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Believing in Russia

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Religion and Russian State Consolidation

The Russian Orthodox Church asserts itself as the definitive expression of Russian nationhood. Alternative worldviews are marginalized. The gravest consequence of this antagonism is its exacerbation of separatist tendencies among Russian Muslims, who seek to establish Islam locally in opposition to Patriarchate hegemony nationally. Far from its mystical vision, the Orthodox-centered model of Russian identity is thus failing to consolidate the modern Russian nation. Alone, this failure will not trigger widespread civil conflict or the collapse of the Russian Federation. Yet the situation could deteriorate rapidly, especially in combination with other, more potent factors such as rising social disaffection.

Since 2009 a dozen regions have eagerly pursued a Brezhnev-esque campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses without so much as a cough of disapproval from the Kremlin. Chechnya's bald imposition of Islamic norms in defiance of Russia's 1993 Constitution also goes unchecked by Moscow. Regional disparity is now acute. In June 2008 the Koranic verse "There is no god but Allah" adorned the mountainside opposite Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov's palace. The same month, it was forcibly removed from the outer wall of the mosque in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk.¹ The Kremlin's failure to uphold its own constitutional commitment to religious freedom means there is no firm barrier against further decline.

Religious Freedom: A Low State Priority

The erosion of religious freedom is not due to deliberate federal preference for the Russian Orthodox Church. Rather, it is a symptom of a disinterested Kremlin absenting itself from the religious policy sphere. Few top officials yearn for Orthodox Christianity's restoration to the status of national ideology as under the tsars. The driving impulses of today's Russian rulers are pursuit and retention of personal wealth and influence. Since religious freedom (among other human rights and public concerns) is not one of them, it is left unregulated to the extent that it does not encroach upon the strategic interests of the elite.

That freedom of conscience has not deteriorated further in Russia over the past two decades is due to a scattering of lawyers and civil society activists such as those behind the Moscow-based SOVA Centre, and benign state officials such as government adviser Andrei Sebentsov. Yet as unrelenting calls for oppression of non-establishment faiths snowball, the situation is nearing breaking point.

An Orthodox-Centered Religious Policy

Putin is famed for muscular rhetoric on a strong state and dictatorship of the law. But the Kremlin's fundamental indifference to religious freedom allows junior officials to pursue an Orthodox-centered religious policy in defiance of the federal standard. Their allies in the Moscow Patriarchate have taken advantage of this situation by concentrating initial lobbying efforts for exclusive privilege at regional level. This push has garnered sufficient momentum to effect formal policy change at the federal level, most notably the 1997 federal law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations and special access to the armed forces and state schools in 2009. Certain federal representatives now also patronize such initiatives. "It doesn't matter that the Church is separate from the state," Duma First Deputy Speaker Lyubov Sliska argued in support of the Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture course in 2005.²

Putin has occasionally moved to check Patriarchate initiatives, including the Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture course. Yet as popular resentment over the gulf between the lifestyles of the rich and powerful and ordinary citizens rises, the Kremlin is growing ever more reliant upon cynical identification with national values in order to protect the elite. While so far substantially untapped, alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church against perceived spiritual enemies is one of the few remaining mechanisms for bolstering popularity to which it has recourse.

Ethno-Religious Tensions

That is dangerous strategy. On a dim Saturday afternoon in December 2010, thousands of young Russians gave Nazi salutes just yards from the Kremlin's walls. Their grievances centered upon ethnicity: rumors were sweeping Moscow that North Caucasians suspected of murdering a Slav soccer fan had bribed their way out of police detention. Ethnicity's entrenched association with faith in Russia moved Putin to address sharpening ethno-religious polarization days later when discussing the impromptu rally during his annual televised call-in show:

A person from the Caucasus should not be afraid to walk the streets of Moscow, and our citizens of Slavic ethnicity should not be afraid to live in the republics of the North Caucasus. . . . From the outset—I stress, from the outset—Russia formed as a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic state.³

Yet Putin's further comments illustrated the bankruptcy of the Russian state's approach to religion more than a generation after *perestroika*. Their inadequacy also points to the elite's alarming alienation from the ordinary populace. First he

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fumbled for tired Soviet rhetoric of the “traditional religion” paradigm, referring—in an apparent attempt to deflect resentment towards a familiar Western foe—to a claim by unspecified “theorists of Christianity” that Orthodoxy “is in many ways even closer to Islam than to Catholics.” Then, grasping for a model of interreligious harmony, he cited the ostensibly “truly brotherly” relations between Russian Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish, and “other traditional” faith leaders. Even if taken to be genuinely brotherly, such leaders are hardly authorities for the nation’s rising generation, let alone those prone to engage in ethno-religious violence.

State Treatment of Islam

Putin’s appeals to Russia’s multi-confessional and multi-ethnic identity come woefully late. Back in 2001 the Council of Muftis of Russia had urged that, as there was no longer a part of Russia where Muslims did not live, it was vitally important they “feel any part of this country to be their homeland.”⁴ Subsequent warnings to Putin over prosecutions of innocent Muslims on the pretext of combating religious extremism and “Wahhabism” likewise went unheeded, for Russia’s ruling elite is oblivious to religious freedom concerns.⁵

Despite blatant discrimination between faiths, Kremlin press secretary Dmitri Peskov insisted in April 2008 that in Russia “all religions are treated on an equal basis.”⁶ The Foreign Ministry is in still deeper denial, responding to a March 2006 US Congress resolution urging Russia to “ensure full protection of freedoms for all religious communities without distinction” by claiming that the authorities had received “practically not a single complaint” from religious organizations.⁷ Russia’s own human rights ombudsman was in fact then receiving some 250 such complaints annually.⁸

Following the demise of enforced atheism, the diverse reality of beliefs in Russia is more distant than ever from the old pre-revolutionary messianic vision of a homogeneously Orthodox civilization. Political pursuit of that vision is consequently producing a dangerously skewed social imbalance. For evidence, one need look no further than the “Third Rome” itself. Despite Putin’s assurances during his December 2010 telethon that a new mosque would be built in Moscow, the city still had only three official mosques by 2010.⁹ By contrast, a construction plan for 200 new Orthodox churches in the capital spearheaded by Patriarch Kirill continues apace.¹⁰ Moscow’s Soviet-planned suburbs indeed lack Orthodox churches. But the enormous discrepancy between their provision and that of mosques—reflecting the assumption that Russia is definitively Orthodox with inconsequential Muslims and other minorities—is turning explosive. Three mosques were woefully inadequate for the estimated 100,000 Muslim worshippers who attended *Uraza-Bayram (Eid ul-Fitr)* in Moscow in August 2011, mostly packing central streets.¹¹

Putin and the Patriarch

Few passive Orthodox, non-Orthodox, or atheist taxpayers object to government funding for aspects of religious activity perceived as cultural, such as preservation of historic churches or celebration of major Church festivals. Senior human rights official

Mikhail Odintsov has thus suggested “cultural cooperation” to be the optimal foundation for the state’s religious policy.¹² Provided such cooperation was transparent and non-exclusive, the Russian Orthodox Church could enjoy broad public approval amid conditions of true religious freedom. These are not mutually exclusive.

But formidable obstacles remain. Any policy shift would mean abandoning the entrenched attitude that citizens need to be directed and protected from themselves—or, in the words of Baptist leader Yuri Sipko, “supposing that the citizens of a country with a great culture are incapable of making their own choices.”¹³ And in order for that shift to take place, Russia’s rulers would have to make civic rather than personal political interest their priority.

As Putin commenced his third presidency in May 2012, Russia continued to drift in the opposite direction. Fifteen years before, Patriarch Aleksy II insisted that “Russia came to exist as a state on the basis of the Orthodox religion... and it is only on the basis of the Orthodox religion that the Motherland can regain its magnificence.”¹⁴ Seeking the Patriarchate as an ally in its drive to preserve credibility amidst rising popular resentment, the regime is increasingly drawn to the old notion that Russia is definitively Orthodox. At an extraordinary four-hour meeting with key religious leaders just weeks before the 2012 presidential election, Putin acknowledged the Orthodox Church to be Russia’s “state-forming” confession and promised to grant its wish list for privileged access to state institutions. Patriarch Kirill reciprocated by declaring Putin’s presidential candidacy to have “the best chances” and—“as the Patriarch, who is called upon to speak the truth”—lauding his role in leading Russia out of political crisis.¹⁵

But will Putin deliver? Whether he honors his pledge to continue Medvedev’s concessions to “traditional religions” or resumes his pragmatic aloofness towards the Moscow Patriarchate will prove the key religious policy question for as long as he retains power.♦

Notes:

¹ Verse 28:88; Megan K. Stack, “Chechen tiger without a chain,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 June 2008: <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/columnone/la-fg-kadyrov17-2008june17.0.3816252.story?page=2>; Mikhail Pozdniaev, “Proverka na ‘pravil’nost’,” *Novye Izvestiia*, 9 June 2008: <http://www.newizv.ru/news/2008-06-09/91604/>.

