task of Patriarchia.Ru journalists to defend the Moscow Patriarchate and combat "myths" maligning it. While Patriarchia.Ru, for example, tries to "explain" and to justify the expensive, several-million-dollar yacht of Patriarch Kyrill, a gift of Putin in 2005, Credo.Ru feels obliged unceasingly to "unmask" such phenomena. While Patriarchia.Ru reports in straightforward or complimentary fashion on church awards to rich businessmen and dubious politicians, Credo.Ru publishes letters of protest on such awards written by rural priests living in abject poverty. Patriarchia.Ru does not post such letters. On the contrary, its representatives consider the publication of such letters objectionable, in effect, amounting to "uncovering the nakedness of the mother" (Leviticus 18:7). Patriarchia.Ru and Credo.Ru represent two extremes of Orthodox journalism in Russia today: on the one side, the officious, triumphalist, "glossy" Orthodoxy of Patriarchia.Ru; on the other side, the so-called "true autonomous" Orthodoxy of Credo.Ru, which goes to absurd lengths to reject any positive characterization of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The gap between Orthodox media loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate and media alien to it continues to widen. The less transparent the Moscow Patriarchate becomes, the more it lends credibility to its critics. The Russian Orthodox Church also suffers damage from ideologically driven ultra-Orthodox believers and their quasi-Orthodox media (such as *Dukh kristianina* and *Russkaya liniya*).

Quasi-Independent and Independent Orthodox Media

Other Orthodox media exist that do not owe their existence to the church's administration and are financially on their own, although the degree of independence is still debatable in some cases. The newspaper *Tatiana's Day* (*Tatianin den*'), founded in 1995, and the journal *Thomas* (*Foma*), founded in 1996, came into being because of private initiatives "from below." However, knowing the background of both media, one might doubt their independence:

Xeniya Luchenko, until recently working editor-in-chief of *Tatiana's Day*, is the wife of Sergei Chapnin, editor-in-chief of the official *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchy*. Similarly, the founder and editor-in-chief of *Thomas*, Vladimir Legoyda, is, as noted previously, at the same time head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department of Information (SINFO). In both cases, the connections noted undermine claims of independence.

Some official Russian Orthodox Church media owe their existence to private initiatives. Among these are the journal for Russian Orthodox social services, *Neskuchnyi sad* (www.nsad.ru), which works in cooperation with the Moscow Patriarchate's Synodal Department for Charity, the diaconal internet portal *Miloserdie.Ru* ("Mercy"), the radio station of the St. Petersburg diocese, *Grad Petrov* (<http://www.grad-petrov.ru>), and many others. Furthermore, a number of interesting, independent internet portals, such as "*Orthodoxy and the World*" (*Pravoslavie i mir*; www.pravmir.ru) and *Bogoslov.Ru* (*The Theologian*) may be noted. The independence of these media, even if they hold an official church status and are led by priests, is demonstrated by their origin in private initiatives and their private funding.

Independent Orthodox media offer serious analysis even if self-censorship is employed in some cases. Official and independent Orthodox media have differing goals. The former seek to propagate a certain image of the church in the eyes of the public. By contrast, the latter are less concerned about the reputation of the church and strive sincerely for a genuine exchange of information.

The Media and the Church

In Russia today unscrupulous secular media primarily convey negative messages about the Orthodox Church: Orthodox clerics and believers who are dishonest, who are hostile to museums, and who lust for power and real estate. The self-denying labors of Orthodox faithful in hospitals or orphanages, however, do not appear to be too entertaining a theme. Private and state-owned television seems interested in the church these days only for public appearances of the Patriarch or when the subject has high entertainment value, such as a story of miracles. Any other church-related themes are the exception. It is seen as liberal to report on scandals, conflicts, and quarrels within or swirling around the church, whereas journalists reporting favorably about the church risk damaging their reputation in the liberal press.

The causes of this hostile reporting are to be found not only within the church. Today, worldwide, the public expects negative press treatment of the church. Across the globe secular media do not receive the church with open arms. Therefore, those opposed to the church attempt to silence it by "uncovering the nakedness" of its representatives. This is entertaining. Unfortunately, it also is easy.

Conclusion

In the first years after *perestroika* the church still profited from its Soviet martyrdom. At that time,

The gap between Orthodox media loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate and media alien to it continues to widen. The less transparent the Moscow Patriarchate becomes, the more it lends credibility to its critics.

(continued on page 8)

the media reported willingly and often about the church, and many people placed their hopes in it. The church received a second, smaller boost with the beginning of reforms instituted when Patriarch Kyrill took office. Each of his steps was followed eagerly. However, since then Patriarch Kyrill has taken too many steps in the wrong direction. SINFO, his creation, is forced to always justify itself with utterances, activities, and methods that remind the public of the old party style, methods that alienate rather than convince.

