



# EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

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## Orthodox-Baptist Relations in Romania

Gillian Kimber

The history of the relationship between Romanian Orthodox and Romanian Baptists is particularly bitter. My husband, Geoff, an Anglican priest, and I went to Romania in 2001 as mission partners with the Anglican Church Mission Society to work ecumenically under the aegis of the Cross of Nails. This worldwide network of reconciliation projects based at Coventry Cathedral, United Kingdom, is committed to promoting understanding and friendship among denominations and encouraging them in mission. We started a unique initiative in Sibiu in the Transylvanian region of Romania to bring together Baptist pastors and Orthodox priests, encouraging them to discuss subjects in a non-controversial way in an effort to build more mutual understanding and respect.

### Initial Experience of Romanian Orthodox: Acceptance and Friendship

Our experiences were mixed. At a personal level we met with much typically Romanian kindness and hospitality. We were always invited by Orthodox clergy to major church festivals and often hosted to meals. My husband was invited to the regular meetings held by the Protopop (Archdeacon) for the 80-plus clergy in the Sibiu ecclesiastical area. He was frequently asked to join Orthodox clergy behind the iconostasis and at times to preach or lead sections of the Holy Liturgy. His Anglican priesthood was respected.

Building personal friendships in Sibiu across denominations created a context in which we were able to bring Baptist pastors and Orthodox priests together for a series of discussions in the Cross of Nails Center. It was made clear from the start that these would focus on aspects of the Christian faith that all church traditions held in common. To our surprise the dean of Sibiu's Orthodox theological faculty attended, at which an Orthodox priest friend commented, "Where else is he able to meet neo-Protestants?" The dean's attendance was illuminating in its suggestion that some Orthodox at least did not subscribe to the general condemnation of neo-Protestants. *Editor's note: Neo-Protestants are Protestant believers whose denominations came into being later than the historic 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation churches.*

### Romanian Orthodox Leadership in Sibiu: Rejection and Suspicion

At the episcopal level of the Romanian Orthodox Church the story was different. Our work came under great suspicion by the then Orthodox Metropolitan, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Antonie Plămădeală. We went to meet him with a letter of introduction which took care to explain that our activities were in no way a form of proselytism. Having read it, the Metropolitan banged

his fist on the table and said that he did not believe us and that we were certainly there to proselytize. We were unable to convince him otherwise and learned that he warned his priests not to support our work to the extent of forbidding them from taking English lessons from us. We learned that our lack of formal status, our representation of a parachurch mission organization rather than of an Anglican diocese, and the apparent absence of episcopal oversight for our work created a major problem in Orthodox minds which dogged our time in Sibiu.

Under Communism the state strictly controlled ecumenical cooperation that existed among the "historical" churches: Orthodox, Lutheran, Hungarian Catholic, and Reformed. Even then, Romanian Orthodox refused to have any dialogue with so-called "neo-Protestants": Baptists, Brethren, and Pentecostals. Baptist pastor Benjamin Poplăcean considers that even under Communism his denomination had more trouble with the Orthodox than with the state. Orthodox still regard neo-Protestants as interlopers.

More openness existed in Transylvania immediately following the 1989 Revolution. Poplăcean initiated a regular prayer time for all clergy in the city of Sibiu which was attended by Orthodox as well as Lutherans, Hungarian Catholics, Reformed, Greek-Catholics, and Baptists. This prayer group continues, but Baptists no longer attend. Attitudes have deteriorated owing to the stance of the Orthodox toward neo-Protestants, and their response.

### The National Church Issue

Mutual hostility hardened and became more entrenched over the national church issue, following a strong debate between Baptist and Orthodox churches concerning the phrasing of Article 29 of the Romanian Constitution concerning freedom of conscience and religious belief. Although the Baptist Church played a full part in these discussions in order to win a fair outcome for all denominations, the Romanian Orthodox Holy Synod began to insist that legislation should describe it as the national church because it considers all Romanians to be Orthodox by virtue of their ethnicity, not through choice as exercised in a pluralist society.

Minority churches thought a national church designation would give an unfair advantage to the Orthodox who already were receiving much state aid for new churches. New Orthodox worship places built between 1990 and 2004 numbered 2,000, with another 1,000 planned. Orthodox priests also receive a government stipend. The state offered this funding to clergy of other recognized denominations, but the Baptist Church decided not to accept it.

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## **New Code of Conduct** (continued from page 1)

Orthodox understand their insistence on being called the national church as a description of reality: The vast majority of Romanians consider themselves Orthodox. Orthodoxy is also inextricably linked with nationalism. The colors of the Romanian flag act as markers in church Bibles or are painted around the outside of church buildings. Both the historical Protestant churches and minority neo-Protestants united in strong opposition to Orthodox “national church” language in the constitution, and the argument had a very negative effect on ecumenical relations.

### **Orthodox Hostility Toward Baptists**

Although the Romanian Orthodox Church is a member of the Conference of European Churches and has signed the 2001 Charta Oecumenica, which recognizes that “every person can freely choose his or her church affiliation as a matter of conscience” (Section 2, Paragraph 3: <http://www.cec-kek.org/English/ChartafinE.htm>), Orthodox and Baptists clearly drew opposing lines almost from the start of the post-Communist period. Neither the Orthodox nor the government recognize the Baptist church as a “confession” or “denomination.” Rather, both refer to Baptists and other neo-Protestants as members of cults. Orthodox also consider that evangelistic efforts of Baptists and other Evangelicals constitute proselytism, thus their vehement opposition to neo-Protestant efforts to build churches.

In many instances Evangelicals have been threatened by mobs encouraged by Orthodox clerics, and worship buildings have been destroyed. A 2007 report documents the experience of Pastor Corneliu Pealease, who organized a small group of Baptists in Slobozia de Arges (Patratosu, 30 May 2007: <http://partatosu.wordpress.com/2007/05/30/grava-incalcare-a-drepturilor-omului-la-slobozia-de-arges/>, p. 4). When they reached 14 in number, he applied to local authorities for permission to build a place of worship on land donated by one of his church members. One local Orthodox priest, Rev. Jianu Ionel, who continually opposed Baptists, appeared on the day of the hearing at the town hall with a group of other priests and a vociferous crowd of 130-150 people. He was given priority at the hearing, accusing Baptists of being members of a pagan sect, trying to steal souls, and being traitors who had sold their souls for American dollars. An uproar ensued. When the mayor insisted that Baptists had a legal right to construct a church, the priest threatened the mayor with the loss of his job.

Fr. Ionel then incited his congregation to set fire to the Baptist congregation’s construction materials “because it was the church of Satan.” In May 2007 the Orthodox Bishop of Arges and Muscel sent representatives to pressure the mayor to withdraw the city building permit. When he refused, he was threatened but stood firm, insisting that the project was legal.

The issue came to a head with the death of the church member who had donated the land. She was refused burial in the Orthodox cemetery. The crisis escalated to the point that the Secretary-General of the Romanian government became involved. Only then did Fr. Ionel agree to a compromise, with the Baptist funeral rite being followed by the Orthodox rite in the

church. He used this occasion to pray for the soul of the deceased who, he claimed, had died without the true light. The priest again launched a virulent attack on Baptists, saying he would fight with the cross against the “repenters,” and that no one would be buried in the cemetery without an Orthodox ritual. He claimed he would never have agreed to the burial if the Secretary-General had not become involved. The 1999 U.S. Department of State *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* adds:

In spring 1999, Emmanuel Baptist Church of Oradea tried to establish a sister church in Marginea and obtained all necessary building permits from government officials.

However, the Romanian Orthodox Church was opposed to the construction of the new church and responded with sharply negative articles in the press and lawsuits against the church construction. In April 1999, 33 Orthodox clergy criticized Baptists in a newspaper article, accusing them of “buying souls,” promoting pornography and homosexuality, and desecrating graves. In May 1999, a local court agreed with the Romanian Orthodox Church’s claim and prohibited the construction of the new Baptist church (Section 2: [http://www.state.gov/www/global/human\\_rights/irf/irf\\_rpt/1999/irf\\_romania99.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/irf/irf_rpt/1999/irf_romania99.html)).

### **Baptists in Sibiu: Suspicion and Outreach**

Baptist pastors were not overly friendly when we arrived in Sibiu, uncertain about our theological stance. However, as time passed they became good friends, inviting us to their services and my husband to the monthly prayer meeting of evangelical pastors in the city.

