



# EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

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## The Lausanne Orthodox Initiative

Tim Grass

### Contributing Editors

**Canon Michael Bourdeaux**  
Keston Institute,  
Oxford

**Dr. Anita Deyneka**  
Peter Deyneka Russian  
Ministries,  
Wheaton, Illinois

**Father Georgi Edelstein**  
Russian Orthodox Church,  
Kostroma Diocese

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Magazine Training Institute,  
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Theological Institute,  
Sofia

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**Dr. Walter Sawatsky**  
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International Christian  
Adoptions, Moscow

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Freedom Watch,  
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**Bishop Hans Växby**  
United Methodist Church  
in Eurasia, Moscow

**Dr. Alexander Zaichenko**  
Gazeta Protestant,  
Moscow

### Background

Readers of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* will be aware that over the last two decades various initiatives have sought to bring Evangelicals and Orthodox closer together. One could be forgiven for wondering whether any of them has made much practical difference, and what is the point of all this talking. I have been involved in promoting better relations between these two traditions for many years, both in the United Kingdom and abroad, and I love meeting old friends and making new ones at joint gatherings, but I too am prey to the same doubt. However, a recent consultation on “The Mission of God” organized by the Lausanne Orthodox Initiative (LOI) offers hope for the future. Although I was part of the organizing committee, before the consultation I did not want to go; at the end of the week I did not want to come back!

### Albanian Orthodox Hosts

Participants gathered 2-6 September 2013 to enjoy the warm hospitality of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania at the Monastery of St. Vlash, near the port of Durrës, Albania. The week was efficiently and unobtrusively facilitated by Canon Mark Oxbrow, an Anglican who heads up Faith2Share (an international network of mission agencies), in collaboration with Bishop Nikola, the rector of the seminary based at the monastery, and Nathan Hoppe, a missionary with the Orthodox Christian Mission Center who lives in nearby Tirana.

### A Diverse Gathering

The gathering brought together by invitation over 45 mission workers, church leaders, ecumenists, and theologians from all over the world, including an Orthodox archbishop from Tanzania and Evangelical leaders from Brazil and Australia. Oriental and Eastern Orthodox were present from many different jurisdictions; Evangelicals, too, were drawn from a worldwide range of denominational traditions. The aim of the week was to explore Orthodox and Evangelical understandings of the church’s missionary task and to seek ways in which to foster cooperation between two Christian traditions that are committed to the historic Christian faith which is expressed in the early creeds.

### Getting to Know “the Other Side” in Person

I am not sure that the specifically theological presentations broke any new ground for me, nor that they were necessarily expected to do so. Indeed, it might be argued that brief presentations could only introduce the issues and that such intractable problems as proselytism and canonical territory will take longer

than a week to resolve. However, it is important to have honest expressions of what the issues are and how each side views them, which can then be referred to in subsequent reflection and discussion. For some, too, the issues may have been new, and the immense value of this gathering was the unique mix of participants bringing their minds and hearts to bear on these issues. If that sense of fellowship in Christ can be maintained, then future consultations could bring real benefit. At the very least, such gatherings enable people to build personal relationships with representatives of “the other side.” We have to move beyond seeing each other as theological constructs if dialogue is to be effective and make a difference. And it was illuminating to hear accounts of the faith journeys of others in our small groups and to learn about joint mission ventures which have been undertaken. For a number of participants, a session in which an Evangelical and an Oriental Orthodox reported honestly and graciously on the successes and failures of a mission trip they had led together was one of the most moving of the whole consultation. Studying the Bible together in small groups each day also enabled us to sense the heart of participants from other Christian traditions.

### Albanian Resurrection

Those of us able to stay on past the consultation’s Friday conclusion spent the weekend exploring Albania’s rich heritage and the revival of faith against great odds. What impressed me most was the vigorous resurrection of the Albanian Orthodox Church, being rebuilt from the ground up. When Communist rule ended in 1990 in the world’s only officially godless state, virtually nothing had survived in the way of faith. No wonder that the new Orthodox cathedral in Tirana, opened in 2012, is named the Cathedral of the Resurrection. The church is headed by Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos), a well-known mission theologian and veteran of African missionary service, whose name in English means resurrection. Illustrative of Orthodoxy’s renewed vitality was a baptism we attended of two children at a village church--best described as joyful, liturgically focused mayhem--and fellowship with an Orthodox family in a Tirana suburb who use the ground floor of their home to host weekly teaching sessions for up to 80 children, a ministry which is bearing fruit because neighbors had seen how the father had faced terminal illness with firm Christian faith and confidence. Consultation participants attended worship both in an Evangelical church in the center of Tirana (in a building home to no less than five different congregations) and

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### **The Lausanne Orthodox Initiative** *(continued from page 1)*

Orthodox vespers at Tabor Orthodox Retreat Center, on the edge of Tirana. The latter for me was a highlight: I confess that as a committed Evangelical, it felt like “home.”