² “Komitet Gosdumy po delam’ obshchestvennykh ob’edinenii i religioznykh organizatsii vozglavil predstavitel’ LDPR,” *SOVA*, 21 December 2011: <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/authorities/legal-regulation/2011/12/d23292/>.

³ “V priamom efire telekanalov ‘Rossiia,’ ‘Rossiia 24,’ radiostantsii ‘Maiak,’ ‘Vesti FM’ i ‘Radio Rossii’ vyshla spetsial’naia programma ‘Razgovor s Vladimirom Putinyem. Prodolzhenie,’” Russian government website, 16 December 2010: <http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/13427/>.

⁴ Sovet Muftiev Rossii, *Osnovnye polozeniia sotsial’noi programmy rossiiskikh musul’man*

Putin [is] seeking the Patriarchate as an ally to preserve credibility amidst popular resentment.

(Yaroslavl: DIA-press, 2001), 24.

⁵ “Dokument: Obrashchenie vedushchikh rossiiskikh pravozashchitnikov k prezidentu RF s trebovaniem prekratit' presledovaniia musul'man v Rossii,” *Portal-Credo*, 10 June 2005: <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/index.php?act=news&id=34215&topic=38>; “Musul'man Dagestana prosiat V. Putina otmenit' zapret na knigi Nursi,” *Portal-Credo*, 26 December 2007: <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=59378>.

⁶ Clifford J. Levy, “At Expense of All Others, Putin Picks a Church,” *New York Times*, 24 April 2008: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/24/world/europe/24church.html>.

⁷ H. Con. Res. 190, 109th Congress, 2nd Session, 14 March 2006: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/R?r109:FLD001:H50889>.

⁸ “Opublikovan polnyi tekst doklada o deiatel'nosti Upolnomochennogo po pravam cheloveka v RF v 2005 g.,” *SOVA*, 11 May 2006: <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/community-media/right-protection/2006/05/d8155/>.

⁹ “V priamom efire,” Ignat Belovskii and Irina Reznik, “Tekstil'shchiki protiv mecheti,” *Gazeta.ru*, 22 September 2010: <http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2010/09/22/3422028.shtml>; “9/11. Moskovskaia versiia,” *Archnadzor*, 11 September 2011: <http://www.archnadzor.ru/2011/09/12/9-11-moskovskaya-versiya/>. The Central Mosque was reportedly demolished with the approval of Mufti Ravil Gainutdin.

¹⁰ “Spravka: Moskovskii proekt ‘200 khramov shagovoi dostupnosti’”: predystoriia, pozitsiia mera, adresa,” *Portal-Credo*, 11 November 2010: <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=80782>.

¹¹ “Dannye o kolichestve musul'man, posetivshikh bogosluzheniia na Uraza-Baqiram,” *SOVA*, 31 August 2011: <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/discussions/how-many/2011/08/d22422/>; “Uraza-bairam 2011 v Moskve. Sobornaia mechet,” *You Tube*, 30 August 2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCWFBkiOdo0&feature=related>; “Dannye o posetivshikh paskhal'nye bogosluzheniia v raznykh regionakh,” *SOVA*, 25 April 2011: <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/discussions/how-many/2011/04/d21486/>.

¹² M. I. Odintsov, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov' v XX veke: istoriia vzaimootnosheniia s gosudarstvom i obshchestvom* (Moscow: TslNO, 2002), 11.

¹³ Predsedatel Rossiiskogo soiuza evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov Iurii Sipko, “Gosudarstvo v litse ministerstva iustitsii demonstriruet absolutnoe nevezhestvo v voprosakh very,” *Portal-Credo*, 4 December 2009: <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=authority&id=1297>.

¹⁴ Cited in Wallace L. Daniel, *The Orthodox Church and Civil Society in Russia* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), 70.

¹⁵ “Vladimir Putin vstretilsia v Sviato-Danilovom monastyre s predstaviteliami religioznykh konfessii Rossii,” Vladimir Putin presidential candidacy website, 8 February 2012: <http://putin2012.ru/events/216>.

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How Orthodox Is Russia?

Geraldine Fagan

Cultural Orthodox and Practicing Orthodox

How far is Russian society truly Orthodox? While recent national polls record over 70 percent self-identifying as Orthodox Christians, only some 40 percent believe categorically in God.¹ In their particularly wide-ranging 2005 survey, Dmitri Furman and Kimmo Kääriäinen found only 15 percent accepting the central Christian tenet of resurrection from the dead, while 42 percent trusted astrology. Believers in God had nearly doubled since 1991, yet there was no accompanying shift in moral values. In rates similar to wider society, just 30 percent of believers opposed abortion—only marginally more than in 1991—while those condemning marital infidelity declined by half.²

Receipt of the sacraments by regular participation in Church life is central to the Orthodox faith. Yet few of Russia's majority who identify as Orthodox conform to the Church definition. Recent surveys reveal that while some 80 percent are baptized, over 70 percent have never taken communion in their lives.³ In 2007 the independent Levada Centre polled only two percent attending Orthodox liturgy weekly.⁴

Easter figures for Moscow's approximately 250 churches wavered around one percent of the population, or from 80,000 to 125,000 in 2005-07. In 2009 the Patriarchate circulated a Moscow police figure of 137,000 participating in Easter processions

commencing at midnight—the point of maximum involvement—and 4.5 million attending across Russia.⁵ Even so, this number accounts for only some three percent of a supposedly majority Orthodox population, on the most important church festival of the year. A similar pattern characterizes another major aspect of Orthodox observance: fasting. A 2010 poll found only four percent intending to follow fully the main Lenten fast—involving a seven-week vegan diet—and a further 22 percent in part.⁶

Clergy recognize the gulf between Orthodox allegiance and practice. “It's not one sheep that's gone astray, but the 99,” mused Fr. Oleg Stanyayev. “We're now talking not about a lost sheep, but a lost nation.”⁷ The polls also suggest that the gulf is not one of ignorance, however. Furman and Kääriäinen found respondents choosing to reckon as Orthodox those outside the Church's own determination: 84 percent agreed that “a Russian, even if not baptized or attending church, is still Orthodox in his soul.”⁸ While the dividing line is blurred, we can thus increasingly speak of two Orthodoxies in Russia: one oriented on church canons, the other on popular perception. Sociologist of religion Sergei Filatov suggests that leading hierarchs have facilitated the second of these by publicly appealing to national tradition rather than core Christianity.⁹ Yet this is the Church's only mode of engagement with wider post-Soviet society.

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Religious Minorities

Assuming that only some three percent—or 4.5 million—are practicing Orthodox Christians, Russia retains significant religious minorities. Mirroring the loose identification of Russian ethnicity with Orthodoxy, Aleksei Malashenko estimates around 20 million of Islamic background in Russia, but acknowledges those practicing may be as low as two million.¹⁰ The latter figure tallies roughly with Furman and Kääriainen's and Vyacheslav Karpov and Elena Lisovskaya's reckoning of around three percent.¹¹ Active followers of the other so-called traditional faiths are negligible: While the 2002 national census recorded nearly a quarter of a million ethnic Jews, for example, those even self-identifying as religious are as low as 20,000.¹² While Protestants are likely more numerous than Catholics, Furman and Kääriainen found one percent identifying as Protestant. Very few will be nominally so, however, which explains Patriarchate concern over heterodox competition.

Viewed differently, Orthodox hegemony is even less sweeping. The number of registered religious organizations naturally cannot be considered in an absolute sense, as membership may vary markedly. Nevertheless, obstacles to state registration are typically encountered by non-Patriarchate communities, whereas functioning Patriarchate parishes are fewer than on paper.¹³ Federal statistics consistently place the number of Patriarchate organizations at above half, with the remainder mostly shared between Muslims and Protestant denominations.¹⁴ But while the Patriarchate and overall figures have risen steadily—reaching 12,727 and 23,078 respectively in 2009—increased bureaucratic pressure has seen Muslim and Protestant organizations drop by over a thousand since 2006.¹⁵ The 2009 total also omits at least 10,000 religious groups that have never registered; almost none are likely to be Patriarchate.¹⁶

Geographic Disparities

Filatov observes considerable fluctuations in the strength of Orthodoxy as one moves south or east across Russia, correlating with the timespan for which Moscow has controlled a given territory.¹⁷ Publicized once, in 2002, official figures for registered religious organizations in Russia's seven federal districts confirm this topography. In the Central and North-Western Federal Districts—where Orthodoxy has the longest historical presence—Patriarchate organizations held a clear majority of 5,785 and 1,802 organizations respectively, with Protestants occupying a notable second place. In the Volga and the Southern Federal Districts, just under half of 5,269 and 2,999 organizations were Patriarchate, with Protestants and now Muslims comprising the bulk of the remainder. Beyond the Ural Mountains, the picture grew starker as it panned eastwards: The Patriarchate accounted for markedly fewer than half of the 1,253 and 1,876 organizations in the Ural and Siberian Federal Districts, and barely a third of the Far Eastern Federal District's 908, where Protestants scored a majority 409.¹⁸ ♦

Notes:

¹“83% rossiian ne sobliudaiut ne sobliudaiut Velikii

post,” *SOVA*, 21 April 2008: <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/discussions/how-many/2008/04/d13143/>; Igor' Kononov, “Nedovotserkovlennyye,” *NG-Religiia*, 1 July 2009: http://religion.ng.ru/events/2009-07-01/3_vocerkvlenie.html; D. E. Furman and K. Kääriainen, *Religioznost' v Rossii v 90-ye gody XX – nachale XXI veka*, (Moscow: OGNI TD, 2006), 43.