Stories were legion of the ways Baptists felt persecuted by the Orthodox, the difficulties they had with them, the suspicion that each felt for the other, and the history of hurt, especially since the 1989 Revolution. No one was able to explain Orthodox hostility, apart from the Baptist belief that Orthodox are not truly Christian and that this accounts for their aggressive behavior. Baptists frequently expressed misgivings about the way of life of many Orthodox, particularly their priests. Alcoholism is widespread in Romanian society and many village priests abuse alcohol. The fact that we were trying to build relationships with Orthodox as well as Baptists was something Baptists could not understand, and of which they were suspicious.

Because of Orthodox hostility, Baptist churches and missionaries were determined to engage in evangelism as if Orthodox did not exist. Western evangelical missionaries running a children’s evangelism project based in Sibiu planned a mission in the nearby mountain village of Râu Sadului in the summer of 2004. We suggested that, out of courtesy, they meet with Father Adrian Dragusin, a young Orthodox parish priest whom we knew to be ecumenically minded. The evangelical mission agency refused on the grounds that Romanian Orthodox were not members of a true church.

Evangelical aggression takes other forms as well.

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Father Dragusin faced a serious problem following the death of a member of the Brethren church in his village who had expressed a wish to be buried in the Orthodox cemetery. As he wished to be ecumenical, he asked for a meeting with the family so that he could explain Orthodox Church law, which forbids the burial of non-Orthodox in an Orthodox cemetery. His story is that this family mounted a strong campaign against him, which included going to the media where he was vilified.

### Social Responsibilities

The way more enterprising Baptist churches take seriously their social responsibilities can also become an issue. Their statement on mission makes it clear that service is understood to be part of the church's life and witness. To this end Beni Seican's church in Sibiu offers a kindergarten, guest accommodations, and a dental clinic. Poplăcean's church also offers a kindergarten and runs a small pharmacy supplied from America. Orthodox see these efforts not as Christian service, but as attempts to lure people away from the true church by offering material benefits.

By contrast, almost no Orthodox churches in Sibiu Diocese had any kind of social work. One priest said that social welfare arose naturally from the liturgy of the church, with beggars being fed from food and wine provided at funerals. Expensive new Orthodox church buildings were being built all over the city, but only one priest in the diocese has a social project for disadvantaged children and the elderly poor, with funding a constant struggle. Baptists see Orthodoxy's limited involvement in social ministry as a sign of a church more interested in visibility and power than in service.

### Western Influence

Another divisive issue concerns Western influence. No doubt much Western evangelical missionary endeavor has been culturally and theologically insensitive in Romania. Missions and charities are set up with Western financing and boards of advisers who expect to control the work in Romania. At first Romania, struggling to emerge from the ruined economy left by Communism, welcomed such efforts. Only slowly did the government put in place legal requirements for such organizations. At the same time, as Romanian pastors gained more training and confidence, they came to resent Western missionary influence. Danut Manastireanu notes "a sort of Western theological aggressiveness, even a form of theological 'imperialism,' which can have very serious negative consequences" for Romanian Evangelicals ("Evangelical Denominations in Post-Communist Romania," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 6 [Summer 1998], 8).

Churches are often built with Western money, which also provides living allowances for pastors, as well as cars and other benefits. Orthodox consider this funding a threat. One Orthodox priest told us of evangelical pastor friends encouraging him to leave the hardship of trying to work within the Romanian Orthodox Church to become Evangelical instead, on the grounds that a Western church would provide him with a decent salary, help with building a house, and a car. Evangelicals are not above mounting great pressure on friends and neighbors to convert from Orthodoxy.

Among the several Baptist churches in Sibiu, the largest is Biserca Betania, where Benjamin Poplăcean is pastor. He is a former vice-president of the Romanian Baptist Union and is involved in its mission department. He is also involved with MIR, the International Mission of Romania, and with Radio Voice of the Gospel, as well as evangelistic television programs. American missionaries have worked in Betania for many years through Greater Europe Mission, and it is relevant to compare their mission practice with the experience of the present writer participating in Orthodox mission.

It is normal practice for American missionaries to host teams of young people from the U.S. to participate in evangelistic summer camps, which take place throughout Romania and in all neo-Protestant church traditions. One American couple leads a very poor church in the hills near Sibiu and uses the opportunities afforded by personal visits to share the Gospel. They also work closely with Child Evangelism Fellowship in Sibiu and with other evangelical churches to run vacation Bible schools in villages.

Betania Church regularly runs evangelistic events, and Poplăcean always combines social projects and evangelistic outreach. In the autumn of 2008 he took a team to a village in the south of the country where they spent a day collecting rubbish. In the evening Poplăcean gave an evangelistic message in the courtyard of the village clinic, purchased and renovated by the church and staffed by a young woman doctor sent there to work as a medical missionary. Some Baptist missionaries are now working in a more holistic way, living among a host community, offering practical help, and teaching Bible studies and evangelism, by personal example seeking to "make disciples rather than converts."

In summary, as Tim Prochnau notes, "Antagonism is not one-sided. Whatever church is predominant in an area, it slanders other denominations. Slander may be the worst element of Romanian society that has permeated the church and threatens to destroy its purity" ("The State of the Church in Romania: Divergent Views," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 13 [Spring 2005], 12). It is, unfortunately, impossible for any church, Orthodox or Protestant, to claim the moral high ground. ♦

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*Edited excerpts published with permission from Gillian Kimber, "Mission Impossible: Developing an Understanding of the Task of Interconfessional Mission with Reference to the Romanian Orthodox Church and Romanian Evangelical and Baptist Churches in Transylvania," master of philosophy thesis, University of Nottingham, 2010.*

*Editor's note: The concluding portion of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 21 (Spring 2013).*

Baptists see Orthodoxy's limited involvement in social ministry as a sign of a church more interested in visibility and power than in service.

# Christian Confessions and Denominations in Post-Soviet States: By the Numbers

Mark R. Elliott, Editor

The four issues of Volume 21 (2013) of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* contain comparative statistical data for 2001 and 2010 for all Christian confessions and most denominations for the 15 independent states of the former Soviet Union and for 12 states in Central and Eastern Europe. The 2001/2010 table for each state provides the name of each church body and its total number of congregations, members, and affiliates (with the affiliates column including members plus adherents who do not hold formal church membership). The present issue carries tables for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Latvia.

Find below cautionary notes which, for various reasons, render published figures from *Operation World* as estimates and approximations.

1. *Operation World* necessarily depends upon self-reporting from church bodies, which have varying definitions for what constitutes a congregation and a member.
2. Because of self-reporting and, in some cases, a lack of, or incomplete, self-reporting, anomalies sometimes occur in data that indicate the need for further investigation. For example, reported totals for Georgian Orthodox membership and affiliates increased between 2001 and 2010, but the reported number for congregations declined.
3. Churches have varying requirements for membership. For example, churches that practice adult baptism exclusively will have lower membership and higher affiliate figures than otherwise, while churches that practice infant baptism and include children as members will have higher membership and lower affiliate figures than otherwise.
4. Orthodox churches typically do not keep membership rolls.
5. An individual's cultural and national identification with an historic, majority church does not necessarily translate into regular worship or even Christian belief. This fact should be kept in mind when reading figures, for example, for Orthodox in Georgia, Catholics in Lithuania, or Lutherans in Latvia.
6. Members and affiliates who do not hold church membership may have dramatically varying profiles of church attendance, from frequent to nominal to nonexistent. In the latter cases, individuals may hold a cultural, national, or ethnic identification with a church without necessarily holding to Christian belief.