For information on planned publication of consultation presentations, and on the Lausanne Orthodox Initiative in general, consult the LOI

website: <http://www.LOImission.org>. Please keep this initiative in your prayers. We are conscious that it needs them. ♦

*Church historian Tim Grass serves the church on the Isle of Man as an Anglican Reader and a Methodist Local Preacher.*

## **Observations from the Lausanne Orthodox Initiative, Durres, Albania, 2-6 September 2013**

Mark R. Elliott

- At this meeting the material and spiritual recovery underway in the Albanian Orthodox Church, following the utter devastation inflicted upon it by the Hoxha regime, was palpable. Archbishop Anastasios, with able assistance from Bishop Nikola and missionary Nathan Hoppe, proved gracious and capable hosts.
- Anglican Canon Mark Oxbrow, consultation program organizer, secured the participation of a diverse and articulate group of Orthodox and Evangelical spokespersons.
- Future Lausanne Orthodox Initiative gatherings would do well to include Russian Orthodox clerical and Russian Pentecostal participation.
- Even the most irenic Orthodox presentations at the consultation were, nevertheless, bedeviled by off-putting triumphalism, reckoning Evangelical

faith, at best, as a splintered reflection of God’s purposes for His church – but with no mention of the dozen-plus overlapping Orthodox jurisdictions in the U.S. Admittedly, too many Protestants are also guilty of spiritual hubris born of a triumphalist mentality, but fortunately, none appeared to be in attendance in this instance.

- Past and present persecution of Christians proved to be the sobering backdrop for the consultation, with Archbishop Anastasios recounting the tribulation endured by Christians in Communist Albania and Coptic Bishop Angaelos relating the current trial by fire being loosed on Christians in Egypt today. ♦

**Mark R. Elliott** is editor of the East-West Church and Ministry Report.

## **Russian Germans in Germany: A Free Church Phenomenon**

Albert W. Wardin, Jr.

### **German Settlement in the East**

With the prospect of economic opportunity, Germans from Central Europe with administrative and technical skills began to settle in the Russian Empire as early as the sixteenth century. Later, Empress Catherine the Great and Alexander I welcomed German peasant farmers with manifestos in 1762-1763 and 1804 respectively. The first settlers were Lutherans with a minority from Reformed and Roman Catholic churches. With the promise of special privileges, Mennonites first arrived in Ukraine in 1789. In 1856 German Baptist settlers began to enter the Baltic region from Memel, Germany, and in 1858 an indigenous German Baptist movement under Gottfried Alf began in Russian Poland that soon spread to western Ukraine. In the Russian census of 1897, Russian Germans numbered 1,790,000. Germans were noted for their industry and contributions to the economy of the country. However, they maintained their culture and identity as Germans and did not assimilate with the Slavic population.<sup>1</sup>

Pietists within the Lutheran Church, called Stundists, formed circles for prayer and Bible study under lay leadership. Lutheran Pietists, Mennonite Brethren, and German Baptists, both latter bodies with a Pietist and revivalist heritage, introduced Protestant evangelicalism among the Ukrainian population.

### **Communist Control**

The Communist seizure of power in 1917 brought civil war, followed by famine in 1921-22. But beginning in 1922 Germans benefited economically

from the New Economic Policy (NEP). In spite of the promotion of atheism by the government that included the teaching of atheism in the schools and the prohibition of religious schools, including Sunday schools, Germans enjoyed religious rights and were even allowed to establish a German Volga Republic.

However, beginning in 1928-1929 until the end of 1955, the German population suffered one calamity after another: The introduction in 1928 of the first Five-Year Plan with its collectivization of agriculture, the famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine, and the religious legislation of 1929 that severely restricted church life. Even worse were attacks on all religions that closed all German churches, theological institutions, and central administrative centers. The Soviet regime sent church leaders to prisons and labor camps with many suffering execution.