At the same time, it is a fact that in the last few years Russian Orthodox believers have undertaken first-class missionary outreach, scholarly theological endeavors, and social reform projects. Many of these initiatives have boldly addressed new questions in ways that certainly counter public stereotypes of the church as anti-intellectual, hostile to education, and dishonest. Today, Orthodox journalists have

increasing professionalism as their main goal. Over the past two decades, but particularly in recent years, they have come to realize that journalism cannot be undertaken as a hobby. ♦

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Editor's note: This article is published with the author's permission from "Orthodoxer Journalismus in Russland: Neueste Entwicklungen," Zeitschrift Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West, No. 10 (October 2011): 12-15. The editor wishes to thank Bishop Ruediger Minor, former head of the United Methodist Church in Russia, for his translation of the present article from the German original.

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

Vera Shevzov

Editor's note: The first portion of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 20 (Summer 2012): 6-8.

Museum Curators Versus Church Clerics

The exhibit "Caution! Religion" spurred debate about museums which played a tremendous role in preserving icons. The modern transformation of numerous icons into "art" prolonged their life in the Soviet period, saving them from destruction, either through decay or iconoclastic zeal. However, the politics of restoration and preservation, even in the early decades of the twentieth century, were fraught with tensions. Today, controversies have flared once again over competing definitions of art and the sacred and the use and misuse of the icon.

From a traditional Orthodox perspective, the icon's proper place—its "home"—is the sacred space of a church, chapel, or devotional icon corner. However, from a broader cultural perspective, as a "monument of early Russian painting," an icon's appropriate viewing place might also be a museum, on display for the aesthetic appreciation of everyone. Curators and museum employees often approach their work in their own spiritual terms. For both Orthodox faithful and museum curators, the conditions of an icon's display are of the utmost importance because the icon's life is at stake. Curators worry about climate and lighting, clergy about liturgy and prayer. Precisely what signals life for an icon from the Orthodox perspective—candles, incense—can eventually spell death for an ancient work of art. Caught between museums and churches, ancient icons in post-Soviet Russia often become involved in a tug-of-war between competing notions of ownership and belonging.

Recently, clergymen and curators from the Tretyakov Gallery found a mutually satisfactory

solution regarding the Vladimir Mother of God icon. Sensitive to its fragility, the gallery's curators became understandably concerned when, in 1993, President Boris Yeltsin issued a directive allowing the Vladimir icon to be used in liturgical services. After one such outing, the icon was returned damaged. In response, the director of the Tretyakov's division of old Russian art insisted, "The icon has protected us for many centuries; now it is our turn to protect it. It has already put in its time, and there is almost nothing left of the painting." The eventual compromise was a "museum-church" located on museum grounds. In addition to an active liturgical space in which the icon can thrive, the building also boasts a controlled climate and a special case for the icon that preserves it from harmful smoke and incense.

Diverse Iconographic Styles

Whether located in churches or museums, icons pose a visual challenge to those who gaze upon them, no less now than in prerevolutionary Russia. The sheer variety in style and technique prompts a reconsideration of the now-classical narrative of the history of the Russian icon. The standard history situates the icon's developmental high point in the fifteenth century and then traces a gradual decline that accelerates with the influences of Western art from the seventeenth century onward. This narrative raises the question of relationships among style, perceived quality, and iconic "authenticity." What visually distinguishes an icon from art or a painting that depicts scenes or persons from the history of Orthodox Christianity? In her work on Russian icons in the twentieth century, art historian Irina Yazykova maintains that the answer to this

Caught between museums and churches, ancient icons in post-Soviet Russia often become involved in a tug-of-war between competing notions of ownership and belonging.

question today remains murkier than ever. As a case in point, she examines the images in Moscow's recently rebuilt Cathedral of Christ the Savior. The iconographic style of most of its images, she maintains, does not in fact correspond to what most Orthodox traditionalists would deem authentic. In her estimation, its wide array of styles might best be categorized as "ecclesial postmodernism."

Print and Internet Icons

Perhaps most immediate in terms of Russia's viewing public are the challenges that consumer culture, technology, and the marketplace pose. In the nineteenth century, the machine production of icons in Russia elicited unease among some believers. In their estimation, without the direct involvement of the human hand and spirit, the machine-produced images could not help but be a qualitatively different product. Analogous concerns arise today with regard to icon production and the internet. While computer technology has contributed substantially to technical advancements in icon restoration, it has also raised concerns about iconographic production. Is an image of an icon downloaded off the virtual space of the internet, for instance, indeed an icon suitable for prayer?

The Icon on Film

Even more problematic is the relationship of the icon to the medium of film. Church and cinema have a history of tension, and that relationship has entered a new phase in the post-Soviet era. Renewed interest in Orthodoxy among certain cinematographers, coupled with a missionary mind-set, has resulted in the proliferation of Orthodox film festivals and in discussions about Orthodox forms of film. Two examples of cinematic events in Russia that drew particular attention to the problems associated with the icon and film are Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and Pavel Lungin's *The Island* (Ostrov, 2006).

Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*

Despite the fact that Russia's public was rarely exposed to cinematic portrayals of Jesus under Soviet rule, filmgoers, including Orthodox believers, displayed the same range of reactions to Gibson's cinematic "icon" of Christ as did their more Hollywood-savvy American counterparts. Some viewers, including Orthodox clergy, judged it a remarkably accurate presentation of the last twelve hours of Jesus' life and saw no reason not to watch it. Others, however, were more reserved in their response. One reviewer, for instance, argued that Orthodox viewers in particular have difficulty watching films about Jesus since their gazes are conditioned from their youth by iconography. A cinematic Jesus, in this sense, could never be seen as an authentic depiction of Christ comparable to an icon. Similarly, though recommending the film on various levels, Andrei Kuraev, an Orthodox deacon and public intellectual, voiced his overall misgivings about the "Jesus film" genre. No cinematic depiction of Christ, in his estimation, could ever be iconic.

The face of the actor takes the place of the genuine Face (*Lik*), thereby making it easy to forget that "the Christ of prayer is not the Christ of film."

Lungin's *The Island*

What if, however, a film happened to be expressly *Orthodox*? The question is becoming more relevant in contemporary Russia as a specifically Orthodox film industry develops. The recent unexpected success of Lungin's *The Island*, which garnered five Nika awards, has stirred misgivings, even in the mainstream press. Hailed as "the first Orthodox film," it drew wide praise from Orthodox believers, including Patriarch Alexis II; it also spurred tourism and pilgrimages to monasteries. *The Island* depicts the story of Father Anatoly, a holy fool and type of elder with a haunting past who lives in the remote frozen regions of the Russian north. The film drew unexpected numbers of believers and nonbelievers alike.

Despite its broad appeal and despite the fact that the film is now sold in churches alongside icons, some believers question its spiritual credentials. According to Sophia Ishchenko, a nun and president of the annual film festival Vstechka held in Kaluga, Orthodox films in general are characterized by three components: theocentricity, Orthodox ethics, and an Orthodox aesthetic informed by iconography. Lungin's film, in the eyes of some, failed on the first front. Instead of lifting the gaze of viewers beyond the boundaries of this world, *The Island*, critics maintain, fixes the gaze on Anatoly himself.

Writing on the eve of the 1917 Revolution, his impressions still fresh following the rediscovery of the Old Russian icon, philosopher Evgeny Trubetskoy maintained that as great works of art, icons are best approached as royalty: "It would be impertinent to speak to them; one must stand before them and deferentially wait for them to speak first." Embracing both image and beholder, a comprehensive understanding of the icon in modern and postmodern times invariably includes an examination of response and respondent. At the outset of the twentieth century it was evident that the icon was speaking in contexts that lay beyond the boundaries of the faith community. It had entered the discursive worlds of philosophy, art, cinematography, politics, and economics, in which deference and waiting were not necessarily viewed as virtues. Still situated in these various worlds, the icon continues to beckon the beholder in ways it leaves to us to understand. ♦

Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Vera Shevzov, "Afterword," in Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity ed. by Jefferson J. A. Gatrall and Douglas Greenfield (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 246-56.

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Is an image of an icon downloaded off the virtual space of the internet an icon suitable for prayer?

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

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Editor's note: Previous sections of this article were published in the East-West Church and Ministry Report 20 (Spring 2012): 9-11; and 20 (Summer 2012): 8-10.

One remarkably successful form of dissent employed by all Christian confessions was *samizdat*, "self-published" protest literature produced and distributed by clandestine means.

Orthodox Dissidence

Significant Orthodox and Protestant dissident movements began to emerge in the early 1960s. On the one hand, the Kremlin instructed the Russian Orthodox Church and some of its other churches to join the World Council of Churches (1961-62), requiring these captive bodies to extol abroad the peaceful intentions of Soviet foreign policy and "freedom of religion" in the U.S.S.R. On the other hand, opponents of state manipulation of religion began speaking out. Among brave Orthodox souls who decried the passivity and compromises of the Moscow Patriarchate (with their year of arrest) were: Anatoly Levitin-Krasnov (1949, 1969, 1972), Archbishop Yermogen (forcibly retired to a monastery, 1965), Father Nikolai Eshliman (forcibly retired, 1965), Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1974), Alexander Ogorodnikov (1978), Father Gleb Yakunin (1979), Lev Regelson (1980), Father Dmitri Dudko (1980), and Irina Ratushinskaya (1982).

Baptist and Adventist Church Splits

Similarly, opponents of state domination of Protestant church life began to defy church and civil authorities. In 1960 Soviet officials pressured cowed Evangelical Christian-Baptist (ECB) leaders to issue a Letter of Instruction to local congregations barring children from worship and advising against "unhealthy missionary tendencies" (Sawatsky 1981: 139). The reaction was an outright revolt leading to a denominational split in August 1961 (Bourdeaux 1968). Dissident Baptists, also known as *Initsiativniki* (the Initiative Group), faced fierce state persecution and prison for its leaders and activists including (with the year of arrest): Peter Rumachik (1961), A.F. Prokofiev (1962), Aida Skripnikova (1962), Georgi Vins (1966), Gennadi Kriuchkov (1966), and Lydia Vins (1969). Seventh-day Adventists experienced a similar schism with identical results, including imprisonment for its leaders, with Vladimir Shelkov (1895-1980) becoming particularly well known for his courageous defiance and 25 years of total imprisonment (Beeson 1982: 96-97; Elliott 1983; Pospelovsky 1988: 158; Sapiets 1990: 68-134).