Armenia	Three Major Beliefs	2001	2010				
		Christian	85.04	94.43			
	Non-Religious/Other	13.71	3.73				
	Muslim	1.20	1.80				
Churches		Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
		2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
	Armenian Apostolic	150	175	1,505,495	1,417,582	2,740,000	2,580,000
	Catholic	19	27	95,808	134,731	160,000	225,000
	Pentecostal	500	350	20,000	14,000	50,000	35,000
	Russian Orthodox	2	3	6,000	8,625	12,000	17,250
	Baptist	30	125	2,500	3,500	5,000	7,000
	Charismatic Groups	13	16	2,300	3,300	4,000	5,280
	Other Evangelical		30		2,987		4,600
	Church of God (Cleveland)		15		1,700		2,380
	Foursquare Gospel		15		1,400		2,380
	Seventh-day Adventist	10	18	865	950	1,800	1,235
	New Apostolic		3		310		620
	United Pentecostal		5		71		100
	Other Denominations (7)	34		3,375		5,320	
	Doubly Affiliated						-25,000
	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>732</b>	<b>1,636,343</b>	<b>1,589,156</b>	<b>2,978,120</b>	<b>2,855,845</b>

Azerbaijan	Three Major Beliefs	2001	2010				
		Christian	83.67	87.58			
	Non-Religious/Other	11.31	9.55				
	Muslim	4.63	2.74				
Churches		Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
		2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
	Armenian Apostolic	14	8	126,374	67,582	230,000	123,000
	Russian Orthodox	9	8	68,182	62,338	105,000	96,000
	Georgian Orthodox		3		5,090		8,500
	Baptist	15	40	500	4,000	770	6,160
	Word of Life	2	4	700	1,250	1,150	1,875
	Greater Grace World Outreach		2		600		840
	Church of God (Cleveland)		6		500		835
	United Pentecostal		1		35		60
	New Apostolic		2		525		788
	Other Protestant		5		300		546
	Roman Catholic	7	1	4,360	233	7,500	400
	Seventh-day Adventist	5	6	600	700	900	910
	Other Indigenous Believers		1		0		0
	Other Denominations	6		7,807		12,450	
	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>208,023</b>	<b>139,156</b>	<b>357,000</b>	<b>233,754</b>

Belarus	Three Major Beliefs		2001	2010		
	Christian		78.70	70.53		
	Non-Religious/Other		20.20	28.14		
	Jewish		1.00	0.51		
Churches	Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
	2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
Orthodox	799	1,400	2,797,203	3,828,671	4,000,000	5,475,000
Other Orthodox	23	22	22,727	19,156	35,000	29,500
Old Believers	30	30	37,662	29,870	58,000	46,000
Roman Catholic	400	400	808,383	795,600	1,350,000	994,500
Byzantine (Eastern Rite) Catholic		24		3,892		6,500
Pentecostal Union	510	480	22,000	36,500	44,000	73,000
Pentecostal (Unregistered)	462	54	37,000	9,000	74,000	18,000
Church of God (Cleveland)		2		230		391
United Pentecostal		60		102		600
Evangelical Christian - Baptist	232	325	11,848	15,000	23,696	16,700
Lutheran		35		2,250		4,500
Seventh-day Adventist	60	81	7,000	5,750	9,100	6,500
Other Protestant		56		3,950		7,900
Other Denominations (15)	211		595,687		996,734	
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,727</b>	<b>2,969</b>	<b>4,339,510</b>	<b>4,749,971</b>	<b>6,590,530</b>	<b>6,679,091</b>

Estonia	Three Major Beliefs		2001	2010		
	Non-Religious		60.41	54		
	Christian		38.63	45.30		
	Muslim		0.70	0.20		
Churches	Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
	2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
Lutheran	168	165	56,000	62,963	160,000	170,000
Christian Pentecostal	45	38	3,200	2,556	7,000	4,600
Full Gospel		9		944		1,700
Evangelical Charismatic		22		2,400		4,008
Charismatic Episcopal		3		220		350
Evangelical Christian-Baptist	85	81	6,125	3,222	18,559	5,800
United Methodist	19	9	1,850	898	3,200	1,500
Estonian Christian Free	6	8	1,100	385	3,146	1,100
Moravian Brethren		1		90		150
Salvation Army		3		50		84
New Apostolic	14	9	3,000	1,850	4,410	3,500
Seventh-day Adventist	18	19	1,876	1,705	3,000	2,847
Other Independent		42		3,400		8,500
Estonian Orthodox	52		16,807		40,000	
Orthodox		29		66,387		158,000
Old Believers		11		5,500		16,500
Roman Catholic	18	7	1,876	1,821	3,700	5,100
Other Denominations (19)	126		13,178		23,000	
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>551</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>105,012</b>	<b>154,391</b>	<b>266,015</b>	<b>383,739</b>

Georgia	Three Major Beliefs		2001	2010		
	Christian		62.47	78.67		
	Muslim		20.00	11.30		
	Non-Religious		17.11	9.58		
Churches	Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
	2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
Georgian Orthodox	520	486	1,100,000	1,214,583	2,400,000	2,915,000
Russian Orthodox	35	15	69,930	29,720	100,000	42,500
Syrian Orthodox	2	3	2,814	3,234	4,700	5,400
Other Orthodox (Traditionalists)		5		232		930
Armenian Apostolic	30	18	18,182	14,286	330,000	225,000
Roman Catholic	9	7	11,039	11,688	28,000	22,000
Byzantine (Eastern Rite) Catholic	11	12		4,896	17,000	18,000
Evangelical Christian - Baptist		80	800	5,796		15,600
Lutheran	8	6		900	1,600	1,400
Salvation Army		9	5,000	3,100		550
Pentecostal (Assemblies of God)	80	110		90	12,000	5,000
United Pentecostal		10		3,400		180
Other Pentecostal	25	25	3,000	3,000	5,000	5,100
Other Independent / Charismatic		12		800		2,000
Seventh-day Adventist		8		390		500
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>1,441,234</b>	<b>1,333,252</b>	<b>2,898,300</b>	<b>3,259,160</b>

(continued on page 6)

**Christian Confessions and Denominations in Post-Soviet States: By the Numbers** (continued from page 5)

<b>Kazakhstan</b>		<b>Three Major Beliefs</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>			
		Muslim	60.50	53.68			
		Christian	26.66	12.15			
		Non-Religious / Other	14.27	33.94			
<b>Churches</b>		<b>Congregations</b>		<b>Members</b>		<b>Affiliates</b>	
		<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>
Russian Orthodox		210	206	839,161	825,175	1,200,000	1,180,000
Ukrainian Orthodox			95		190,625		305,000
Georgian Orthodox			0		1,818		2,800
Armenian Apostolic		7	4	7,143	3,896	11,000	6,000
Old Believers			10		10,490		15,000
Roman Catholic		5	42	2,300	83,916	3,290	120,000
Byzantine (Eastern Rite) Catholic		23	2	34,965	12,587	50,000	18,000
Evangelical Christian - Baptist		242	315	11,613	11,000	46,450	27,500
Baptist (Unregistered)		30	45	1,000	2,000	5,000	7,500
Korean Baptist		11	9	1,600	1,400	4,000	3,500
Lutheran		16	65	23,952	11,976	40,000	20,000
Presbyterian			274		7,400		18,500
Korean Presbyterian		20		4,000		10,000	
United Methodist			28		6,944		12,500
House Churches			56		2,778		5,000
Mennonite		5	4	500	330	1,665	1,099
Church of God			2		64		160
Pentecostal		160	156	8,000	7,800	20,000	19,500
Seventh-day Adventist		39	58	3,149	3,500	6,300	7,000
Other Protestant			45		1,800		3,600
Other Denominations [15/49]		44	392	28,416	53,297	57,650	90,159
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>812</b>	<b>1,808</b>	<b>965,799</b>	<b>1,238,766</b>	<b>1,455,355</b>	<b>1,862,812</b>
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>		<b>Three Major Beliefs</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>			
		Muslim	78.08	88.73			
		Non-Religious	13.6	5.30			
		Christian	7.83	5.27			
<b>Churches</b>		<b>Congregations</b>		<b>Members</b>		<b>Affiliates</b>	
		<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>
Russian Orthodox		40	45	162,338	144,156	250,000	222,000
Other Orthodox			1		2,994		5,000
Armenian Apostolic			1		551		920
Pentecostal		25	35	3,000	4,000	5,500	8,200
Charismatic			22		1,300		3,300
Evangelical Christian-Baptist		50	49	3,800	3,500	6,500	8,050
Southern Baptist Convention			12		110		220
Lutheran		18	22	1,300	1,650	1,950	2,475
Presbyterian		6	7	650	560	700	870
Antioch			5		170		170
Pioneers			2		170		340
Brethren "Little Flock"			1		20		32
Church of Jesus Christ		18	40	5,000	8,000	9,000	15,000
Seventh-day Adventist			28		1,600		3,840
Other Protestant		25	30	1,250	1,500	2,500	3,150
Other Independent		20	35	1,200	1,750	2,040	2,975
Roman Catholic		3	7	8,392	490	12,000	700
Other Denominations [18]		58		10,862		19,000	
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>263</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>197,792</b>	<b>172,521</b>	<b>309,190</b>	<b>277,242</b>
<b>Latvia</b>		<b>Three Major Beliefs</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>			
		Christian	58.25	60			
		Non-Religious	40.32	38.44			
		Other	0.80	0.90			
<b>Churches</b>		<b>Congregations</b>		<b>Members</b>		<b>Affiliates</b>	
		<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2010</b>
Lutheran		301	301	160,000	300,000	400,000	450,000
Baptist		81	88	6,259	6,800	40,000	13,600
Pentecostal		53	23	5,500	3,500	10,000	6,300
Church of God (Cleveland)			18		1,440		2,448
United Methodist			14		242,515		2,795
Roman Catholic		241	273	281,437	194,805	470,000	405,000
Latvian Orthodox			122		5,828		300,000
Other Orthodox			0		1,650		9,200
Old Believers		65	69	32,500	33,750	65,000	67,500
Seventh-day Adventist		44	60	3,868	4,100	6,962	7,380
Independent		25	10	1,250	500	2,500	1,000
Other Denominations [9]		38		7,000		12,000	
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>848</b>	<b>978</b>	<b>497,814</b>	<b>793,888</b>	<b>1,006,462</b>	<b>1,265,223</b>