The German invasion of Russia in 1941 during the Second World War brought further calamity not only to the country, but as much if not more to the German population. All Germans were suspected as traitors. The government exiled almost 900,000 Germans from western European Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus, and the Volga River region (including the dissolution of the Volga Republic) to Siberia and Central Asia. The regime placed them in labor armies or left them to survive on their own. Until the end of 1955 Germans were under direct administrative control and were forbidden to travel. Their leadership was destroyed, their churches gone, and their language suppressed. In this 25-year period, possibly 25 percent of the German population died.<sup>2</sup>

During the Second World War the government exiled almost 900,000 Germans to Siberia and Central Asia.

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## Revival

In the 1940s and 1950s, in spite of exile and suppression and continuing religious restrictions, a religious revival began among the Russian German population, often led at first by widows. Underground gatherings engaged in prayer, Bible study, and the singing of old hymns. Religious life was returning to the older 19<sup>th</sup> century pattern of pietistic Stundist meetings under lay leadership. Revivals also attracted youth. A few of the older pastors who survived began to travel among the population. Denominational barriers among Protestant Germans began to break down with Lutherans, Mennonites, Baptists, and Pentecostals often worshipping together. Illegal and unregistered congregations began to be organized. Without ordained ministers, Lutherans formed lay brotherhoods, and Mennonites formed congregations with Mennonite Brethren again baptizing believers by immersion.<sup>3</sup>

German Baptists, although the smallest of German Protestant communities, found themselves in a more enviable position. To better control all Protestants, Stalin permitted the formation in 1944 of an umbrella organization for free church evangelicals called the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (soon changed to Evangelical Christians-Baptists). It attempted to include most free church adherents, including Baptists, Evangelical Christians, Mennonite Brethren, and Pentecostals. The regime permitted the registration of a limited number of Russian Baptist congregations. German Baptists and Mennonite Brethren often joined Russian-speaking congregations, which in turn established separate German services, while some congregations were predominantly German. From a trip in 1987 Gerd Stricker, a Lutheran from Germany, reported that the All-Union Council included 65 German churches, primarily Mennonite, and about 300 Russian congregations that had German contingents. The Communist periodical, *Neues Leben*, reported in 1988 that about 70 percent of the Baptists in Kazakhstan were German. With freedom of movement after 1955, some Germans began to migrate where churches existed, such as to Karaganda in Kazakhstan where they formed large congregations.<sup>4</sup>

Beginning in the 1950s Lutheran and Mennonite congregations attempted to maintain German services. At the same time a number of Lutherans and Mennonites (who had largely given up their advocacy of pacifism and opposition to oaths) were attracted to Baptist congregations. Many young people who were losing their use of German were attracted to Baptist churches for their vitality and music and opportunities for service.<sup>5</sup>

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## Renewed Repression—Then *Perestroika*

With the imposition in 1960 of more restrictive regulations on the churches of the All-Union Council, Baptists began to split in 1961-1962 with the rise of unregistered *Initiativniki* or Reform Baptists, who rejected state control of congregations, cooptation of leaders, and regulations prohibiting evangelism, publications, and religious education. These evangelical dissidents survived and attracted a number of Baptists and Mennonites to their cause, despite the regime's imprisonment of their leaders, the

suppression of their congregations, and the destruction of their secret printing presses when found.<sup>6</sup>

The new regime under Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 and his program of *perestroika* and *glasnost* led to dramatic changes in religious policy. With the relaxation in religious restrictions, churches and public evangelism began to flourish. By the end of 1989 the regime had released all religious prisoners.<sup>7</sup>

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## Westward Migration

With the removal of barriers to migration in 1987, a much greater opportunity than ever before arrived for Germans to leave Russia to settle in West Germany. With their history of woe and exile and religious restriction, the enticement of greater freedom, economic opportunity, and the possibility of recovering their German heritage in their native homeland was alluring. In 1987, 14,500 ethnic Germans departed the Soviet Union, followed in 1988 by 40,000. Then the migration to Germany became a flood. From a German population of approximately 2.5 million in 1985, almost 1.8 million Germans had migrated by 1998.