² Furman and Kääriainen, *Religioznost'*, 43–46, 76–77.
³ Furman and Kääriainen, *Religioznost'*, 13, 56; Nikolai Mitrokhin, “Zakhozhanie. Kto i kak v strane poseshchaet Tserkvi,” *Politicheskii zhurnal*, No. 14 (66), 25 April 2005: <http://www.politjournal.ru/preview.php?action=Articles&dirid=56&tek=3309&issue=99>.

⁴ “Rossiiane stali men'she poseshchat' religioznye sluzhby – opros',” *Interfax*, 8 August 2007: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=19672>.

⁵ “V Moskve na Paskhu khramy posetili 359 tys. Chelovek, kladbishcha-580 tys.,” *SOVA*, 3 May 2005:

<http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/discussions/how-many/2005/05d4466/>; “Paskhal'nye bogosluzheniia v Rossii posetilo znachital'no men'she veruiushchikh, chem predskazyvali sotsiologi,” *Portal-Credo*, 24 April 2006: <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id42586&topic=108>; “Po dannym GUV D paskhal'nye bogosluzheniia v Moskve posetili bolee 300 tys. chelovek,” *Interfax*, 8 April 2007: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=17589>.

⁶ “Velikii post sobiraiutsia sobliudat' 4 protsenta rossiian,” *Religare*, 12 February 2010: http://www.religare.ru/s_72801.html.

⁷ “Po mneniiu sviashchennika Olega Steniaeva, RPTs zagoniaut v getto, a v khristianstve chto-to ponimaet odin protsent naseleniia,” *Blagovest-info*, 1 February 2005: http://www.religare.ru/2_14120.html.

⁸ Furman and Kääriainen, *Religioznost'*, 41.

⁹ Sergei Filatov, “Posleslovie. Religiia v postsovetsskoi Rossii,” in *Religiia i obshchestvo: Ocherki religioznoi zhizni sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Letnii sad, 2002), 474.

¹⁰ Aleksei Malashenko, *Islam dlia Rossii* (Moscow: Moskovskii Tsentr Karnegi, 2007), 10.

¹¹ Furman and Kääriainen, *Religioznost'*, 43; Vyacheslav Karpov and Elena Lisovskaya, “Religious Intolerance among Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Russia,” *Religion, State & Society* 36 (December 2008), 365.

¹² Sergei Filatov and Roman Lunin, “Statistics on Religion in Russia: The Reality behind the Figures,” *Religion, State & Society* 34 (March 2006), 37.

¹³ Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaiia Tserkov': sovremennoe sostoianie i actual'nye problemy* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006), 69, 74.

¹⁴ “Svedeniia o religioznykh organizatsiakh, zaregistrirrovannykh v Rossiiskoi Federatsii po dannym gosudarstvennogo reestra na 1 ianvaria 2001 g.,” http://www.archipelag.ru/ru_mir/religio/statistics/said/statistics-2001/; “Za proshedsheie dva goda dolia obshchin Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi v Rossii uvelichilas'- statistika,” *Interfax*, 20 September 2006: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/national/?act=news&div=14045>.

¹⁵ “Reportazh: Sobstvennost' – RPTs MP, ostal'nyim – uchet i kontrol'. V Gosdume obsudili gridushchie izmeneniia v zakonodatel'stve o svobode sovesti,” *Portal-Credo*, 13 March 2009: <http://www.portal-credo.ru/>

Assuming that only some three percent—or 4.5 million—are practicing Orthodox Christians, Russia retains significant religious minorities.

credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=69222.

¹⁶ Andrei Mel'nikov, "Ukorochennaia propoved," *NG-Religii*, 21 October 2009: http://religion.ng.ru/events/2009-10-21/1_missionerstvo.html?mthree=2.

¹⁷ Sergei Filatov, "Mnogotsvetie volshebnoogo sada rossiiskoi dukhovnosti: dvadtsat' let vozrastaniia religioznogo mnogoobraziia postsovetskoi Rossii," in *Dvadtsat' let religioznoi svobody v Rossii* (Moscow: Moskovskii Tsentri Karnegi, 2009), 18-37.

¹⁸ Anatolii Krasikov, "Svoboda sovesti – vazhnoe uslovie grazhdanskogo mira i mezhnatsional'nogo

soglasii. Doklad prezidenta Evraziiskogo otdeleniia mezhdunarodnoi assotsiatsii religioznoi svobody," 27 November 2002: <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/print.php?act=news&id=5159>.

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Book Review

Geraldine Fagan. *Believing in Russia – Religious Policy after Communism*. London: Routledge, 2013.

There is no book in English comparable to this one in the authority that it brings to the portrayal of Russian religious policy. The analysis is built from the author's decade-long and in-depth experience in Russia. It relies on up-to-date data and documents, taking into account significant alternative works in both English and Russian publications. Geraldine Fagan traverses Russian society and culture freely as a veteran correspondent and religious rights advocate working for Forum 18 News Service. Scholars and religious workers have relied on the accurate and timely reporting of Forum 18 for reliable knowledge about the conditions of religious rights in the countries that were created from the former Soviet Union. With Fagan at the point, Forum 18 has penetrated the peripheries of the great expanses of Russia as well as its urbanized core to get the particulars of local government and court actions and to portray the conditions on the ground in intimate detail. This book uses that close-up knowledge to assess the great changes that are taking place in the religious and political sphere since the demise of the USSR.

The portrayal of the multi-faceted political processes that led up to the passage of the pivotal 1997 law, which favored four religions by name, is clearer than any other I have read. Fagan's analysis in Chapter 6 of the narrative surrounding the "traditional religions" designation is very helpful in clarifying how the concept, which is not explicitly stated in the 1997 law, gained legs. The analytical descriptions of the ongoing consequences of the (mis-)application of this law for the range of religious groups from Jehovah's Witnesses to conservative Muslims builds a portrait of frequent indifference to norms of justice, but with noteworthy exceptions that prove the rule. The favoritism given to the Russian Orthodox Church and the deference to the Moscow Patriarchate are well documented, as is the Patriarchate's aggressive pursuit of its own privilege. The discussion of the ebb and flow of debate about and preparation for religious education in schools gets beneath the headlines to help the reader perceive the fundamental structure of interests that has driven this rocky process of change.

Opposite the copyright page of the book, the author uses the words of Luke 9:49-50, first in Old Russian script and then in English translation, as a

kind of frontispiece, presaging some of what comes after. "And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us." In a secular age and in a society with a history of a particularly virulent strain of militant atheism, faith differences too quickly get interpreted as animosities. This is a systemic problem in post-Soviet Russia, a country that started out in 1991 with a liberal legal approach to religion but has become a society in which persecution and favoritism define religious policy. More aptly, as Fagan conceives it, Russia has a *non-policy* on the federal level, the center ceding control of religion to local prerogatives that are often decidedly contrary to the Russian constitution. Concentrating on self-promotion and protection of special interests, central authorities, led by Vladimir Putin, curry favor with the Russian Orthodox, expecting Orthodox identity to unite the diverse faith groups within the Federation. Unfortunately, if Fagan is correct – and I believe that she is – the social bond that defines Russia no longer can be subsumed (if it ever was) under the umbrella of *Pravoslavie* [Orthodoxy]. Lack of attention to building a broader civic cultural identity threatens the future of a united Russia.

With the Boston Marathon bomb attacks in mind, the importance of works such as Fagan's is ever more apparent. Ignorance of religion and of state policy toward religion (and closely related ethnic dynamics) is dangerous. This ignorance has global consequences that are revealed as we learn that practice in distant locales in Russia may have shaped murderous actions in the United States. Moreover, inside Russia, denying the fundamental religious rights of significant populations leads to strife that can escalate to violence under the right circumstances. In situations in which diverse religious orientations are persecuted or suppressed, and in which the state sets so much of the tone, with religious groups acting accordingly, inter-group hatred and violence are not far behind. Russia provides perhaps too apt an example of these social and spiritual dynamics and regressive tendencies. ♦

Jerry Pankhurst, *Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio*

Russia has a *non-policy* on the federal level, the center ceding control of religion to local prerogatives that are often decidedly contrary to the Russian constitution.