*Editor's note: Volume 21, Issues 1 (Winter 2013) and 2 (Spring 2013) include tables for the states of the former Soviet Union, and Issues 3 (Summer 2013) and 4 (Fall 2013) include tables for the states of Central and Eastern Europe. Sources, used with permission, are Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, Operation World, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Carlisle, England, and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Publishing and Wec International, 2001) and Jason*

*Mandryk, Operation World, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., CD-ROM professional edition (Colorado Springs, CO: GMI, 2010). The 2010 CD-ROM includes HTML, PDF, and Excel formats, with the latter being utilized in this case.*

*A special word of thanks is in order for excellent work on this project by student assistant Caleb Conover, history major at Asbury University, Wilmore, Kentucky.*

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## Christian Economic and Social Organizations in Kyrgyzstan

Galina Kolodinskaya

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### New Freedoms; New Restrictions

To understand Christian economic and social development efforts in Kyrgyzstan, it is first necessary to provide historical and political background. For some time after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, independent Kyrgyzstan received favorable press for its respect for human rights and its progress towards democratization. More recently, Kyrgyzstan increasingly has restricted freedom. The religious situation in the Kyrgyz Republic can illustrate these trends.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the first Kyrgyz law on freedom of religion and conscience, adopted on 16 December 1991, was very liberal and did not limit any rights of believers. A large number of religious communities of different faiths succeeded in obtaining registration under the terms of this legislation. In the 1990s many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian and religious organizations applied and received official registration for their activity in the country.

Currently, however, in accordance with the temper of the times in Russia and the Central Asian republics, religious policy in Kyrgyzstan has become more restrictive. This new direction in religious policy may be seen in the actions of the president and the legislature to extend the influence of Islam and prevent the conversion of Muslims to Christianity. The government implemented new restrictions on 6 May 2006, and on 31 December 2008 the Parliament adopted the current law on freedom of religion and conscience (K.O. Osmonaliev, K.C. Murzakhililov, and K.K. Mamtaliev, *International Rates of Regulation of Freedom of Religion and Conscience; Juridical Normative Notes from the Kyrgyz Republic* [Osh: 2010]). The current law differs from previous legislation by forbidding proselytizing (drawing people from one faith to another). Under such conditions many Christian organizations cannot function openly. For this reason many of them prefer not to register as religious organizations but as NGOs, humanitarian organizations, even entertainment centers.

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### Local Christian Charities

Christian economic and social development organizations and foundations in Kyrgyzstan may

be divided into three main categories. The first group consists of small local workshops that are the property of Christian churches (usually Protestant) or the private property of members of churches. Such organizations are very widely spread in the north, in Bishkek, and in towns near the capital. They supply the city with a variety of products and provide work for many people. Some of these workshops receive support from foreign donors or investors, as well as from churches helping their members open businesses. A number of Christian humanitarian organizations also work with orphans, the handicapped, and poor people. Churches and foreign charitable foundations finance such groups.

One of the best-known Christian orphanages is in the village of Sosnovka near Kara-Balta. This extraordinary center is not so much an orphanage as a family of orphans. Some Christian families now adopt orphans and raise them to live normal lives with parents, brothers, and sisters in an atmosphere of God's love. In such cases homeless children have a great chance to feel parental love, receive a good education, and learn how to build their own families, overcoming the wounds of the past. Often these children find jobs in workshops founded by churches or by individual Christians.

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### National Christian NGOs

The second category of groups consists of national parachurch organizations. Generally, they have the status of non-commercial or charitable NGOs. Such Christian guilds cannot proclaim their Christian roots officially. Their staff, for the most part, consists of Christians. The activities of such organizations include training in business and the procurement of work permits, passports, and visas, and many other tasks related to work in Kyrgyzstan. Most of these parachurch groups are local in origin but obtain financial support from Western churches. In a few cases financial support comes from church agencies such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). This agency and others like it are well-organized and well-connected; they partner effectively with local churches and other groups. The result is the possibility of assisting many people through cooperative efforts.

In accordance with the temper of the times in Russia and the Central Asian republics, religious policy in Kyrgyzstan has become more restrictive.

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### **International Christian Agencies**

The third group of Christian organizations consists of international agencies that work worldwide. They strive to cooperate with local NGOs, centers, and religious communities. The majority of their employees are not Christians, but they hold strong convictions about the importance of human rights and Christian business ethics. Their main goals include the reduction of poverty, the development of civil society, and legislative reform. Sometimes international organizations finance projects of religious communities. For instance, Danish Church Aid is assisting the Russian Orthodox Church in developing a self-sustaining church-based farm in Kant. Christian organizations in Kyrgyzstan meet annually to gather information, discuss important issues and challenges, and develop new contacts for cooperation and partnership.

After the tragic ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh in June 2010, a humanitarian crisis threatened southern Kyrgyzstan. To their credit, local and international organizations united to provide aid in this emergency situation and to defend those threatened by violence. They managed to prevent the further escalation of this crisis. International Christian organizations also appealed to the United Nations for assistance for Kyrgyzstan. Indigenous and international NGOs and parachurch organizations play an important role in strengthening Kyrgyz statehood and national development. International observers frequently note that the majority of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan are linked to local or international Christian organizations.

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### **The Scope of Christian NGO Work**

Christian economic and social organizations in Kyrgyzstan address a diverse array of human needs. 1) They ameliorate the plight of refugees in Kyrgyzstan by assisting them in obtaining passports, visas, and other documents necessary to provide them with a legal status and protect their civil rights. 2) They promote agricultural and small business development. A coalition of international Christian NGOs and churches, including Christian Aid, Danish Church Aid, Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation, and the Church of Sweden, are helping finance and develop private farms, to date, primarily in northern Kyrgyzstan. Plans are underway to extend help to farmers and small and medium-sized businesses in southern Kyrgyzstan, an especially needy area after the ethnic conflicts in and around Osh. 3) ACT Alliance, a worldwide coalition of Christian relief and development agencies, is engaged in a project to promote primary and vocational education. To date 23 primary schools have been assisted through the efforts of ACT. 4) A number of NGOs, churches, charitable foundations, and other religious communities have been involved in providing assistance to the elderly. 5) Various local NGOs, international organizations, and the Kyrgyz Office of the President have sponsored a number of forums and consultations addressing government corruption as part of a larger effort to promote transparency and honesty in government.

Unfortunately, to date these efforts have had little effect. 6) Finally, a number of NGOs advocate for better state protection of civil liberties.

The Kyrgyz constitution, Kyrgyz legislation, and international human rights treaties that Kyrgyzstan has ratified all provide protections for civil liberties. However, contradictions exist in the safeguards provided by the constitution compared with Kyrgyz legislation and compared with international accords. In addition, enforcement of protections of human rights has been uniformly deficient.

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### **The YAVNA Foundation**

Children's Charitable Foundation YAVNA has been working in Kyrgyzstan since 2001, with official registration from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Justice since 2003. Founded by husband and wife Yashin Vadim and Natalia Aslapovskaya, the Foundation's mission is to care for orphans, with the hope of giving every child a family upbringing, a sense of responsibility, and the chance to become a successful person. YAVNA develops programs for the benefit of both orphans and orphan graduates.