According to religious identification, Lutherans numbered almost one million and Roman Catholics approximately 370,000. German Baptists departing the Soviet Union totaled about 158,000, while departing Mennonites numbered 102,100.<sup>8</sup> The migration of German Baptists seriously affected the membership of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Siberia and Central Asia, although a number of churches and leaders survived. A significant percentage of unregistered Baptists left, which greatly reduced their numbers in the Soviet Union. Most Mennonites migrated, leaving only a small remnant. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the collapse of Communist Party rule in 1991 precipitated a large scale migration of not only German but Slavic Baptists and Pentecostals to Germany, and in larger numbers to the North American Pacific Rim in Canada and the United States.<sup>9</sup>

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## Russian German Denominations in Germany

In his dissertation on free church bodies in Germany, John N. Klassen listed three Russian German Baptist bodies, two with a significant mixture of Baptists and Mennonite Brethren, and one predominantly Baptist body with two Mennonite Brethren churches. He also listed three Mennonite Brethren groups and one traditional Church Mennonite body that baptized by affusion or sprinkling rather than immersion as is the practice of Baptists and Mennonite Brethren. In addition, a number of Baptist congregations and a small number of Mennonite Brethren in Germany were entirely independent. For 1998 Klassen recorded 356 Baptist and Mennonite Brethren congregations with around 61,500 baptized members, of whom 40,000 were Baptists, 15,000 Mennonite Brethren, and 6,500 Church Mennonites. Klassen noted that in 2003 Baptist and Mennonite membership had grown to 70,000. In 1998 he found 7,000 Russian Germans in churches or as single members affiliated with the Baptist Union of Germany and 2,900 in other affiliations.<sup>10</sup>

Ten years later in 2013 Heinrich Derksen, president of Bonn Bible Seminary, claimed Russian German

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## Russian Germans in Germany: A Free Church Phenomenon *(continued from page 3)*

Baptists and Mennonite Brethren had formed 600 churches with a membership of 125,000 and a constituency with children of twice that number. In comparison, the Baptist Union of Germany in 2005 reported 85,000 members in 835 congregations. Russian German growth had come through aggressive evangelism, mostly among their own kind, and through church planting, as well as from children of their large families. Free Church Russian Germans are now far more numerous than they were in 1906 when the Russian Empire counted 15,000 German Baptists and 5,600 German Mennonite Brethren.<sup>11</sup>

### Russian German Distinctives

It is not surprising that this body of free churches in Germany established their own congregations and institutions, given their turbulent history of 150 years in Russia and then resettlement in Germany, their experiences of persecution, their strong unregistered Baptist strain, and their long separation from Western life. Their theology is very conservative, if not fundamentalist, as they separate themselves from those with ecumenical and broader theological tendencies. As in Russia, most Russian German Baptists and Mennonites maintain an Arminian or free-will position, although some in the younger generation have now imbibed Calvinism from the West. Russian Germans have established their own theological institution, the Bibelseminar in Bonn. In 1996 it acquired as a campus the historic Haus Wittgenstein with space for offices, five classrooms, and a small library. The school today has about 100 full-time students and over 300 in long-distance programs. Since 2005 the seminary has had a special tie with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, a Southern Baptist school that accredits its degrees, provides two professors, and contributes to an annual pastors' conference.

Russian Germans with ties to Reform Baptists have established two mission societies-- Missionswerk Friedensstimme in Gummersbach and Missionswerk Friedensbote in Meinerzhagen. Their work is primarily evangelism and sending material assistance to co-religionists in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Another mission, Hilfskomitee Aquila in Steinhagen, provides support mainly to Siberia and Kazakhstan. It publishes *Aquila*, a periodical that includes both mission information and historical material on Mennonites and Baptists in Siberia and Central Asia.

### The Cultural Challenge

Russian Germans in the West are now confronted with serious cultural challenges.<sup>12</sup> They live in a materialistic and increasingly secular society that accepts few constraints. Freedom of choice frequently supplants authoritarianism both in family life and in society.

The simple cultural lifestyle of Russian Germans often sets them apart from German society. In addition, a growing division now exists in their own ranks between conservative churches of the older generation and less restrictive standards in churches of the second generation. The younger generation, forgetting its German language in Russia, but now forgetting its

Russian language in Germany, has opportunities for work and play not available in Russia.

All churches forbid the use of tobacco and generally alcohol, although some begin to tolerate drinking. Conservative churches oppose movies and forbid television, while many of the younger generation look at television, attend movies, and use the Internet. Some second-generation churches close one eye to youth attending discos. Congregations, however, provide their youth with numerous fellowship events.

Conservative churches are against birth control while second-generation churches do not make it an issue. In conservative churches head coverings are obligatory for married women, and men and women sit separately in worship. In second-generation churches, in contrast, head coverings for women are optional, with no separation of the sexes. Standing is generally practiced for prayer. However, kneeling for prayer, common in Russia, is generally not practiced largely because of cold tiled floors in the West. Also in the West, the Russian custom of all participating in whispered prayer, while one or more lead out, is still common. On rare occasions hymns in Russian are sung, but not often.