Pentecostal Persecution

Most Pentecostals had long since refused legal recognition under the umbrella of the state-recognized ECB Union. As a result, they too regularly suffered harassment, arrest, imprisonment, and church closures during Khrushchev's antireligious campaign, but before and after it as well. Representative of the Pentecostal plight was the persecution endured by the "Siberian Seven"

(Peter and Augustina Vashchenko, their daughters Lida, Lyuba, and Lila, and Maria Chmykhalova and son Timothy). Various members of these long-suffering families fell victim to arrest, imprisonment, forced psychiatric treatment, even state abduction of children. In 1978, in desperation, eight members of these Pentecostal families traveled to Moscow, with seven managing to break through Soviet guards to enter the American Embassy compound. There they remained in limbo until their ultimate emigration to the U.S. in 1983 (Hill 1991: 25-40; Pollock 1979).

Samizdat

One remarkably successful form of dissent, employed not only by the Siberian Seven but by all Christian confessions, especially from the 1960s on, was *samizdat*, "self-published" protest literature produced and distributed by clandestine means. Outstanding examples include Alexander Solzhenitsyn's April 1972 Lenten Letter to Patriarch Pimen, the long-running *Chronicle of the Catholic Church of Lithuania* (1972-88), the 1975 protest of Father Gleb Yakunin and Lev Regelson to the World Council of Churches, and the prodigious production of dissident Adventist Vladimir Shelkov and the dissident Baptist Khristianin Press (1971-), which printed over one million books and brochures by the late 1980s (Nikol'skaia 2009: 289-91; Rowe 1994: 172).

"Carrot and Stick"

Soviet religious policy under Leonid Brezhnev (1964-82), Yuri Andropov (1982-84), and Konstantin Chernenko (1984-85) may best be described as a mixture of "carrot and stick." This differentiated strategy meant token concessions to legally recognized church bodies, such as state permission for Orthodox to appoint additional bishops, the launching of a seminary correspondence course for Baptists, and the printing and importing of some Bibles and hymnals for both. At the same time, the Kremlin was unyielding in its repression of catacomb Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants. State recognition, however, provided scant protection as the number of legally registered Orthodox parishes fell from 7,600 in 1964 to 6,754 in 1985, and the number of Orthodox priests dropped from 6,800 in 1966 to approximately 6,000 in 1988 (Davis 2003: 126 and 131-32. See also Sawatsky 1992: 247-48).

Glasnost

In March 1985 leadership of the Soviet Union passed to 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev. His campaigns of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) introduced a new day, not only in the political and economic realms, but in church-state

relations as well. New freedoms to celebrate the millennium of Christianity in Ukraine and Russia in 1988 were accompanied by the release of all prisoners of conscience (1986-89), an end to religious censorship, large-scale importations of Bibles, an end to jamming of shortwave religious broadcasts, and permission for some persecuted believers to emigrate (Elliott 1989 and 1990). In 1989 the Eastern-Rite Catholic Church gained legal status. In 1990 the Soviet Parliament (October 1) and the Russian Republic Parliament (October 25) adopted laws on freedom of conscience as generous as any worldwide. And in 1991 the Kremlin abolished its malevolent Council of Religious Affairs (Ellis 1996: 157-63 and 166).

Restrictions Renewed

However, just as Nicholas II's Edict of Toleration shortly gave way to renewed restrictions upon non-Orthodox believers, so too in the 1990s did Orthodox, nationalists, and Communists make common cause to impinge upon the free expression of faith by non-Orthodox churches and missionaries. As early as 1992 Patriarch Aleksei II called for legislation to curtail foreign missionary work in Russia (Elliott 1997b).

Finally, in 1997 the Moscow Patriarchate's concerted efforts to restrict the activities of missionaries and "non-traditional" faiths were rewarded in legislation that, if enforced as the Orthodox hierarchy hoped, would have dramatically reduced religious liberties previously granted by the 1990 laws on freedom of conscience. However, an unintended loophole in the legislation permitted churches to join "centralized religious associations" that exempted them from the law's most onerous provisions. In addition, a 1999 Russian Constitutional Court ruling set aside other discriminatory provisions of the law. However, the intent of Russian law and court rulings has never meant as much as the bias and whim of administrators charged with their implementation. As a result, the climate of suspicion of non-Orthodox faiths, fueled by the Moscow Patriarchate and the press from the 1990s on, spelled harassment and arbitrariness on the part of federal and local officials in their dealings with Catholics and Protestants (Elliott 1997a; Elliott 1999; Elliott 2000).

In the early 21st century non-Orthodox believers must once again suffer increasing infringements upon freedom of conscience. The Orthodox Church, the state, and the press charge that the loyalty and patriotism of non-Orthodox believers are suspect and that they and their missionary friends harbor spies working for foreign powers (Uzzell 2003). Current assaults on the religious liberties of Russia's non-Orthodox citizens—with a familiar ring from times past—include frequent difficulties in purchasing, renovating, and renting property for worship, increasing impediments to missionary residency, discrimination in employment, and, increasingly, the exclusion of Catholics and Protestants from the

public square, the military chaplaincy, and from ministry in orphanages, schools, and homes for the aged (Elliott 2005).