Beginning in 2004 YAVNA sponsored a foster family in the village of Sosnovka, with orphaned children living in foster care along with the biological children of adoptive parents. In 2005 this charitable foundation opened a shelter for teenagers in Kara-Balta where graduates of orphanages are able to continue their studies or work. In 2006 YAVNA launched a project to provide assistance to prospective adoptive families and orphan graduates living on their own. Prospective adoptive families and families who already have adopted children receive training in the best care for adopted children.

In 2008, with the support of international partners, YAVNA established a new program called "Workshop and Service Stations." The goal is to provide permanent jobs for orphan graduates and other adolescents through the development of their own businesses so they can support themselves and their families. In 2009 YAVNA created a Youth Center for Learning and Leisure in Petrovka, a Kyrgyz village that previously had experienced riots and pogroms against its Kurdish minority. In partnership with the Resource Center Suyuu Bulagy in Bishkek and the local Church of Jesus Christ, this center provides training in computer literacy and English and conducts problem-solving seminars. In just its first year, the center trained 105 people, and 300 people participated in its various programs.

In January 2010 YAVNA undertook a project to support small business development. Enterprises established in the program's first year included a confectionary shop in Kara-Balta (January 2010), a social shop in Sosnovka (May 2010), a sewing workshop (July 2010), a hairdressing salon (October 2010), and a computer training business (October 2010).

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### **ARDI**

In 1995, a group of Christians in Kyrgyzstan founded the Association of Parents of Disabled Children (ARDI in Russian) in response to the problems and needs of children with disabilities and

Indigenous and international NGOs and parachurch organizations play an important role in strengthening Kyrgyz statehood and national development.

their parents. ARDI's main goal is to help children with disabilities and their parents find new hope in God. The first such association in Kyrgyzstan, ARDI has helped thousands of parents and children through the provision of humanitarian and technical assistance, legal and psychological counsel, training, cultural activities, and entertainment. Currently, ARDI is one of the leading NGOs in Kyrgyzstan. HelsProm, its first major project, stressed a personalized and multi-disciplinary approach to support children with special needs and their parents. Its goals include the integration of children with disabilities into society, the promotion of tolerance and equal opportunities for them in Kyrgyz society, and legal advocacy for children with disabilities.

ARDI also sponsors the Development Support Center for children with special needs and their families. The Center works to improve awareness and understanding of disability issues in Kyrgyz society. State agencies invite ARDI to participate in conferences and meetings in which ARDI representatives provide expert testimony on issues related to children with special needs.

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### **The Fund Irayim**

The non-commercial Christian charity Irayim founded Kemin Orphanage School for children with disabilities in 2001. With the support of churches and individual Christians, Irayim provides primary and vocational education to orphans with disabilities, allowing them to obtain good jobs in the future. It also seeks to encourage both intellectual and spiritual development for special needs orphans based on high Christian moral principles.

Kemin Orphanage School, in addition to housing, feeding, clothing, and instructing the children in its care, provides an array of enrichment opportunities including sports and musical competitions, summer camps, and therapeutically valuable work in the school garden and with the orphanage's farm animals. Orphanage director Galina Mativeevna Bosikova oversees seven teachers and tutors, 42 foster care day students, and 30 children who live on campus. Over the past ten years Kemin Orphanage School has cared for and educated over 100 children. Kemin children clearly receive many material and educational benefits, but the most important gift they receive is the love and care of the orphanage school teachers and staff.

A second group of Christian organizations cooperates with international Christian and humanitarian organizations by supporting small indigenous charities. Despite some difficulties with finances, the latter play a very important role in fostering prosperity and reconciliation in Kyrgyzstan.

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### **Adventist Development and Relief Agency**

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), which began operations in Kyrgyzstan in 1995, works to improve health, nutrition, education, economic development, and disaster assistance in more than 120 countries. As part of its efforts to create jobs and reduce social inequality, ADRA assists women in acquiring employable skills and developing small businesses and sponsors literacy programs for children and adults.

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### **Suyuu Bulagu**

The Suyuu Bulagu Center for Initiatives has worked since 2005 to improve the living standards of poor and socially vulnerable segments of Kyrgyz society. Its Resource Center provides free vocational training for poor and unemployed people in fields such as computer literacy, bookkeeping, sewing, hairdressing, and manicure/pedicure services.

Computer literacy and bookkeeping are required in every Kyrgyz institution, organization, and commercial enterprise. Because textile manufacturing is one of the few industries in the country that continues to sustain small and medium-size business growth, seamstresses are in demand. With well-qualified teachers and modern sewing equipment, the Resource Center is able to train seamstresses for sewing factories, where they enjoy a reputation as highly skilled workers. Suyuu Bulagu helps a substantial number of women in Kyrgyzstan earn a good income, thereby reducing the ranks of the unemployed. Hairdressing and manicure-pedicure work are very popular professions for women, but training can be expensive. The Resource Center's free courses provide excellent opportunities for such training and lead to steady employment and improved self-esteem.

Suyuu Bulagu Resource Center has well-established links with the Kyrgyz government's Youth Labor Exchange Office through which it has the opportunity to help people find employment. Hundreds of graduates of Resource Center courses have been able to earn a decent income, have been able to improve the quality of their lives, and have become valued, skilled workers.

Suyuu Bulagu also supports a number of orphanages and shelters for homeless people in addition to providing assistance to people with disabilities and the elderly. In its various projects Suyuu Bulagu cooperates with relevant governmental bodies and NGOs.

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### **Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe**

The German church charity Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH) provides humanitarian aid worldwide, including Kyrgyzstan. It supports people who have fallen victim to natural disasters, war, and displacement and who are not able to cope with emergency situations on their own. One of its most important principles is impartiality and independence. DKH painstakingly strives to avoid becoming an instrument for political, economic, or military interests. To maximize its positive economic impact, it purchases aid commodities locally as far as possible.

Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe funding is derived from four sources: private donations, its most important source; its sister organization, Brot für die Welt (Bread for the World), providing up to ten percent of its annual income; Caritas International (in certain emergency cases); and German government agencies including the Humanitarian Aid Department of the Foreign Affairs Office, the Department for Food, Emergency, and Refugee Assistance of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and, from time to time, individual German provincial governments and cities.

Suyuu Bulagu provides free vocational training in fields such as computer literacy, bookkeeping, sewing, hairdressing, and manicure/pedicure services.

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### **Danish Church Aid**

The goal of Danish Church Aid (DCA) is to support the poorest of the poor and other disadvantaged groups in cooperation with local partners. Its long-term and short-term assistance includes public advocacy, technical and material assistance, and spiritual support. Its priorities in Kyrgyzstan include: human rights, provision of food, and support for civil society, health, and education. DCA is financed through fundraising, Danida (the Danish government aid agency), the European Union, and church donations.

### **Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation**

Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (IODC) supports projects in some 70 countries worldwide, including Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan it co-finances projects with partner organizations including Transboundary Waters Management Experience in Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia (TWME ECCA), Development and Cooperation in Central Asia (DCCA), Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), and the European Union. ICCO has co-sponsored a cross-border project of rural development in the Fergana Valley (2003-05), a project to rehabilitate the Kyrgyz village of Kaynama after a landslide (2004-05), a civil society development project in Kyrgyzstan and other parts of Central Asia (2006-08), and a socio-economic development project for rural communities in southern Kyrgyzstan (2006-08).

### **Christian Aid**

Christian Aid, an agency of the churches of Great Britain and Ireland, supports local organizations worldwide that work to alleviate poverty. In Kyrgyzstan, to that end, Christian Aid supports various economic development projects and campaigns for changes in laws to assist people in overcoming poverty.

### **Kerk in Actie (The Church in Action)**

Kerk in Actie, the missionary and service arm of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and ten smaller Dutch churches and ecumenical organizations, cooperates with nearly 1,000 partner churches and organizations in more than 60 countries of Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Eastern Europe. It facilitates networking between local congregations in the Netherlands and churches and organizations abroad to proclaim the Gospel and promote justice. In Kyrgyzstan Kerk in Actie provides prayer, financial support, and personnel for its partner organizations and serves as an advocate for various humanitarian concerns. In Central Asia Kerk in Actie frequently conducts outreach in cooperation with Danish Church Aid and IODC.

### **BPN**

BPN (Brand Profilers Network) is a Swiss development charity that focuses on assistance to small and medium-size businesses. It promotes entrepreneurship and the improvement of professional competence through training seminars, business

consulting, and loans. Business consultants from Switzerland visit Kyrgyzstan several times a year to conduct seminars on basic economics and the organization of production, to supervise BPN staff, and to make final selections of candidates for BPN programs. It also provides personalized professional assistance (coaching) for business owners participating in BPN programs.