Advice for Ministry in Central Asia

“Nuriddin Vlashinov” with “Andrew Colbourne”

Preparing for Service

When I first arrived in Central Asia over a decade ago, the team I joined quarantined me for a week because I had not received a proper introduction into what it means to live and work in such a context. I had completed a rather long application to a mission agency and was accepted within a few weeks, but this ministry did not have the human resource capacity or time to prepare me for what was to follow. Of the four other new missionary team members, I was the only one who stayed on the field more than a few months. I managed to survive because of the deep relationship I developed with the team leader and the resilience I had acquired during my life up to that moment. But my work could have ended in disappointment, lack of clarity of God’s calling on my life, or personal harm. Ministry in Central Asia is hard, and Christian workers too often leave because of family issues, team conflicts, need for psychiatric treatment, ministry disillusionment, or difficult living conditions.

Thus, to avoid being a Central Asian missionary casualty, careful preparation is essential. First, one should be one hundred percent certain of one’s spiritual calling. It is essential to be confident that one is headed for the place to which God is leading one. *The Call* by Os Guinness (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998) could help clarify God’s purposes, including a healthy, realistic focus on what one life can accomplish. Most sending agencies spell out the level of biblical training required of their candidates. Such formal grounding in Scripture not only undergirds spiritual calling, it also helps sustain the new missionary on site.

Experience in ministry is also highly advisable prior to overseas missionary service. Regardless of prerequisites, some practical, hands-on ministry experience is greatly encouraged. Too many workers burn out in the first term because the learning curve is so steep. It is important to get involved in the “mess of ministry”—the difficult, painful, and complicated sides of pastoral care in one’s own culture first. Most of the lessons learned through involvement in ministry in one’s home environment will transfer directly to a missionary context.

Another prerequisite for missionary service is robust physical and mental health. Sending organizations typically require routine medical checkups while some favor more elaborate physical and emotional screenings through such services as InterHealth (London, England, www.interhealth.org). We have seen too many workers unable to function or leaving the field because of health issues. The fact is that throughout Central Asia, medical services are still basic or inadequate. For one’s physical and mental health, two vacations per year are advisable, one of which should be outside the region.

Coping with Culture Shock

An inevitable ordeal for new missionaries is culture shock. Its negative aspects, however, can be greatly reduced by preparing for it, studying the phenomenon, and learning from others who have successfully weathered it. One’s team members on the ground can be a great help in seeing one through it. For some new missionaries culture shock comes the minute they step

off the plane. For others it comes as a rude awakening after six months or a year. In the latter case, it is much deeper and harder to manage. In dealing with culture shock we have found that the best advice is to talk about it. It is essential to lean on friends locally who can help one deal with the disorienting realities of the world in which one lives.

It is widely recognized that reading about and studying the effects of culture shock can lessen the severity of the experience. Highly recommended are the following books by Duane Elmer, all published by InterVarsity Press: *Cross Cultural Conflict; Building Relationships for Effective Ministry* (1993); *Cross Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting in Around the World* (2002); and *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* (2006).

Studying the missionary experience in general and Central Asian history, culture, and current events can also lessen the discomfort of culture shock and better prepare one for effective service in a post-Soviet, Islamic context. We recommend the Perspectives Course (www.perspectives.org), general courses and readings on Central Asian history and religion, mission-oriented preparation through Sahara Challenge training and trips and the Bridges DVD study and seminars (<http://www.crescentproject.org>), and news sources including Forum 18 (forum18.org) and Radio Free Europe (www.rferl.org). In studying Central Asian religion, it is best not to focus on Islam in general, but rather its expressions in the post-Soviet context. One informative source is Morgan Y. Liu, “Central Asia in the Post-Cold War World,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (October 2011): 115-31; www.annualreviews.org.

In coping with culture shock, the new missionary must also come to terms with the question of personal identity. At home, one’s family, church, schooling, and job help define who one is, but almost all of these “locators” are set aside abroad. One must prepare as best one can for the painful process of being stripped of much of one’s identity based on one’s home culture. While this personal loss can actually be positive in a spiritual sense (the stripping process allows God to replace self-identification and self-absorption with Himself), it is not a pleasant experience.

Think of serious burn patients who need to have their scabs removed in order for new skin to grow. New missionaries, for all intents and purposes, are children in their new culture. Cross-cultural adjustment is awkward, frustrating, exhilarating, and difficult all at the same time, but the result (a mature person who can function and minister within the new culture) is worth the pain.

The speed with which new missionaries succeed in overcoming culture shock depends in part upon how, and how often, they maintain ties back home. Email and Skype, for example, can ease the disorientation of much that is new and strange about Central Asia. However, daily communications with family and friends may actually inhibit coming to terms with one’s new cultural environment. It is healthiest to live one’s life fully in one’s new ministry setting, recognizing that constant communications with home folk may delay

Studying the missionary experience in general and Central Asian history, culture, and current events can lessen the discomfort of culture shock.

overcoming cross-cultural shock. Regular exercise can also ease one's cultural transition and provide long-term staying power. Staying fit and staying healthy is part and parcel of personal well-being and contributes to long-term survival in Central Asia.

Language Study

Finally, in preparing for service in Central Asia, the question of language acquisition deserves serious consideration. First, which language should one study? Should it be a Central Asian language—Uzbek, Kazakh, Khirgiz, Tadjhik, Turkmen—or Russian? Or an indigenous language and Russian? Once this issue is settled, is language study best tackled prior to missionary service, during one's first term of service, or some combination of the two? (*Editor's note: On the theme of language acquisition see Marc T. Conner, "Russian Language for Missionaries: Start Now Before Departure," East-West Church and Ministry Report 3 [Fall 1995]: 5-6; and Beverly Nickles, "Russian Language for Missionaries: The Russian Context Is Best," East-West Church and Ministry Report 3 [Fall 1995]: 4-5.*)

Whether or not one begins language training before departure, learning on the field through immersion is unquestionably much deeper and faster. Once in country, we recommend finding two or more language partners: at least one teacher and one language helper. All teachers have their strong points, and if a particular teacher loves grammar, then that will be what one learns. Utilizing two or more teachers helps provide a more well-rounded learning experience. Using different curricula and having a language tutor assist with homework and assignments can also be a help. Conversational practice with a tutor is a great asset as well. Recruiting a university student who wants to practice English allows one to "trade" time with a Central Asian language speaker and opens doors for sharing the Good News.

In language—and missionary service in general—flexibility is a key asset. It is best not to wait for the ideal language teacher or tutor to surface. Instead, get started as soon as possible, rather than wait for the "perfect" instructor. In Central Asia few things go perfectly in any case.

Accountability

Once in place in Central Asia, accountability with one's team leader and teammates deserves high priority. It is important to be open, to share one's struggles, to ask for help, and to take advice from those who know Central Asia from personal experience. Very few people succeed long-term in Central Asia without solid accountability partners.

Many mission agencies arrange for new recruits to live for a time with a local family. Such an arrangement can teach valuable lessons in sharing, especially for those coming from individualistic cultures. It also can give the new missionary a belonging community for the long term.

Cultural Do's and Don'ts

Host families and teammates can both provide a wealth of critical suggestions on everyday life and cultural taboos. For example, these relationships can teach one appropriate and inappropriate gestures: how one should comport oneself in a new culture.

1. Do not blow one's nose in public.
2. Point with two fingers, or better yet, with one's hand.
3. Hail taxis and buses with a downward wave. Do not raise one's arm above 90 degrees.
4. A flick on the neck under the chin implies heavy drinking.
5. Do not lick fingers after a meal.
6. Watch how Central Asians engage in handshakes, hugs, kisses, and greetings.
7. Use an "Amen" to finish a prayer, a meal, or to indicate that something/someone has finished or passed on. With cupped, up-facing palms, bring them to one's face and wipe them down to the chin.
8. A slicing motion along the neck with one's thumb indicates "full," "up to here," or "plenty" of something.
9. Do not slap one's hand on top of one's fist. This refers to sexual intercourse or prostitution, as does a single index finger wiped along one's eyebrow.
10. Men arm-in-arm or women hand-in-hand is normal in most Central Asian contexts and does not imply homosexual relations.
11. Learn the different forms of address for older and younger individuals. In making new acquaintances, one of the first questions always relates to age, asking politely what year someone was born, so that one will know how to converse properly. People are generally forgiving of grammatical mistakes when they observe clear signs of showing respect.

Combining Witness and Work

In Central Asia missionaries typically combine Christian witness and work in a business or NGO. If one holds to a holistic perspective of life, where everything one does is for God, one may find that even "secular" work is ministry, with opportunities to witness for Christ coming in the course of one's employment. At the same time, one should not treat one's work as an excuse for doing ministry. People will soon understand that, and that will give them the wrong message. It is best to be involved in genuine work, be it an NGO or business. Both will give one enough freedom to live one's life and conduct ministry in Central Asia. In one's employment it is also a valuable service to teach local believers skills that will help them find jobs so that they can remain in their country and minister there. This holistic approach is far preferable to running a short-term project. We have seen far too many Central Asian believers leaving a key area of ministry due to lack of employment that can sustain their family.