Varying Levels of Restrictions

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 all 15 former Soviet republics adopted constitutions and legislation guaranteeing freedom of conscience. However, while some successor states have for the most part honored their citizens' civil liberties (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine), many others have not. The most egregious violators of freedom of conscience have been Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, and Belarus, with persecution of unwelcomed faiths comparable in many respects to some of the darker days of Soviet repression. Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova occupy a middle ground: for the most part not as oppressive of out-of-favor faiths as was common in the Soviet Union, but in practice falling far short of their own domestic and international commitments to protect the religious liberties of their citizens (Forum 18; Lunkin 2011; Marshall 2008).

The persecution of Christians in Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet experience has been so vast and, despite occasional respites, so persistent that sympathy can be muted by the numbing statistics. Individual believers who faced oppression with courage or who perished holding fast to their hope in Christ may move us more than the martyred millions beyond our capacity to comprehend.

"Only Those Who Are Pure of Heart See God"

In 1967, the antireligious journal, *Nauka i religiiia* [*Science and Religion*], complained of the case of a stubborn second-grader from a Christian home. Her teacher had explained in class that Soviet cosmonauts had traveled 300 kilometers into space with no sign of God above. This educator singled out her believing pupil, asking her if this evidence from the cosmos convinced her that there was no God. In a most intimidating setting, standing by her desk as her classmates looked on, this eight-year-old child had the God-given presence of mind to respond, "I do not know if 300 kilometers is very much, but I do know very well that only those who are pure of heart see God" (Powell, 1975b: 155; Matthew 5: 8). Need we ever wonder again how little children will teach us?

Lydia Vins

Lydia Mikhailovna Vins endured over three years of imprisonment (1970-73) for her role in founding and managing the Council of Prisoners' Relatives, a remarkable enterprise that kept the West abreast of all manner of Soviet violations of the religious rights of dissident Baptists. The weight of suffering for her faith that she was forced to bear can hardly be comprehended: Her husband, Peter, a Baptist pastor, was arrested three times (1930, 1936, and 1937) and died in a Siberian labor camp in 1943; her son, Georgi, a leading dissident Baptist pastor, served two terms of imprisonment for his

Just as Nicholas II's Edict of Toleration shortly gave way to renewed restrictions upon non-Orthodox believers, so too in the 1990's did Orthodox, nationalists, and Communists make common cause to impinge upon the free expression of faith by non-Orthodox.

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"It is a fine thing to remain unembittered by life's sufferings."

The Patriarch declared boldly that "the gates of hell will not prevail against the church of Christ."

Persecution of Christians (continued from page 11)

faith (1966-69 and 1974-79); her daughter-in-law, Nadezhda, with a university degree in philology, could find employment only as an ice cream vendor; and her grandchildren, because of their faith, faced harassment in school and unemployment afterwards. Notwithstanding her "three generations of suffering," Lydia Vins could write her son in prison (4 October 1967): "Believe in man. Believe that everyone has a place beneath the surface of evil feelings where the true face of their divine origin can be seen. People feel this to be impractical and often... laughable and stupid, but it is a fine thing to remain unembittered by life's sufferings" (Vins 1975: 90-91. See also Vins 1976: 89-97).

Nijole Sadunaite

In 1974 the KGB arrested Nijole Sadunaite for typing carbon copies of the underground *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania*. Interrogated, tortured, and convicted in a closed trial to three years of strict regime labor camp followed by three years of Siberian exile, she never surrendered the names of fellow Catholic dissidents. Her spiritual autobiography, smuggled to the West and aptly published under the title *Radiance in the Gulag*, provides profound testimony to indomitable faith. Broken in the flesh but with undaunted spirit, she confounded her captors with longsuffering love: "This is the happiest day of my life. I am being tried for the truth and the love of my fellow man.... My sentence will be my triumph!... How can one not rejoice when Almighty God has guaranteed that the light will conquer darkness and the truth will overcome error and falsehood!" After Nijole's trial her young Russian guards, who could not understand Lithuanian, said to her: "For two years we have been escorting those on trial, and we have never seen anything like it. You were the prosecutor, and all of them were like criminals condemned to death! What did you speak about during the trial to frighten them like that?" (Sadunaite 1987: 57-58).

Patriarch Aleksei I and Metropolitan Nikolai

On 16 February 1960 at a Kremlin-sponsored international "disarmament" conference, Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksei I gave a speech that very likely was written for him by Metropolitan Nikolai. In it the Patriarch, in the first throes of the dire Khrushchev antireligious campaign, declared boldly that "the gates of hell will not prevail against the church of Christ" (Fletcher 1968: 188; Matthew 16: 18). Rather than wreak its wrath upon the all-too-visible Aleksei, the Soviet regime instead inflicted its retaliation on Nikolai, the Patriarch's first lieutenant. The Metropolitan was not seen again in public after February 1960. Nikolai "resigned" his post as chairman of the Russian Orthodox Department of External Relations on 21 June 1960. Then the church accepted his "request" to be relieved of his duties as metropolitan on 15 September 1960. His death on 13 December 1961 followed hospitalization in isolation

so strict that not even his sister, an Orthodox nun, was permitted to see him. Suspicions of an unnatural death have persisted ever since (Fletcher 1968:199-201).