Those wishing to participate in BPN's program complete initial application forms and questionnaires. Candidates who receive a positive assessment attend training sessions to develop business plans. BPN consultants stress the importance of honesty and professionalism in all aspects of business.

Businesses partnering with BPN receive assistance with personnel management, combatting corruption, customer service, employee relations, and negotiations with suppliers and government officials. Participating business personnel attend seminars lasting four to five days on business, financial management, marketing, and employee supervision. To expand production BPN program participants are eligible for loans of \$2,000 to \$20,000 at interest rates well below the going rate in Kyrgyzstan. Businesses that receive BPN loans include manufacturing plants of all kinds, enterprises that process agricultural products, and businesses in service industries including hotels, restaurants, medical facilities, and internet services.

### **In Summary**

In the past two decades, Christian charities and Christians employed in NGOs in Kyrgyzstan have played a significant role in fostering economic and social development and providing humanitarian assistance. The stress has been on microenterprise development, humanitarian assistance for especially vulnerable populations (the poor, the orphaned, the disabled, and the displaced), and the promotion of transparency in government, civil liberties, and ethnic and religious tolerance. In recent years increasing government restrictions on religious liberties and on the development of civil society parallel trends in the Russian Republic and undermine long-term prospects for democracy and freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan. ♦

*Editor's note: In 2006 the Association of Civil Society Support Centers in Bishkek published a 142-page Review of the History of Establishment and Development of the NGO Sector in the Kyrgyz Republic, with assistance from the Aga Khan Development Network. The full text is available at [http://www.akdn.org/publications/civil\\_society\\_kyrgyzstan\\_review.pdf](http://www.akdn.org/publications/civil_society_kyrgyzstan_review.pdf). On pages 36-39 the study examines various approaches to NGO classification, the most comprehensive of which enumerates the following Third Sector categories: social reform, legal, health care, civic education, gender, ecology, NGO support, agriculture, culture, business development, conflict resolution, mass media, professional associations, and science.*

In recent years increasing government restrictions on religious liberties and on the development of civil society parallel trends in the Russian Republic and undermine long-term prospects for democracy and freedom of religion in Kyrgyzstan.

Neither in this listing nor in the rest of the lengthy report do the authors take note of the existence of church-sponsored NGOs in Kyrgyzstan. Practically none of the Christian charities noted in Galina Kolodinskaya's article, active as they are in social reform, health care, agriculture, and business development, are mentioned in the Review of the... NGO Sector in the Kyrgyz Republic. Most studies of Western NGOs, as well, exclude Christian charities and parachurch agencies from their coverage even though they fit non-governmental Third Sector definitions.

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## Christian Micro-Enterprise and Social Agencies in Kyrgyzstan

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# The Russian Orthodox Practice of Confession Since 1988

Nadieszda Kizenko

Confession is of unique and persistent importance in modern Russian religious and political culture as demonstrated by legal codes, theological treatises, artistic representations, written confessions of the past, and present-day innovations in the practice. Many aspects of confession in Russia today have much in common with past, pre-revolutionary practice. People are still expected to fast before going to confession and communion; they still often schedule these sacraments for the traditional Lenten periods; and the Orthodox Church still publishes large-circulation guides to train penitents to confess properly. Nevertheless, three aspects of confession as it is now practiced represent something new. These are written confessions, the practice of spiritual eldership (*dukhovnichestvo* or *starchestvo*), and confession for the sake of confession (without communion as the logical end of the process). The first and third have been adopted extensively and with little fanfare; the second has emerged as so much of a potential threat that the Moscow Patriarchate officially condemned its abuses in 1998. The present study focuses on innovative aspects of these three practices and what they tell us about contemporary Russian religious and political culture.

## Written Confessions

Written confessions were extremely unusual in imperial Russia before and after 1917, not only as a matter of low literacy rates. According to the standard tableside companion of the Russian priest, the Church hierarchy thought they were acceptable only for literate deaf-mutes. While there are notable exceptions, such as the written confessions sent to St. John of Kronstadt, written confessions were still mostly rejected as being the easy way out—it was one thing to jot down one's sins in the privacy of one's room and put them in the mail and another altogether to utter them face-to-face before a familiar parish priest. The few written confessions that survive from before 1917, then, are anomalies.

The situation has changed sharply since 1988, however. Now, as part of the campaign to re-church the neophyte Orthodox population of Russia, written confessions have been identified as a useful supplement to—though not quite a substitute for—the standard spoken confession. Almost every guide to confession published since 1988 includes a section for writing down one's sins every day, the idea being that one will bring these notebooks or lists and use them to jog one's memory. While the published guides warn against rote recitation, many people are apparently still fearful of leaving something out (and thus, they believe, having to come back before they can go to communion), so they prefer to read the list in its entirety. Most interesting here is that it is not considered acceptable for the penitent to hand the list to the confessor and expect him to read it silently. Even in this written form, the confession is meant to be something uttered and generated by the penitent. And, as with pre-revolutionary deaf-mutes, the penitent expects to see his list destroyed before his eyes or to have it given back to him. Thus, the old liturgical phrase asking God to “tear asunder the hand-writing of

my sins” (sung in the triparion at the sixth hour during Lent) has acquired a new and literal meaning.

This appears to be part of a larger tendency for both laity and clergy to work from a written text. Just as laypeople are encouraged to confess from a set list, so priests (particularly inexperienced ones) after 1988 tend to read sermons from a book rather than delivering their own. These practices are meant to help the laity to focus and to prevent the priest from saying something incorrect. But they also appear to reflect the new reality of re-schooling and re-churching a largely religiously inexperienced population.

Perhaps one reason why written confessions have attracted little controversy is because their utility is obvious and they do not appear to be doing any damage. The practice of going to confession without automatically going afterwards to communion is slightly more suspect. Although priests frown upon the disjunction and try to steer parishioners away from it, confession pursued as an independent activity persists for at least two reasons. First, communion requires the traditional week-long (or three-day) period of fasting and church attendance; confession does not. Therefore one can do it practically any time the mood strikes, without extensive preparation in advance. Second, confession is practically the only opportunity in present-day Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia, to talk to a priest about oneself. After morning liturgy, priests are usually busy with baptisms and burials and such para-liturgical services as blessing new apartments or cars. Confession, on the other hand, all but requires them to hear people out. While these two new aspects of confession have incorporated themselves relatively seamlessly into post-atheistic Russian religiosity, the practice of spiritual eldership, *dukhovnichestvo* or *starchestvo*, has wrought havoc both in people's personal lives and in their relation to the clerical, especially episcopal, hierarchy.

## Spiritual Eldership

The abuses now associated with eldership are something new. To people living outside of Russia, the practice of spiritual elders is linked to such historically positive examples as Dostoyevsky's Father Zosima or St. John of Kronstadt. It is thus difficult to understand how there might possibly be a problem. But after decades of state atheism, at the beginning of the twenty-first century the practice has since mutated into something quite different from what it was at the beginning of the twentieth.

First, there is the matter of numbers and scale. In pre-revolutionary Russia, it was understood that both *dukhovniki* and elders were extraordinary. The vast majority of the population contented themselves with routine confessions to a parish priest. Such spectacular exceptions as St. John of Kronstadt were just that. This is not to say that people did not take confession seriously, but simply that they did not expect more from either the sacrament or the confessor than a “regular” priest could provide. In contrast, today even partly-churched people have not mere confessors, but full-fledged spiritual fathers; even Vladimir Putin has his own. Their spiritual obedience to these elders,

Confession is practically the only opportunity in present-day Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia, to talk to a priest about oneself. After morning liturgy, priests are usually busy with baptisms and burials and such para-liturgical services as blessing new apartments or cars.

moreover, goes beyond anything dreamed of before communism.

Church kiosks from Solovki to Pochaev are filled with booklets called, for example, “How to find a *dukhovnik* according to the counsels of elders and holy fathers of the Church” and “The revelation of thoughts to the elder and confession before a *dukhovnik*.” All bear the key “*po blagoslaveniiu*” (“with the blessing of”) phrase on the reverse of their title-pages. And all contain the message that regular confession is necessary and good, but having a true spiritual director—a *dukhovnik*—is even better. Citing abundantly from such classic works of Orthodox mystical theology and asceticism as the *Philokalia* or the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, they in effect seek to re-create the discipline of monastic obedience in the lay world.