Coping with Corruption

As one works in business or in an NGO, an understanding of post-Soviet bureaucracy and market functions and dysfunction is essential. How one will respond to pressures to bribe is best resolved before one inevitably finds oneself in such circumstances in Central Asia. For help in thinking through and praying through issues of bribery and extortion see Ron Koteskey's e-book, *Missionaries and Bribery* (missionarycare.com) and various responses to the predicament provided by post-Soviet church nationals

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and Western Christians: *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 5 (Winter 1997): 8-10; 21 (Winter 2013): 14-16.

The present authors have divergent views on bribery, but they both are successful in their interaction with officials. Also, if one manages people, it is important to have a solid biblical understanding of the ethics of work. As lax as work discipline may appear in a Western context, Central Asian society functions at an even slower, more casual pace, and missionaries should not presume that they can fix all ills that they encounter in life.

Location and Finances

Another practical decision missionaries to Central Asia have to make concerns location. Living in urban areas affords anonymity, more foreign relationships (which can be helpful or harmful), better access to resources (printed materials, computer repairs, car parts, etc.), greater schooling choices for children, and usually more open-minded people. Living in rural areas offers a slower pace of life, more opportunities for conversation, simpler living without the distractions of modern technology, and ready, aspiring English speakers (and thereby virtually unlimited language practice). Urban and rural choices also, naturally, have their drawbacks. In large cities, people often do not have time to talk, while small towns and villages often have more narrow-minded citizens. In any case, prospective missionaries should discuss their choices of location with their families, keeping in mind their needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

Finances deserve attention as well. Most of Central Asia remains a cash transaction environment. However, the region is changing quickly, and ATMs are in increasing evidence in large cities. It is advisable to establish a bank account which will help with salary and other necessary transfers. In preparing for missionary service and in planning budgets, cost-of-living information provided by trusted sources in a country can be quite useful. Everyone spends money differently, so it is a good idea to learn the cost of basic items.

Lifestyle and Team Relations

Missionaries in every context, including Central Asia, have to decide how closely they will identify with those they hope to influence spiritually, including lifestyle—the degree to which they maintain Western forms and levels of comfort versus indigenous living conditions and customs. Additionally, if one chooses to live in a Western style, how Western (how comfortable

with how many modern conveniences)? If one chooses to live like Central Asians, how much so (like a wealthy or a poor native)? Practical questions that need to be considered include the following: How often will one want to shower? How important is an indoor toilet? How important is running water? How long can one live in uncomfortable circumstances? How important is warmth in the winter? How important is personal privacy? And how will one cope in a new environment?

The truth of the matter is that imprisonment or death rarely end missionary service. Rather, the difficulties of everyday life, strained interpersonal relations with team members, or conflicts with indigenous coworkers more often cut ministry short in Central Asia—as elsewhere. “Inglorious” challenges of living on the field (cold, sickness, lack of privacy, cultural clashes) can quickly eclipse the “glorious” challenges (persecution for one’s faith) in the day-in/day-out grind of living in Central Asia.

In Conclusion

In preparing for ministry in Central Asia, many tasks can and should be undertaken beforehand to ease cross-cultural adjustment. But ultimately, nothing is more vital than one’s identity in Christ and permanently abiding in Him. Challenges and difficulties will come, but if faith is strong, so will be one’s dedication and desire to learn and adapt. Missionary candidates should be prepared to suffer. It is part of life, not an accident or something to avoid. The suffering that comes with living in Central Asia is not glamorous: electricity goes off and one misses Skype with one’s parents; an electric meter is not working and electricity is cut off for days in the middle of the winter; water pipes freeze in December, meaning no running water until March, etc. It is not that one is likely to be put in jail. Rather, one will be pushed to the limits of one’s patience and one’s trust in God. Thankfully, nevertheless, the discomforts and stress and frustrations are worth it because God is the author and finisher of faith. It is well to remember that when one changes location to Central Asia, God does not change, and the “mission field” does not change. God’s mission field continues to be the heart of every member of His creation, including the heart of His missionaries. ♦

“Nuriddin Vlashinov” and “Andrew Colbourne” are missionaries in Central Asia.

Many tasks can and should be undertaken beforehand to ease cross-cultural adjustment. But ultimately, nothing is more vital than one’s identity in Christ and permanently abiding in Him.

The Missionary Practice of the Gospel in the Secular Environment of the Czech Republic

Pavel Černý

Recapturing the Meaning of Mission and Evangelization

Due to the fact that the word *mission* has been often misused by various ideologies and deformed by incorrect historical interpretations, it evolved merely into a swear-word or at least into a word with pejorative connotations. The mission of the church is closely related to the practice of the Gospel in the

secular environment of the Czech Republic. Through its new understanding, which springs from re-reading the Bible from a missionary perspective and a radical contextualization of the Gospel of Christ, mission inspires ecumenical dialogue, helps churches in their orientation, and leads to their cooperation in the practice of the Gospel.

Repeatedly, Professor Pavel Filipi has stressed that the Gospel of Christ crosses various borderlines

between peoples, and it connects, unifies, and overcomes differences, contradictions, and disputes (*Církev a církev: Kapitoly z ekumenické eklesiologie* [Brno: CDEK, 2000]). How can the Gospel of Christ influence the theology of mission of the Christian churches and practice of the Gospel in the thoroughly secular Czech Republic?

First, we need to admit that in the Czech environment the words *mission* and *evangelization* are not commonly used anymore. It may be the result of the long life of our churches under totalitarian regimes, when very limited and restricted religious freedoms were preserved, with a focus mainly on the performance of liturgical acts inside churches, chapels, and prayer rooms. The churches were not allowed to appear in public. Thus churches and congregations, little by little, became used to caring more for themselves than for missionary work and evangelization outside their communities. Even now some Christians react antagonistically upon even hearing the terms *mission* or *evangelization* and consider them to be anachronistic relics of the past.

Thus, the practice of mission and evangelization is problematic in the Czech environment. After all, it means to approach people, search for a comprehensible language, disrespect any limitations, and disturb the self-confidence of an isolated island of a few rescued. This is exactly where we have to deal with serious questions of our understanding of the missionary work of the church. I highlight for consideration only the four most pressing questions regarding mission and evangelization.

Mission in a Multi-Faith World

The peaceful coexistence of world religions is very important, and inter-religious dialogue is deeply rooted in the ground of the theology of mission. Nevertheless, it is important to discern what exactly we expect from this dialogue. It seems that proselytizing among Christian churches has been overcome and nearly eliminated. The churches mutually respect their affirmations of the Savior's grace and diversity of gifts of the Spirit. Is it possible, however, to adopt such a stance also toward other religions? Is it not the case that we should rather proselytize among members of those religions and give them the same chances? Is it not rather important to grasp anew Him whom the Christian churches worship and serve? Theological research should help us make a clear decision as to whether we want partnership or association with other religions or whether we should try to proselytize among their adherents—on the assumption that other religions will do the same.

Certainly we have to respect other religions and treat them with dignity, but it does not mean that our testimony of Jesus Christ should be concealed as an esoteric teaching. In an inter-religious dialogue, it is the very integrity of our faith which is tested. A dialogue with partners who hide the most precious belief they hold soon ceases to be interesting. Members of other religions very often express disdain and mockery for those unable or unwilling to confess their faith.

Professor Filipi also warns about the danger of confessional vagueness. False tolerance, which defends itself with such vagueness, is not a positive

value. Inter-religious dialogue should not be taken as a “warehouse” of diverse beliefs. Friendly relations among people of different religions should not be an obstacle to confessional forthrightness in the context of the Christian understanding of salvation.

Secularization or the Return of God

Friedrich Nietzsche foretold the death of God and many after him repeated monotonously “God is Dead,” but it seems that the phrase “God is back” would better fit the current situation. Everything points toward the fact that the global trend of secularization has stopped. In 1990, 67 percent of people professed one of the world's four largest religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism). In 2005 it was already 73 percent. According to estimates, the number will rise to 80 percent of the world population by 2025. In contrast, in the 1960s and 1970s, many theological documents considered secularization irreversible.

European theology in particular has been strongly affected by secularization as church membership has declined year after year, and Christianity gradually has become a minority religion. Undoubtedly, certain waves of secularization have taken place. On the other hand, it must be said that on a global scale secularization is not as successful. Be it the effect of migration of population or the spreading of the postmodern paradigm of spirituality and desire for transcendence, we can speak about the “return of God” in Europe.

A thorough sociological analysis of secularization trends and its opposites is offered in Zdenek R. Nešpor's *Priliš slábi ve vire: Česká ne/religiozita v evropském kontextu* [*Too Weak in Faith: Czech (Non)Religiosity in the European Context*] (Prague: Kalich, 2010), which strongly challenges Europe's understanding of secularization. Nešpor contends, “Contemporary Czech society is still not as atheist as it might like to ‘proudly’ think and claim about itself. It is, rather, anti-clerical. Generally speaking, Czechs refuse the Christian God. But they do not cease to believe in something, identifying it occasionally with the structures of the fragmentary Christian memory tucked in the social consciousness” (p. 188).