Stalin and his League of the Militant Godless are history. Khrushchev, who failed in his promise to parade the Soviet Union's last Christian on TV, and his antireligious Znanie (Knowledge) Society are also history. But the Church (Russian Orthodox, privileged to its detriment, and Protestant and Catholic, restricted to no good end), nevertheless, endures. Indeed, the gates of hell have not prevailed. ♦

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Stalin and Khrushchev are history, but the Church endures. Indeed, the gates of hell have not prevailed.

Ivan Kargel and the Formation of Russian Evangelical Theology

Gregory L. Nichols

Russian evangelical leader Johann G. Kargel (1849-1937), later known as Ivan Veniaminovich Kargel, had an enormous influence within the Russian evangelical milieu of his time, particularly through his approach to spirituality. From the 1880s onwards much of his thinking was derived from the Holiness movements that affected evangelicalism in the 1870s, and especially from the spirituality of the Keswick Convention, which began in 1875.

Early Years

Kargel's evangelical conversion took place in 1869, and the same year, on 6 October, he was baptized and joined the Baptist congregation in Tiflis, Georgia. Services were in Russian and German, but the stronger influence was German, since by this time the wider German Baptist movement across a number of parts of Europe was well organized and was expanding. It was this movement that gave Kargel his early spiritual nurture. The German Baptist vision, mirroring the wider Baptist vision of the period in Britain and North America, was strongly evangelical, emphasizing conversion, the cross, the Bible, and activism. Each of these emphases was absorbed by Kargel and each was evident in Kargel's thinking throughout his life.

In the early 1870s Kargel also made contacts among another group of Germans—the Mennonite Brethren. Kargel attended a Mennonite Brethren conference in Southern Russia in 1873 at which he received his call into the pastoral ministry. Subsequently, Kargel went to Hamburg to train at the German Baptist Mission School, set up and led by Johann G. Oncken, the powerful leader of German Baptists. Kargel did have some wider links, but his spiritual grounding up to the mid-1870s was firmly within the Baptist camp.

The Influence of Vasily Pashkov

From 1875 to 1880, as the (first) German Baptist minister in Saint Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire, Kargel had a high profile within the German Baptist community. A remarkable evangelical movement was taking root and growing in this period among a number of Russians from aristocratic circles. The origins of this movement lay in the influence of the English evangelist Lord Radstock, and through his preaching in Saint Petersburg a number of leading Russian figures were converted to evangelical faith, including Colonel Vasily Pashkov. Kargel's contacts with this stream of evangelicalism, which owed a great deal, through Radstock, to interdenominational British evangelical

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thinking and to the Brethren movement, were to challenge Kargel's strictly Baptist views and also open up new spiritual possibilities.

A major turning point in Kargel's life was his marriage, in 1880, to Anna Semenova, who was a member of the Pashkovite circle. The Kargels, as a newly married couple, began their life and ministry together in Bulgaria in late 1880. The time in Bulgaria was hard for Anna, who missed the Pashkovite meetings and the close fellowship she had known with Pashkov and his wife. Increasingly she began to pray that her husband would embrace broader evangelical views and would open himself to a deeper work of the Holy Spirit in his life. One issue about which Anna felt strongly was the question of who could be admitted to the Lord's Table. German Baptists restricted admittance to those baptized as believers while the Pashkovite approach, which Anna followed, was an Open Table. Anna's hopes for change in her husband were realized. Writing much later, Kargel spoke of how in 1883 he found the sanctification he had been seeking.

The Influence of the Keswick Holiness Movement

The Kargels, now with young daughters, returned to Saint Petersburg in 1884, to take up new work among the Pashkovites. From this point on, Kargel's ministry was to be primarily among Russian speakers. Pashkov was exiled in 1884 and Ivan Kargel took on major responsibility for the Evangelical Christian community in the capital. Kargel also developed a close association with Freidrich Baedeker, whose own evangelical faith had been shaped by Lord Radstock and who, like Radstock, was associated with the Brethren. Baedeker was involved in Holiness gatherings, and as Kargel worked closely with Baedeker he imbibed more of the Holiness spirituality that was by then being mediated in Britain through the Keswick Convention. Baedeker was granted a unique authorization by the Russian government to visit the prisons of Russia. From the mid-1880s, with this official sanction, Kargel and Baedeker were freely able to travel together, speak, and distribute literature in normally inaccessible areas.

Increasingly, Kargel began to express his emphases in explicitly Holiness terms, using language employed at Keswick. By 1886, with Baedeker, Kargel was holding what can be termed mini-Keswick meetings in different parts of the Russian Empire.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Kargel began to be acknowledged as the most significant Russian evangelical theologian of his generation. Through his teaching at the Evangelical Christian Bible College in Saint Petersburg, through his preaching in many other places, and through his prolific writings, Kargel had an enormous influence on evangelicals in the Russian-speaking world in

the first three decades of the twentieth century and beyond.