The results are mixed. Even such apparently neutral titles as *Chinoposledovanie ispovedi* [*The Sacrament of Repentance*] have questions about sins, or lists of sins, so detailed that they boggle the mind. One reads, for example, “Spent a lot of time doing unnecessary laundry.” That supposed vice, incidentally, prompted the ire of no less an authority than Patriarch Alexii II, who noted with heavy irony that laziness and slovenliness did not in themselves mean a Christian way of life, and added that not everyone had the opportunity to buy imported automatic washing machines which might mean less time at the wash-tub. Another conservative list had people repent of 296 separate kinds of sin. And at least one over-earnest elder asked his spiritual children whether they had had improper relations with a chicken.

### **Spiritual Eldership—Beyond the Call of Duty**

But these illustrations might seem simply anecdotal. More serious, and of particular concern to the church hierarchy, are those cases where the *dukhovnik* extends his sphere above and beyond the call of duty. Some *dukhovniki* demand that couples who have only a civil marriage, but who were never married in church, part ways. Others require that Orthodox Christians leave spouses who are not Orthodox. Monastic *dukhovniki* forbid their spiritual children to enter into matrimony, insisting that the monastic state is higher. Others do not give their blessing for a spiritual child to marry the person he or she has chosen, insisting that out of obedience they marry someone the *dukhovnik* recommended. Others yet do not bless seeking medical assistance, serving in the army, holding particular political opinions, or pursuing secular literature as a profession. It hardly needs to be underscored that counsels of this sort might eventually undermine the good order of civic and political life.

As a result, as of 1998, the Moscow Patriarchate has officially forbidden *dukhovniki* to compel their spiritual children to do any of the following: enter monastic life; carry out any sort of “church” obedience; make any kind of donations; get married; divorce or refuse to marry, except in such cases where there were canonical impediments; refuse their spouses normal marital relations; refuse to serve in the military; refuse to take part in elections or other civic responsibilities; refuse to seek medical help; refuse an education; or change jobs or homes.

But the very fact that these limits had to be spelled out, and the fact that in its decree the Synod recognized that it was addressing explicit and numerous complaints by laity, suggests that the problem had reached significant proportions. To be sure, such “excesses” are clearly a function of inexperience and, correspondingly, naive enthusiasm, on the part of both confessors and penitents. Present-day post-Soviet space offers a perfect illustration of what happens when living traditions are not preserved and both sides seek to re-create an ideal Orthodox reality “by the book.” It becomes all the more problematic if one realizes that the books consulted are in most cases reprints of nineteenth-century translations of even earlier works for ascetics, and not more recent examples of pastoral guidance. The backlash, both personal and official, against such an excessive interpretation, and the wide publication of well-tempered criticisms and counsels by the late, eternally reasonable, Metropolitan Antony of Sourozh, however, suggest that this is a feature characteristic of a transitional period and that in years to come Russian penitents may ask less both of themselves and their confessors.

Sociologist Nikolai Mitrokhin argues that the *dukhovnik* or *starets* represents a parallel, or alternative, church within the official Orthodox Church. The *starets* phenomenon actually began to spread in the Soviet era further than it had in the past precisely because the elder or eldress was not linked to official Soviet church structures, which significant numbers of people still mistrusted after Metropolitan Sergii’s declaration of loyalty to the Soviet regime in 1927 and the collaboration of the Moscow Patriarchate with Stalin from World War II onward. If people did trust the average parish priest before 1917, they were far less likely to during the Soviet period, particularly after the official church reached a concordat with the persecuting regime. On the other hand, the impulse to unburden oneself to someone else persisted—hence the urge to seek out unofficial, even unordained, men and women one could trust. It is precisely the neophytes’ exaggerated dependence on the unofficial elder or eldress that undercuts the traditional chain of authority in Orthodoxy.

### **General Confessions**

A final aspect of post-Soviet confessional practice has its roots in the Soviet era—that is, the general confession where the priest’s flock comes together to hear a more or less exhaustive confession read over them as a group. A collective absolution then follows. In the Soviet era this was justified both by a desire for privacy (confessional records could be used against one) and by the shortage of clergy. In the first years after 1988, similar arguments applied. The waves of people coming to church overwhelmed the still-low number of clerical cadres and general confessions seemed to be the only way of coping. Now, after nearly 20 years, equilibrium has been reached, and general confessions appear to be a regular feature chiefly of provincial life, or anywhere there is a shortage of clergy. Where enough parish or monastic clergy serve, general confession has largely died out.

Thus, confession in modern Russia reflects, and helps form, the paradoxes in Russian political and

It is precisely the neophytes’ exaggerated dependence on the unofficial elder or eldress that undercuts the traditional chain of authority in Orthodoxy.

(continued on page 14)

## The Russian Orthodox Practice of Confession Since 1988 *(continued from page 13)*

religious culture. From the middle of the seventeenth century onward, state and church authorities have sought to use the sacramental confession as a means of learning about, teaching, in short, controlling the inner lives and public actions of their flocks. Peter I's initial attempt to get father-confessors to report on their spiritual children for the good of the "father of the fatherland," applied with a renewed burst of energy by Nicholas I, was pushed far further by the communists of the twentieth century. Yet one cannot assume that these actions irrevocably compromised the sacrament of penance in the eyes of believers, or made it somehow inauthentic. Orthodox Christians in

modern Russia have continued to find their own ways of approaching confession, and thus they control their own spiritual lives.

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Nadieszda Kizenko, "Confession in Modern Russian Culture," National Council for Eurasian and East European Research grant report, June 2007. The original paper's extensive documentation may be accessed via the NCEEER website, [www.nceeer.org](http://www.nceeer.org). The present article has been revised and updated by the author. ♦*

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## The Issue of Bribery

Mark R. Elliott, Editor

The *East-West Church and Ministry Report* published three articles in volume 5 (Winter 1997), giving differing perspectives on the issue of bribery, a topic very rarely tackled in church or missionary publications. In October 2011, I discussed this issue—and the Christian community's reluctance to air examinations of it in print—with psychologist Ron Koteskey, a longtime friend and academic colleague. Dr. Koteskey and his wife Bonnie took early retirement in 2002 in order to establish a counseling service for missionaries and to prepare books and brochures on all aspects of missionary care. (See [www.missionary.com](http://www.missionary.com) for the full text of Dr. Koteskey's 14 books and 90 brochures, all of which may be downloaded at no charge.)

Ron Koteskey subsequently did his own literature search on the issue of bribery and was struck, as well, by the paucity of reflection in Christian publications on the subject. This lacuna prompted his decision to write *Missionaries and Bribes*, completed in May 2012, and now available on the missionary care website. In July 2012, I requested responses to Koteskey's book from believers who could write on the issue of bribery from the perspective of the Eurasian context. Find below reflections on the subject from church historian and missiologist Walter Sawatsky, attorney Ekaterina Smyslova, missionary/journalist Sharon Mumper, and religious liberty journalist Lawrence Uzell. ♦

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## Overcoming the Soviet-Era Legacy of Secrecy

This book appears at a time when missions and money are in a troubled relationship again. What changed since the debates over Bible smuggling and financial mismanagement in the late 1970s? Secrecy for smuggling and supporting beleaguered pastors across the USSR and Eastern Europe had served to justify secrecy about mission budgets, lavish salaries for key leaders, etc. Evangelical mission societies responded by establishing a financial monitoring body that rated agencies according to mutually recognized standards [Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability]. Another change was the collapse of socialist or communist states. There followed major economic collapse as the new post-Soviet states shifted to a form of crony capitalism. Small elites seized large sectors of former government economies through dubious means and deposited much of the liquid wealth in secret Swiss bank accounts.

For missions in those countries the impact was similarly dramatic. A significant level of indigenous mission work had already developed, financially supported in secret by the churches, which after 1989 could become legal and public. Instead it became a tortuous road, soon overwhelmed by dependency on the West. The massive invasion of Western

missionaries, with so many poorly informed about existing Christianity and established ways of living, included large sums for the construction of seminaries and churches, as had been the pattern in the Two Thirds World. Sensing a looming problem, Mark Elliott organized a conference in Moscow on ethics in the early 1990s, bringing together new entrepreneurs related to evangelicals plus Western missionaries and scholars.