The current missionary condition is actually much closer to that of the first century A.D. than to the past four or five decades. Today we also encounter polytheism, myriad mystery cults, and various forms of old and new religions. It is quite obvious that Communist totalitarian ideology also had its religious content and character. From this point of view it is quite surprising that emphasis upon the rational aspects of faith still prevails over religious experience in many Protestant churches.

Dialogue and Cooperation with Churches of Other Languages

Today non-native English-speaking immigrants prevail among participants of Sunday worship in London. This is an example of the fact that some European cities are experiencing an increase of influence of immigrant church communities. The Czech Republic still does not have as many immigrants as Western Europe. However, Korean, Russian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Japanese, and multinational congregations have emerged on Czech

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Missionary Practice in Czech Republic (continued from page 9)

territory. Some of these churches belong to traditional denominations, while some are independent. This is a great chance for theological dialogue and mutual enrichment in the field of mission. At a time when the European concept of multiculturalism is in decay or even in ruins, Christian churches should be able to manifest their ability to overcome ethnocentrism and cultural differences.

New churches now evangelize among Czech citizens and spread their faith in a country which, to them, is foreign. Will Czech Christians be able to create a favorable environment for newly contextualized missionary church models? Will they be open to dialogue which can positively influence the missionary work of existing churches? This still remains an open question.

Culture

Missiologist and theologian Jonathan J. Bonk has written that “theology can be liberated from cultural bounds only through mission” (“Missions and the Liberation of Theology,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34 [No. 4, 2010], 194). This understanding is hardly new; we can verify its validity on the pages of Scripture itself, depicting the development of the early church. The Apostle Paul is an archetypal bearer of the missionary quest who preaches the Gospel connecting Jewish and Greek thought. His theology is shaped by his mission, which entails a spiritual struggle to contextualize the Gospel in a foreign cultural environment.

A 2010 European Jesuit conference which interpreted secular culture as a challenge for new evangelization. Since modernity stands on two pillars – the development of science and a new self-understanding of the individual – the postmodern era brings religion back on the stage, even though it has the shape of a wide pluralism. Irish Jesuit Michael Paul Gallagher describes postmodernity as “cultural hopelessness and inconsolability,” but, on the other hand, it also means “new openness to faith” (Jan Regner, “Evangelizace v sekularizovaném svete,” *Universum* 21 [No. 1, 2010], 30-31).

A rationale for missionary efforts very often shines through the pages of the Old and New Testaments. To approach the biblical text without

any knowledge of the missionary quest of Israel and that of the early church means giving too much space to modern culture (Pavel Černý, “The Relationship between Theology and Missiology: The Missiological Hermeneutics,” *European Journal of Theology* 21 [No. 2, 2010], 104-09).

Conclusion

Europeans once played a leading role at theological conferences; now it is their time to show humility and accept the missionary call of non-European churches, even in Europe. It is not easy to learn from those whose Christianity is still relatively young. We should pay attention to cultural study of the present epoch in which we live, because culture determines much more than we are willing to admit. That being the case, theological schools should make what we might call a “missionary audit” of their curricula and ethos to improve their service to the church’s missionary quest and to answer today’s challenges. Theology that does not take seriously the church’s missionary imperative is in danger of escapism, can lose its relevance, and can blind itself to the necessity of evangelization and the social mission of the church.

Materially saturated Europe has been manifesting a spiritual hunger in recent years. Just “googling” the words *Europe* and *spirituality* produces four million links. Despite the fact that many of these items deal with occultism or paranormal phenomena, we still can recognize that many millions of Europeans sense that there might be something more than material life. People seek answers to their difficult questions. They crave spiritual experience and search for meaning in life. What will be the answer of Christian theology—and practical theology in particular—to this spiritual need? ♦

Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Central European Missiological Forum, 2011; <http://www.missioncentre.eu/files/CEMF%202011.pdf>.

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Czech Church Property Restitution: Can It Avoid Corruption?

Jonathan Crane

Criticism and Skepticism

When the Czech Parliament passed a controversial church restitution bill into law in November 2012, it marked the end of a 20-year struggle between church and government on how best to compensate religious organizations for property seized by the former communist regime. Seen by many as the last phase of privatization after the Velvet Revolution, the legislation has attracted much criticism from a largely atheistic population, especially during this time of economic crisis.

President Václav Klaus showed his displeasure by neither signing nor vetoing the law, expressing his view that it would open the floodgates for other

restitution claims prior to the 1948 cut-off date, notably those of the Sudeten Germans who were expelled after World War II. However, others are predicting a far bigger problem: that the churches don’t have the means to manage the unprecedented scale of their returns, and consequently, that the entire process could fall victim to corruption.

“I’m a realist living in the Czech Republic,” said anti-graft campaigner Adriana Krnáčová. “I know what the quality of local administration is like, not to mention the culture that exists in our political establishment. So I would say the prospect that these financial transactions won’t be affected by corruption is impossible. I wish I could be convinced otherwise.”

The Terms of Legislation

Under the legislation, 17 churches and other religious groups will get back 56 percent of their land and property, valued at 75 billion Koruna (\$3.75 billion), while the remaining real estate that cannot be returned in accordance with the law will be compensated to the tune of some 59 billion Koruna (\$2.95 billion), spread over three decades. At the same time, the state will gradually reduce its 1.4 billion Koruna (\$70 million) in annual subsidies to the church, currently used to pay clergy wages and maintain church buildings. While the subsidies are set to disappear in annual increments, it is estimated the properties to be returned generate as much as 4.5 billion Koruna (\$225 million) every year. The Catholic Church stands to gain about 80 percent of the total.

The Process

According to the Culture Ministry, religious organizations will have one year to submit their requests, expected to number in the thousands, and must be able to prove the land or property belonged to them in the days immediately before the February 1948 communist coup. Given that records from the period were badly kept, many are wondering how it will even be possible for the different groups to compile an accurate list of what they owned.

Throw into the mix more than 200,000 hectares (772 square miles) of land, comprising forests, farmland, and lakes (making the Catholic Church the country's biggest landowner), combined with uncertainty regarding the real estate's true market value, and this could be a recipe for disaster. "It's a sort of voucher privatization for churches," Krnáčová said. "The biggest risk I see is the churches surrendering either to private speculators or businessmen with access to public money. In these two cases, they would lose their property just like during the voucher privatization of the 1990s."

Catholic Monsignor Tomas Holub, secretary general of the Czech Bishops' Conference, says all transactions will undergo two steps of control, with those worth more than 50,000 Koruna (\$2,500)

needing approval from the economic councils of individual bishoprics. The Bishops' Conference has also created a special commission to prepare and review proposals. Father Josef Hurt, who is used to looking after a small plot of land in his picturesque parish of Kryry, northwest Bohemia, wants to believe in the system. However, despite possessing basic knowledge of property management, the 48-year-old priest worries he and his colleagues lack the necessary support from above to handle the demands effectively.

Fears of Corruption

"We should definitely be concerned about this transfer of property, especially since the current government isn't really trustworthy," he said. "A brief glance at their conduct should serve as warning. The environment inside Parliament is corrupt, and we have to ask ourselves why these politicians agreed so easily to give church restitution the green light."

"Churches can never be ready for the administration of such an enormous amount of property," added David Ondráčka, head of the Czech branch of Transparency International. "Inevitably, they will outsource some services by hiring external managers, lawyers, and advisers, which will then raise questions over the quality and transparency of that process. I can easily envisage a number of sharks who smell blood."

In the meantime, all Father Hurt can do is stay positive, waiting to see what happens. "I would like to think of the restitutions as a chance," he said. "Maybe we could invest in schools and charities. Some are even saying churches might be able to reap more from the land than its current private owners. With these finances, we could go a long way toward helping people in need." ♦

Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Jonathan Crane, "Restitution Bill Leaves Church Leaders Struggling to Avoid the Corruption Trap," The Prague Post, 2 January 2013.

Jonathan Crane is a staff writer for The Prague Post.

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Acts of Vandalism Against Russian Religious Centers

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Orthodox	16	16	12	37
New Religious Movements	4	14	16	10
Jewish	21	14	14	8
Muslim	8	9	17	5
Protestant	4	3	5	4
Catholic	1			1
Armenian Apostolic	4	2		
Pagan		1	1	

Source: SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, Moscow; <http://www.sovacenter.ru/en/database/>.

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

Mark R. Elliott and Caleb Conover, compilers

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 Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, and Hungary. See 21 (Winter 2013), 4, for explanatory notes.