As in Russia, Russian German Baptists and Mennonite Brethren attempt to be separate from the world, but find that the world continues to encroach upon them. Nevertheless, they continue to provide their own unique witness, but now in a different context.

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Karl Stumpp, *The German-Russians: Two Centuries of Pioneering* (Bonn, Brussels, New York: Atlantic-Forum, 1966), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Stumpp, *German-Russians*, 32-35; Johannes Dyck, "A Root Out of Dry Ground: Revival Patterns in the German Free Churches in the USSR After World War II," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 30 (2012), 98.

<sup>3</sup> Dyck, "A Root Out of Dry Ground," 101-07.

<sup>4</sup> For German services, see Dyck, "A Root Out of Dry Ground," 108; *Bratskii vestnik* No. 2 (1986), 62, 65; and Gerd Stricker, "A Visit to German Congregations in Central Asia," *Religion in Communist Lands* 17 (Spring, 1989), 25. *Neues Leben*, 13 January 1988, reported in Keston News Service, 21 January 1988, 9.

<sup>5</sup> For the attraction of Lutherans to Baptists, see Stricker, "A Visit," 21, 26. For the attraction of Mennonites to Baptist congregations, see Dyck, "A Root Out of Dry Ground," 108. For the attraction of German young people to Russian Baptist congregations, see *Light in the East News* No. 3 (June 1981), 10, and Stricker, "A Visit," 27.

<sup>6</sup> For the Reform Baptist movement, see Michael Bourdeaux, *Religious Ferment in Russia* (London: Macmillan, 1968). For the attraction of some Mennonites to the *Iniatsiivniki*, see Dyck, "A Root Out of Dry Ground," 107-08; Alexander Weiss, "The Transition of Siberian Mennonites to Baptists: Causes and Results," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 30 (2012), 133-38; Alexy V. Gorbatov, "Mennonite Associations in Siberia in the 1950s and 1960s," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 30 (2012), 69-70; and *Mennonite Weekly Review*, 25 June 1970, 2.

As in Russia, Russian German Baptists and Mennonite Brethren attempt to be separate from the world, but find that the world continues to encroach upon them.

<sup>7</sup> For the shift in religious policy under Gorbachev, see Kent R. Hill, *The Soviet Union on the Brink: An Inside Look at Christianity & Glasnost* (Portland, OR: Mulnomah Press, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Stricker, "A Visit," 32; John N. Klassen, *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Nürnberg and Bonn: VTR/VKW, 2007), 83-88.

<sup>9</sup> For information on Slavic Russian migrants to the North American Pacific Rim, see Susan Wiley Hardwick, *Russian Refuge* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 179-93.

<sup>10</sup> Klassen, *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen*, 111-31, 136-39.

<sup>11</sup> Interview of Albert W. Wardin, Jr., with Heinrich Derksen, Bonn, Germany, 23 January 2013. Baptist World Alliance, Congress, 2005, 239. *Unions-Statistik der Baptisten-Gemeinden in Russland*, 1906 (Riga, 1907), 10; Abe J. Dueck, *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity, 1872-1922* (Winnipeg, MB, and Hillsboro, KS: Kindred Productions, 1997), 28.

<sup>12</sup> Much of the information on Russian German lifestyles is a response to a questionnaire sent to Johannes Dyck, head of the Institute of German-Russian Theology and History at the Bibleseminar in Bonn. ♦

**Albert W. Wardin, Jr.**, is professor of history emeritus, Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee.

## After Communism: Forty Years in the Desert?

Danut Manastireanu

### The Trauma of Transition

When freedom came to Eastern Europe, one former communist leader declared that people in my country "will need 20 years in order to learn democracy and freedom." When people heard this, they were very annoyed. This man was accused of being too pessimistic. People said to themselves, "What does he mean? We are smart people. We will certainly learn how to live in democracy in a very short period of time." It has been more than 20 years since that "prophecy," and most people in former communist countries are still very far from having worked out how to live in a free world. Maybe this "prophet" was in fact too optimistic. What if people need not 20 but 40 years, like the Israelites in the desert, to learn how to fully enjoy freedom?