Kargel's Desire for Evangelical Unity

Kargel followed the direction set by Pashkov, which was to seek to bring evangelicals in Russia together under the umbrella of an Evangelical Alliance, with denominational perspectives being played down. This approach can be termed "non-creedal," in the sense that what was primary was experience of Christ rather than assent to written confessions of faith, although the Evangelical Alliance did have a basis of faith and Kargel penned the longest-lasting Confession of Faith used by Russian Baptists. The nurturing of genuine spiritual experience, regardless of denominational affiliation, became Kargel's primary goal.

Kargel's vision was that Russian evangelicals could unite around evangelical distinctives. The idea of broader unity was not accepted by all, however, and was emphatically rejected by Baptists. In the wake of failed attempts at unity, a group was organized that became known as the Evangelical Christian Union, the body of Russian believers with which Kargel identified for the remainder of his life.

Kargel's Theological Emphasis

In his commentary on Romans, Kargel spoke of the need for Christians to live in the Spirit, not in the flesh. Either believers have full faith, which is demonstrated by new life in Christ, or they have a partial faith, which is demonstrated by the lack of change in their lives. Kargel believed that it was impossible to direct carnal Christians toward a life of submission to God. Christians operating by means of the flesh will, he argued, remain defeated until they are "co-crucified with the resurrected Christ." This is classic Holiness theology.

While emphasizing the Spirit, Kargel was also determinedly Christological. The "image of the Son" is a critical key to understanding Kargel's theology. Union with, and conformity to, Christ were central themes in much of Kargel's writings, and this is indicative of a Keswick perspective.

Yet at the same time Kargel added his own perspectives. He wrote a great deal about suffering as integral to the holiness experience. He was sensitive to the sufferings in his own family, as well as in those around him. Thus, Kargel took the evangelical message and, in particular, a Keswick understanding of holiness, and adjusted it so that it would touch the needs of the Russian soul. He added unique ideas to the classic expressions of Keswick, most notably by placing primary emphasis on the role of suffering in the sanctification process.

Continuing Influence

After Ivan Kargel died in 1937, *Bratsky Vestnik*, the official journal of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCEC-B),

Kargel took the evangelical message and, in particular, a Keswick understanding of holiness, and adjusted it so that it would touch the needs of the Russian soul, placing primary emphasis on the role of suffering in the sanctification process.

printed material written by him on a regular basis. Nearly 25 percent of all issues of *Bratsky Vestnik* published between its beginnings in 1945 and 1988 contained an article from or a reference to Kargel. In 1946, Alexander Karev, then General Secretary of the AUCEC-B, acknowledged Kargel as being a major influence in his spiritual formation. In 1955 Karev again acknowledged the spiritual effect of the life, writings, and lectures of Kargel on him and others, stating that Kargel was the central force that shaped Karev's theological training and his understanding of Scripture.

In 1954, Jakob Zhidkov, then President of the AUCEC-B, spoke about the sermon preached by Ivan Kargel in 1902 that brought about his conversion. In 1972, Alexei M. Bychkov, then General Secretary of the AUCEC-B, stated that the writings of Kargel were some of the first spiritual works he read and were foundational in his understanding of the Christian faith.

In addition to Kargel's continuing influence among Evangelical Christians-Baptists, the Pentecostal Union of Russia and Ukraine considers the writings and personal ministry of Kargel as an essential factor in the formation of their stream of Christianity. Theologian and missiologist Walter Sawatsky claims that among Reform Baptists in Russia (Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists), who broke away from the AUCEC-B in 1961, Kargel has been the most quoted author.

In Summary

Ivan Kargel's unique expression of evangelical spirituality, with a strong tendency toward the

Book Review *(continued from page 16)*

with Pashkov ended. Where Nichols excels is in the close analysis of texts; the broader historical context is often hurriedly sketched, with details and chronology sometimes confused. Yet, for example, the legal environment in post-1905 Russia, with its registration system for religious groups, would seem important to understanding the failure of the informal Brethren ecclesial model and Kargel's eventual move into the Evangelical Christian fold. In his conclusion, Nichols suggests that future areas of research include the Orthodox and Molokan influences on evangelical thought. I would certainly encourage him to pursue these avenues, for his evidence leaves the reader curious about precisely these aspects. At present, Nichols's portrayal of Molokanism, whose potential impact is great given that so many influential ethnic Russian leaders began life as Molokans, is often rather hazy and often inaccurate. And none of the extensive recent research that has been transforming our view of the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the laity and about lay piety and knowledge in the late imperial period is reflected in his references to the

tenets of Holiness theology as found in Keswick teaching, shaped in a decisive way the spirituality of Russian-speaking evangelicals. Through the journeys that he undertook across the Russian Empire with Friedrich Baedeker, he became more and more committed to passing on a message about trust in Christ for full salvation—for justification as well as sanctification—and urging consecration to Christ, abiding in Christ, and the necessity of the filling and power of the Holy Spirit. He also underlined suffering as an integral part of the way of Christ-likeness. Here Kargel was taking the wider Holiness expression of spirituality and applying it to the context in which he found himself, involving restrictions on evangelicals, the banning of believers, war, revolution, and death. He concluded that suffering was at the core of authentic spirituality. Through his writings, he provided Russian-speaking evangelicals with a theological and spiritual perspective that was both deeply biblical and robustly experiential, and which allowed them to sustain their Christian communities within the anti-religious climate of a totalitarian state. ♦

Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Gregory L. Nichols, The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality: A Study of Ivan V. Kargel (1849-1937). Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications (https://wipfandstock.com/pickwick_publications), 2011.