Churches	Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
	2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
Orthodox	270	330	431,138	347,305	720,000	580,000
Greek Orthodox	10		18,000		30,000	
Serbian Orthodox		1		2,635		4,400
Romanian Orthodox		1		2,635		4,400
*Roman Catholic	200	49	312,210	196,364	521,390	432,000
Charismatic/Pentecostal	44	60	1,475	2,676	2,600	4,550
Word of Life	8	12	550	1,517	800	2,200
Foursquare Gospel		13		1,050		2,205
Assemblies of God	4	12	410	400	600	1,550
Church of God (Cleveland)		3		85		195
United Pentecostal		1		25		25
Nehemiah (Pentecostal)		5		600		810
Rilindja (Evangelical)		4		470		658
Baptist	8	7	600	300	1,000	420
Church of the Nazarene		4		65		110
Brethren Little Flock		2		90		144
Church of Christ		12		480		864
Disciple	5	5	400	500	550	700
Christian Brethren	25	20	500	525	800	860
Evangelical Church	6	22	365	560	500	840
Disciples of Jesus		16		640		928
Christ Groups (Every Home for Christ)		27		1,233		1,850
New Apostolic	12	12	1,205	1,476	2,000	2,450
Seventh-day Adventist		4		350		490
Other Denominations (13)	40		2,350		3,700	
TOTALS	632	622	769,203	561,981	1,283,940	1,042,649

*2010 figures derived from the HTML format.

Churches	Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
	2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
Serbian Orthodox	250	290	482,759	731,034	700,000	1,060,000
Roman Catholic	310	275	469,748	326,207	681,135	473,000
Old Catholic		1		255		510
Evangelical (Pentecostal)	16	15	400	350	700	850
United Pentecostal		2		17		25
Baptist	12	12	250	360	400	540
Evangelical Christian Church (Lutheran)	2	2	350	304	500	435
Christian Brethren		1		10		17
Seventh-day Adventist	20	22	650	455	1,000	700
New Apostolic		4		179		250
Other Independent		5		156		250
Other Denominations (6)	10		541		967	
TOTALS	620	629	954,698	1,059,327	1,384,702	1,536,577

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

Bulgaria	Three Major Beliefs		2001	2010			
	Christian		80.24	79.91			
	Muslim		11.87	12.10			
	Non-Religious		7.83	7.94			
Churches		Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
		2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
Bulgarian Orthodox		3,769	3,509	4,296,296	4,000,000	5,800,000	5,400,000
Orthodox Church of Bulgaria		325	299	370,370	340,741	500,000	460,000
Armenian Orthodox		11	10	14,599	13,139	20,000	18,000
Other Orthodox			12		6,000		12,000
Roman Catholic		32	55	66,667	54,815	90,000	74,000
Pentecostal Union		550	571	25,000	37,762	57,000	54,000
Church of God (Cleveland)		269	410	36,000	22,754	45,000	38,000
Church of God Union		180	177	23,000	22,215	31,000	37,000
Foursquare Gospel			31		2,500		3,000
Church of God of Prophecy			3		312		500
Other Independent & Charismatic			21		2,100		3,234
Baptist		102	83	5,000	5,000	7,500	7,500
Congregational		64	56	3,000	2,812	5,000	4,500
United Methodist		36	9	3,200	857	5,000	2,400
Christian Brethren			15		450		1,125
Church of God (Anderson)			22		330		800
Church of the Nazarene			17		300		450
Children of God			4		130		200
New Apostolic			14		187		280
Turkish Congregations			125		1,500		2,310
Seventh-day Adventist		94	120	6,925	8,400	9,400	11,340
Other Protestant			53		1,750		3,500
Other Marginal			28		2,750		4,400
Other Denominations		214		16,292		30,208	
Doubly Affiliated							155,500
TOTALS		5,646	5,644	4,866,349	4,526,804	6,600,108	6,294,039

Croatia	Three Major Beliefs		2001	2010			
	Christian		94.43	91.96			
	Muslim		3.00	1.90			
	Non-Religious/Other		2.52	6.01			
Churches		Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
		2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
Roman Catholic		1,445	1,600	2,689,655	2,655,172	3,900,000	3,850,000
National Old Catholic			12		3,000		6,000
Old Catholic			3		2,000		5,000
Serbian Orthodox		100	47	172,414	179,310	250,000	260,000
Evangelical (Pentecostal)		36	60	1,500	2,400	3,200	4,000
Foursquare Gospel			6		400		800
Church of God			8		200		308
United Pentecostal			2		25		50
Other Pentecostal			5		800		1,400
Baptist		41	56	3,000	2,100	5,000	3,570
Reformed Christian			21		1,800		3,100
Evangelical Church of Croatia (Lutheran)		25	9	4,500	1,550	9,000	3,100
Slovak Evangelical (Lutheran)		16		7,692		11,000	
Church of United Brethren			3		260		400
Christian Brethren			2		75		115
United Methodist			1		11		20
Seventh-day Adventist			82		3,000		4,620
Other Protestant			10		670		1,032
Other Denominations (19)		155		11,000		23,000	
TOTALS		1,818	1,927	2,889,761	2,852,773	4,201,200	4,143,515

(continued on page 14)

Czech Republic	Three Major Beliefs		2001	2010			
	Christian		53.22	25.92			
	Non-Religious		45.02	71.41			
	Other		1.50	2.50			
Churches	Congregations		Members		Affiliates		
	2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010	
Roman Catholic	2,917	1,371	3,500,000	1,645,669	3,500,000	2,090,000	
Old Catholic		4		667		1,200	
Byzantine (Eastern Rite) Catholic	13	9	8,770	5,971	12,200	8,300	
Orthodox	36	30	20,000	20,000	35,000	40,000	
Silesian Evangelical (Lutheran)	34	33	27,000	23,000	48,000	36,000	
Slovak Evangelical (Lutheran)	3	14	4,200	10,140	4,200	14,500	
Augsburg Confession (Lutheran)		2		500		800	
Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren	264	260	150,371	77,692	150,371	101,000	
Christian Brethren		65		2,600		7,050	
Moravian Church of the Brethren	25	12	2,400	1,100	4,800	2,100	
Church of the Brethren	56		2,000		4,000		
Exclusive Brethren		4		150		375	
Hussite	340	150	118,881	52,448	170,000	75,000	
Pentecostal	31		2,000		4,400		
Apostolic (Pentecostal)		42		3,400		6,800	
United Pentecostal		1		33		50	
Church of God (Cleveland)		2		30		45	
Free Evangelical	8	67	1,640	5,500	4,100	9,850	
Christian Fellowship Prague	64		2,400		4,800		
Christian Fellowships		46		4,500		9,000	
Baptist	24	37	2,500	2,200	4,000	3,500	
United Methodist		12		1,000		2,000	
Salvation Army		8		250		325	
Anglican		1		75		125	
Congregational	167		4,500		8,325		
New Apostolic		13		128		255	
Seventh-day Adventist	178	140	8,000	7,400	15,200	9,000	
Other Protestant		26		784		1,960	
Other Independent		40		2,000		4,000	
Other Denominations (29)	139		12,139		22,038		
TOTALS	4,299	2,389	3,866,801	1,867,237	3,991,434	2,423,235	

Hungary	Three Major Beliefs		2001	2010			
	Christian		92.01	87.99			
	Non-Religious/Other		7.09	10.90			
	Jewish		0.80	0.91			

Churches	Congregations		Members		Affiliates	
	2001	2010	2001	2010	2001	2010
Roman Catholic	2,000	2,330	4,548,872	4,466,165	6,050,000	5,940,000
Old Catholic		1		106		265
Orthodox Church of Hungary		7		950		3,800
Romanian Orthodox	18	22	10,526	52,632	16,000	80,000
Other Orthodox		38		14,935		23,000
Reformed	1,210	1,250	400,000	506,250	1,600,000	2,025,000
Baptist	333	333	11,118	11,500	22,236	19,850
Community of Evangelical Brethren	80	108	4,000	4,300	6,800	7,310
Christian Brethren		28		1,400		2,800
Faith	305	52	20,000	31,000	40,000	62,000
Church of the Nazarene		28		2,800		2,900
Christian Advent Fellowship		7		1,330		2,261
Early Christian Apostolic		27		1,080		2,700
Free Christian Fellowship		14		850		1,420
Agape		47		700		1,260
United Methodist		20		400		1,000
Calvary		17		690		1,380
The Bible Speaks		16		375		1,200
Congregation of the Living God		11		365		730
Budapest International		1		175		560
Church of God (Anderson)		4		150		278
Salvation Army		2		70		117
*Evangelical Lutheran	398	320	107,500	72,500	430,000	290,000
Seventh-day Adventist	106	119	4,471	5,950	10,000	11,900
New Apostolic		14		165		379
Fellowship of Evangelical Pentecostals	126	146	5,042	4,730	11,200	10,500
United Pentecostal		6		250		750
International United Pentecostal		46		3,421		3,900
Congregation of God	46	34	2,000	2,200	4,000	4,400
Other Evangelical Congregations		85		6,800		13,600
Autonomous		20		785		1,099
Other Marginal		16		650		1,300
Other Denominations (39)	586		31,042		57,300	
TOTALS	5,208	5,169	5,144,571	5,195,674	8,247,536	8,517,659

*Figures taken from the PDF file.