Koteskey's book arrives at a still later phase of East-West church relations, when the bitter disappointments, especially about repeating the mistakes and sins of earlier mission eras, have made local church leaders and those missionaries who stayed very cautious. Koteskey's observation that in many cross-cultural settings missionaries frequently do confront the issue of paying bribes (seldom that of taking bribes) does apply to Eastern Europe. What he offers (along with a set of appendices nearly twice as long as his 75 pages of text) is a practical survey of the meaning of bribery (and its cognates) from Scripture and history. He helps the reader think through the ambiguities of situations and settings, offering advice on what to do and not do. Rare is such a book on bribery, hence a worthy read today. Rare

Rare is a book on bribery, hence a worthy read today.

too is Koteskey's generosity as counselor. This book, and a dozen others closer to his pastoral care and counseling field, can be downloaded for free from his website ([www.missionarycare.com](http://www.missionarycare.com)).

What I found myself pondering longer and more critically was that the focus on bribery was too narrow, and the Biblical approach (or hermeneutical approach) too limiting. A survey of the use and occurrence of the word bribery in Scripture to establish definitions and to seek out a set of principles from the few cases involving bribery is interesting, but it feels like proof texting. Given what we have been through during the communist and post-communist eras, the bigger issue is one of integrity. An authentic Gospel witness was long measured and respected by the way the believer lived the faith, did so in a hostile environment, and with a keen sense of powerlessness. The ability to trust one another, including with money, to be open before the authorities because they had nothing to hide, had been a persistent challenge. The record of openness about church finances is a spotty one, and after 1989 earlier ways of surviving were not

easily changed. I remain surprised how few financial scandals have surfaced, and I am thankful.

It struck me that the issue of paying bribes to get registered, buy or rent a facility, or bring resources through customs were all options for missionaries with money and power, with time limits to get something done, and not easily issues of shared decision-making by a church union or congregational body. I was reminded again how often Jesus would respond to queries with counter queries to make one think. To think about ministry is a constant challenge. It is what seems embedded in that first commandment Jesus noted in Matthew 22, to "love the Lord your God with heart, mind, and soul," and the second commandment, "to love your neighbor as yourself." Given the literature so far available on Koteskey's website, I would welcome his broader counsel on money and mission when framed by these love commandments. ♦

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

## Bribes and Gifts

*Missionaries and Bribes* by Ronald L. Koteskey has come to me as a pleasant discovery. Every Christian visiting a Third World country faces a very difficult question: Shall I compromise my conscience paying bribes, as it seems to be an organic part of local culture, or quit the ministry field? Unfortunately, many missionaries cannot make distinctions among gifts, extortion, and bribes.

In the 1990s and after, I assisted many Christian missionaries coming to the former Soviet Union. I saw some pushed out of the country, others suffer nervous breakdowns, and others lose great amounts of property, goods, or money simply because of cultural inflexibility. Practically all missionaries have been equipped with knowledge of local history and general culture, but I never met any who were effectively educated in the area of dealing with local officials. As a result, missionaries often were demanding actions from national officials which had to be granted by law, but at the same time, they did not even try to invest time or creativity in preliminary relationship building. Officials facing such "rude behavior" and demands usually felt insulted and exercised all their influence to cause as many problems as possible to these missionaries.

Relationship building is the key to work in the Third World. Yes, many officials are spoiled by bribes, but they need more than payoffs. If we will be channels of true love and care for everyone, including officials, we will not view them as obstacles on our way but as special persons created

in the image and likeness of our precious God. With this outlook, then a miracle may happen, and we will receive our permissions, registrations, and all we need without the necessity of paying bribes. In addition, we will plant seeds of faith in the hearts of officials. I have seen such miracles many times over many years.

At the same time, I never suggested to my clients to come to officials empty-handed. I did not mean envelopes filled with money but some small gift that officials could place on their desks. It would help officials have pleasant memories of their visitors. Actually, Ronald Koteskey suggests doing something exactly like this. I believe the most important gift giving is to have the right motivation. It should be an act of love, not an attempt to bribe on the cheap!

Why does extortion exist in Eurasia?

Unfortunately, even today officials' salaries simply do not allow them to survive without tips and bribes. As a result, missionaries may face extortion at every step when dealing with any government official. Working in Central and Southern Asia as well, I have discovered that the practice of gift-giving is unavoidable and is a very innocent traditional part of relationship building.

I am glad to know that *Missionaries and Bribes* by Ronald L. Koteskey is available on the Internet and can be downloaded for free. ♦

**Ekaterina Smyslova**, *International Christian Adoptions, Moscow, Russia*

Many officials are spoiled by bribes, but they need more than payoff. If we will be channels of true love and care for everyone, including officials, we will not view them as obstacles on our way but as special persons created in the image and likeness of our precious God.

## An Airport Incident: Bribery or Extortion?

I have not often been confronted with the issue of bribery. Or, if I was, I was too ignorant to realize it, and the Christian nationals with whom I was working were too embarrassed to tell me.

I was in the Kyiv airport at the conclusion of a conference that Magazine Training International had organized there, and I was undergoing the kind of thorough document examination typical in 2001. How much cash was I taking out of the country, I was asked. In fact, it was a couple thousand dollars. The dollar exchange rate had risen, our expenses had been lower than anticipated, and I had overestimated how much money I would need for the conference.

"Please come with me." Oh no, this is not good, I thought. And it wasn't. The official wanted to see the cash with his own eyes, and he laid it out carefully in stacks of bills on the table. Then, the questions began, irrelevant and personal, obviously designed to make me fear I would miss my flight. I had committed no crime, but cash was available. I don't remember how it was phrased, but finally minutes before the doors were to close on my flight it was made clear that a "payment" would make it possible for me to make that flight. He pulled out a couple of hundred dollar bills. "That's too much," I protested. It was clear that I was prepared to pay something for my "ransom." In the end, he took \$100. Was I a victim of extortion or had I paid a bribe? Either way, there was no receipt, and I was out the money.

Although I've held conferences in every East European country and most of the countries of the former Soviet Union, I have not often been confronted

with the issue of bribery. Or, if I was, I was too ignorant to realize it, and the Christian nationals with whom I was working were too embarrassed to tell me. However, as a missionary I have wrestled with the question of bribery over the years, but until now I had never found a definitive statement concerning the issue.

I now have finally found the answer in the very thorough, scholarly, yet well-written eBook *Missionaries and Bribes*, noting with interest and a great deal of sympathy the author's proviso, "Other people have reached different positions, and I may change my position at some time" (p.7).

I'm ready to stop wrestling with the issue, and I've decided to accept the final statement Ronald Koteskey makes concerning the issue: "Giving something to an official to disobey a law or to give you preferential treatment is wrong, but giving something to a corrupt official to get him or her to obey or apply a law may be acceptable at times" (p. 73).

I still don't like the feeling that I'm encouraging corruption. So, having made the decision to stop wrestling with the issue of bribery and extortion, I find I am still doing just that. But, at least, thanks to Koteskey's book, I have better tools with which to continue the fight. ♦

**Sharon Mumper**, *Magazine Training International*,  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

In my opinion, missionaries who try to justify bribes have exaggerated their difficulties in Eastern Europe. During my seven years of living in Moscow (1992-1999), I avoided paying bribes.

## Bribes—No Way

In my opinion, missionaries who try to justify bribes have exaggerated their difficulties in Eastern Europe. During my seven years of living in Moscow (1992-1999), I avoided paying bribes. I decided not to own or to rent a car in Russia, knowing that my driving could become a magnet for bribes for traffic police. (Don't forget also that the huge majority of Christian believers in Russia do not have cars.) As a journalist I had the experience of an offer from a well-positioned source to give me information in exchange for money. I refused, and the source immediately ended the conversation. I had many other sources and other methods of finding information without sacrificing my conscience.

Dr. Koteskey's e-book *Missionaries and Bribes* provides a fascinating compendium of texts. In my judgment the most convincing text is the appendix by Rev. David Montgomery entitled "The Price is Wrong: A Biblical and Ethical Examination of Bribery." ♦

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The quarterly *East-West Church & Ministry Report* examines all aspects of church life and mission outreach in the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe as a service to both church and academia. Letters to the editor are welcomed. Annual subscription rates are \$49.95 (individuals, U.S. and Canada); \$59.95 (individuals, international); \$53.95 (libraries, U.S. and Canada); \$63.95 (libraries, international); and \$22.95 (e-mail). Reprint and photocopy policy: 1) Quantity photocopies or reprints of up to three articles from a single issue may be distributed or reprinted at no charge.

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