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broadly Orthodox context in which the evangelical movement operated. Clearly, Kargel had little intimate knowledge of Orthodoxy. Yet Nichols offers suggestive evidence that leads the reader to wonder how his thinking may have developed in dialogue with believers emerging from the Orthodox tradition—for example, the parallels between Orthodox deification and Kargel's key theme of sanctification as a transformation into the image of Christ (which Nichols acknowledges) or the emphasis on suffering, which seems to reflect an important strain in Russian Orthodox spirituality as well.

These quibbles aside, Nichols has made a major contribution to our knowledge of early evangelicalism in the Russian Empire and the origins of the religious identity and understanding of Christian spirituality that remain current among Russian-speaking evangelicals today. ♦

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Quibbles aside, Nichols has made a major contribution to our knowledge of early evangelicalism in the Russian Empire.

Book Review

Nichols, Gregory L. *The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality: A Study of Ivan V. Kargel (1849-1937)*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011. Bibliography. Index. xiv, 382 pp. Paper.

This stimulating book traces the roots of a distinctive Russian evangelical spiritual tradition through a study of the life and thought of that tradition's most important spiritual writer of the early twentieth century, Ivan (Johann) Kargel. Although he is little known abroad, Kargel's legacy continued to shape Soviet evangelicalism long after his death in 1937: in 1966, the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists adopted his 1913 Confession of Faith as its official doctrinal statement; moreover, between 1945 and 1988, almost a quarter of all issues of the AUCEC-B's journal, *Bratskii vestnik*, included an article by or made reference to Kargel. Gregory Nichols argues that Kargel drew on various influences—the German Baptists, the pietist revival among the Mennonites, and the British Holiness movement—to weave together a spirituality that stressed sanctification through “abiding in Christ”, that emphasized the power of the Holy Spirit, and that called on believers to follow Christ on the pathway of suffering.

Nichols takes a primarily biographical approach, following Kargel from his birth into a German-speaking family in the Caucasus region in 1849, his conversion to the Baptist faith in 1869, his early life as a pastor and brief training at the Hamburg Mission School in 1874, and his move to St. Petersburg to lead the German Baptist congregation there. Kargel's five years in the capital coincided with the emergence of the “drawing room revival” centered at the home of Colonel Vasilii Pashkov and his wife Anna. They had been influenced by the ideas of the Open Brethren movement, which preached a simple

form of worship in which believers met for the Lord's Supper without clerical leadership and which emphasized “living by faith,” through the influence of British evangelist Lord Radstock. With Pashkov's moral and financial support, Kargel would spend the next 20 years in mission in Bulgaria, St. Petersburg, and across the Russian Empire.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is Nichols's use of letters from Ivan and Anna Kargel to Pashkov and his wife. This voluminous correspondence is an essential source for the history of early evangelicalism in Russia, but one that has been barely utilized—in part because of the challenge of deciphering the old German script that Kargel used. These letters provide us with a vivid sketch of the emerging evangelical movement in Eastern Europe. They also offer insight into Kargel's spiritual development away from a narrowly Baptist perspective to embrace the non-denominational evangelical vision of Pashkov. Nichols makes especially effective use of Anna Kargel's letters to reveal this transformation and her critical influence, as an ethnic Russian Pashkovite, in steering Kargel towards a new spirituality and ministry that crossed ethnic and denominational lines. Finally, Nichols's careful analysis of the language of the letters allows him to demonstrate the increasing influence of the Holiness spirituality of the Brethren and the Keswick movement on Kargel's thought.

Nichols's detailed analysis of Kargel's classic book, *Christ—Our Sanctification*, and his commentary on chapters five to eight of Romans constitutes the other highlight. In these works, written late in his life, Kargel developed his seminal teaching on sanctification by faith and sanctification as the fulfillment of salvation. Using D. W. Bebbington's characterization of Keswick spirituality as a framework, Nichols reveals a remarkable congruence with the emphases of the Keswick movement, acquired through reading and contact with the missionary Friedrich Baedeker and others. As a result of this influence, he came to hold premillennial views, which were far from universally accepted within the Russian Baptist and Evangelical Christian milieu. But he also developed distinctive themes that would remain part of Russian evangelical spirituality, most particularly the central place of suffering in the life of the believer and its direct relationship to “Christ-likeness.” Similarly, Nichols shows that Kargel's approach to the question of election reveals the neither purely Calvinist nor Arminian attitude that has remained typical among Russian evangelicals.

Throughout the book, Kargel remains somewhat elusive as a person. This is especially the case in the later chapters, once the correspondence

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Kargel drew on various influences – the German Baptists, the pietist revival among the Mennonites, and the British holiness movement – to weave together a spirituality that stressed sanctification and suffering.

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ISSN 1069-5664