Book Review

Edworthy, Mark. *The Wall That Remains*. Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 2012.

Mark Edworthy, a former Southern Baptist pastor, a long-term International Mission Board (IMB) missionary in Poland, and now IMB Affinity Group Strategy Leader for European Peoples, is uniquely qualified to comment on Southern Baptist missions in Central Europe and Eurasia (the former Soviet Union). In his recent book, *The Wall That Remains*, he seeks to accomplish three tasks: to “summarize nearly 100 years of Southern Baptist missionary history in Eastern Europe” (p. 4), to present an insider’s general summary and critique of IMB missions in the region over the last 20 years, and finally, to present a heartfelt plea for Southern Baptist churches not to forget their important role in completing the unfinished task of planting new churches and continuing the evangelization of Central Europe and Eurasia. As the title suggests, Edworthy promotes the idea that while the physical Berlin Wall came down in 1989, there still remains a spiritual wall that can only be brought down by the advance of the gospel.

In the first five chapters Edworthy summarizes the general religious history of the region over the last 150 years with particular focus on the role of Baptist missionaries. He suggests that “the Wall” obstructing the gospel was built over centuries by Christian traditionalism (as opposed to Scripture alone), by Islam, by communism, and by “dictators, war, and fear” (p.37).

Chapters six to nineteen recount the work of

IMB missionaries in various countries throughout the region since 1989, including numerous hardships and difficulties that many have faced. Apart from general country information, the most helpful section for mission practitioners comes at the end of the book where Edworthy discusses lessons learned, specific issues for the region, and the way forward. Of particular interest are issues of personnel selection, preparation, deployment, cultural adaptation and retention, the importance of working closely with national church unions, the rise and strategic importance of immigrant churches, and the proper use of finances so as to maximize ministry while minimizing dependency.

The book could have benefited from a few editorial changes. The term *Eastern Europe*, used throughout the book, is now outdated. The endnotes should have been listed by individual chapters. Lastly, it would have been helpful if the book had included a “Resources” page with immediate connections to online resources, both through websites (like www.imbeurope.org) and social media. There will still be the need for an “outsider’s” history and evaluation of IMB missions in the region. Until then, this volume gives us the closest and most helpful insider perspective to date. No other volume summarizes IMB work in Central Europe and Eurasia like Edworthy’s. ♦

Charley Warner, *Barnabas International, Vienna, Austria*

A Belated Tribute to Fortitude and Faithfulness

Mark R. Elliott

This past year I published a chapter on persecution of Christians in tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union in *Sorrow & Blood; Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom*, ed. by William D. Taylor et al. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012): 193-206, that paid tribute by name to three paragons of faith under fire: Metropolitan Nikolai (Orthodox), Lydia Vins (Evangelical), and Nijole Sadunaite (Catholic). Cardinal Kazimierz Swiatek, who died 21 July 2011, and who is now belatedly recognized here for his faith, could easily have served as representative of his long-suffering church in that chapter.

Of Polish descent, Swiatek was born 21 October 1914 in Estonia, then part of tsarist Russia. After his father died in Polish ranks fighting the Soviet Red Army, mother and son fled to Pinsk, then part of interwar Poland. 1939 witnessed both Swiatek’s ordination and the Nazi-Soviet Pact which doomed Poland to another partition and which landed the young priest in the Red Army zone of occupation. Soviet secret police (NKVD) arrested him in April 1941, and, without trial, he was sentenced to death.

Following the June 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, which spared Swiatek execution, he was released from prison in Brest and served for three of the war years in a Catholic parish in nearby Pruzhany. He was rearrested by the NKVD in December 1944, following the reoccupation of Poland by the Red Army. In July 1945, a Soviet court sentenced

him to ten years’ hard labor in the Vorkuta region of northern Siberia. Unlike many, Swiatek survived the grueling work of felling timber in temperatures as low as 40 below zero. Often kept in isolation to curtail his celebration of mass with other prisoners, he managed to outlast Stalin. This Gulag priest was amnestied in 1954 following the Soviet dictator’s death the year before.

Returning to Pinsk in Soviet Belarussia, he endured five months of interrogation and intimidation before receiving permission to serve as a parish priest in one of the few remaining Catholic churches in the Soviet Union outside Lithuania. Faithful traveled thousands of miles to attend his masses, and, in turn, he traveled far and wide to lead secret worship in private flats. In 1991, following the emergence of an independent Belarus, Pope John Paul II named Father Swiatek archbishop of the Minsk-Mohilev Diocese and apostolic administrator of Pinsk, followed in 1994 by his appointment as cardinal.

The British branch of Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) answered Archbishop Swiatek’s request for assistance in restoring the Catholic seminary in Pinsk and the cathedral in Minsk. Neville Kyrke-Smith, U.K. national director of ACN, recalled, “People asked him if he was worried about Chernobyl [with its winds carrying radioactive fallout across Belarus], but he said he was more concerned with the Chernobyl of the soul, the post-communist spiritual vacuum in the country.” Kyrke-Smith

Father Swiatek was concerned with the Chernobyl of the soul, the post-communist spiritual vacuum in the country.

(continued on page 16)

Book Review

Transparency International. *Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Operations: Handbook of Good Practices*. 2010.

Just because a humanitarian mission to a foreign land is organized with the best of intentions by well-meaning, even experienced, people does not guarantee it will be free of problems, particularly corruption. Money and supplies from external sources to aid people in distress are seen as a rich prize by some national partners, be they government officials, vendors or local staff. The temptation to divert aid to family, friends, or business acquaintances is always near, even among Christian organizations.

Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Operations: Handbook of Good Practices (181pp.) by Transparency International, a Berlin-based non-governmental organization (NGO), is a gift to all humanitarian organizations and missions, large and small. The book identifies corruption risks affecting humanitarian programs and enumerates recommended practices developed over decades by the humanitarian NGO community. It also provides tools and monitoring devices to deter, detect, and deal with corruption risks. Small organizations and even church mission programs can easily adapt these best practices to ensure their programs are corruption free.

The handbook was compiled with the help of Action Aid, CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision International, and several other global humanitarian NGOs. In fact, World Vision, itself an occasional victim of corruption, thought so highly of the handbook it helped fund a 54-page pocket version (www.transparency.org/whatwedo/pub/pocket_guide_of_good_practices_preventing_corruption_in_humanitarian_operations) for humanitarian staff in the field. The unabridged version of the handbook is available as a CD-ROM or may be downloaded at www.transparency.org/whatwedo/pub/handbook_of_good_practices_preventing_corruption_in_humanitarian_operations.

Dating from 1993, Transparency International is a relatively new NGO in the relief and development community. Since then it has morphed into an international movement with more than 100 national chapters working with civil society, business, and government at all levels to put effective measures in place to tackle “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.”

Preventing Corruption so thoroughly covers every aspect of an organization’s operation that, if prepared and wisely managed, it will likely prevent corrupt practices by staff. Chapters include management leadership, emergency preparedness, internal controls and quality assurance, transparency and accountability, and dealing with external environments, all of which are fundamental functions of any humanitarian operation.

The handbook looks at financial corruption such as fraud, bribery, gifts, and extortion, as well as non-financial forms such as diversion of aid to benefit groups of people who do not need it in exchange for reward. In addition, preferential treatment for family members and friends in hiring and coercion and intimidation of staff or beneficiaries to ignore or participate in corruption are examined. The corrupt practice of aid in exchange for sexual favors is also dealt with thoroughly.

No organization or mission agency is exempt from corrupt practices, particularly in post-Soviet states where corruption has long been a way of life, practiced at the highest levels of government and at every level of society. If international humanitarian NGOs learned one major lesson since the end of the Cold War it is that manipulated and unmonitored aid is worse than no aid at all. *Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Operations* should be at the top of every aid field practitioner’s reading list. ♦

Serge Duss is Director of Public Policy & Advocacy with International Medical Corps in Washington, DC. He also served with World Vision International in Moscow in the 1990s.

Manipulated and unmonitored aid is worse than no aid at all.

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



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Belated Tribute (continued from page 15)

continued, Cardinal Swiatek’s “pastoral touch and fortitude of faith sustained the Church... and sustained his priests as Belarus emerged from communism.... He led with strength and faith.” Keston Institute’s Canon Michael Bourdeaux ended his tribute to this stalwart prelate as follows: “Stalin once asked, in scorn, ‘How many legions has the Pope?’ The ministry of Cardinal Swiatek provides the answer.” ♦

Sources: John Newton, “Tribute Paid to Cardinal Who Survived the Gulags,” Religious Information Service of Ukraine (RISU), 21 July 2011; http://risu.org.ua/en/index/monitoring/kaleido_digest/43504/; and Michael Bourdeaux, “Indomitable Soul Braved Stalin’s Worst,” *Manchester Guardian*, 4 August 2011.

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