Here are a few observations from the biblical narrative to open dialogue on this subject:

- Times of transition that follow immediately after oppression are very ambiguous; people are out of oppression, but the oppression is not out of them – the Israelites were out of Egypt, but Egypt was alive and well inside their thinking and hearts (Exodus 16:3).
- Freedom confronts believers with temptation to conform to the ways of the world without God (Deuteronomy 12: 29-32).
- Freedom carries a high price; when confronted with the difficulties and responsibilities that freedom brings, people who have lived for a long time under oppression have a tendency to forget the pain quickly and remember with nostalgia only the good things of the past, few as they were, thereby idealizing their oppression; thus many would rather go back than endure the challenges of the present (Exodus 16:3; Numbers 14: 1-6).
- Those who lead in times of transition have to be prepared to have their authority challenged. This does not mean that leaders should be weak and easy to manipulate, but that real leaders will be more concerned to safeguard God's glory than to cling desperately to their own positions of authority (Numbers 16:1-40).
- During transition people may change in some ways, but other aspects of their life under oppression are so ingrained that they will carry them to the grave; therefore, some will never be able to enjoy fully the benefits of freedom (Numbers 14: 21-24).

### The Legacy of the Past

The leadership style of any authoritarian system is exclusively one of manipulation and control. The party (or the *junta*) forcibly maintains absolute control over the lives of its citizens. Often, this approach to leadership is replicated at every level of society, even the church.

Instead of looking for and submitting to proud and controlling rulers, Christians are called to follow and mentor leaders who learn to become humble and trustworthy servants. Such a change of mentality is rare throughout humanity; that is why Christians need to call upon the grace of God to inspire and raise up servant leaders.

Under oppression, dictatorship is likely the only leadership paradigm available, even among church leaders. Under freedom, some church and community leaders become even more abusive towards their people than the old dictatorial masters. This behavior is incompatible with Christian faith and needs to be exposed and combatted because it is a disgrace to a humanity created in the image of God.

Soon after the collapse of communism, I met with the head of one of the Christian denominations in my country. He explained to me that during communist times the leadership of the church had been perceived as a dictatorial body. After the changes of 1989, denominational leaders were pressed by believers to adopt a more democratic structure. "And guess what happened?" he told me, "Now every local church has its own dictators in its pastors and elders."

Such authoritarian approaches to leadership cannot function effectively in democracy. Under freedom, people simply cannot be controlled. Even if it were possible to do so, control is not God's preferred leadership style. As human history shows, the practice of authoritarianism debilitates people and keeps them in a chronic state of immaturity. It is not only much safer and wiser, but also more compatible with biblical principles, to help people develop their own convictions and become able to make decisions for themselves.

### Unrealistic Expectations of the State

Because of their fundamental lack of trust in people, authoritarian regimes tend to treat their citizens like children. Therefore, the state assumes responsibility for making all important decisions and

What if people need not 20 but 40 years, like the Israelites in the desert, to learn how to fully enjoy freedom?

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## After Communism: Forty Years in the Desert? (continued from page 5)

for providing for those needs of people that the state considers legitimate. This model creates in people a fundamental lack of initiative and a chronic dependence on the state, which is expected to meet all people's needs (at least so far as the state agrees to recognize the extent of "needs").

It is not surprising, then, that when communism fell in Eastern Europe, people continued to expect the same provision from the state. Most people refused to assume personal responsibility for meeting their own needs and held the state responsible for everything that would normally have been their own duty in a free-market economy. Since the state now refused to fulfill these functions, or was unable to do so because of economic collapse, those people who had never valued freedom in any case started to become nostalgic for times when the supposedly benevolent authoritarian state took "good" care of them.

Clearly people and communities who hold to such unrealistic expectations are incapable of functioning normally in a free society and may sooner or later have to "die in the desert," as did their Israelite counterparts, if real promise for a democratic future is to be realized.

### Suspicion of Democracy

Communist propaganda demonizes Western democracy, and such demonizing penetrates deep into the individual and social psyche under communist regimes. Because of constant propaganda bombardment, people who lived for many years under communism developed a sort of "ideological allergy" toward everything from the West. This "allergy" might become dormant during initial transition toward democracy but is reactivated as soon as the cost of living under freedom becomes apparent. In contrast, attitudes are quite different for younger people who did not live under communism long enough to be so effectively brainwashed by its propaganda. Therefore, the real hope for building a truly democratic society rests with the younger generations.

### Devaluation of the Human Person

Under communism, people have value simply as numbers in a mass. At the center of Marxist anthropology, part and parcel of the ideal of creating the "new man" is the essentially pseudo-religious world view that people's individual value is determined by the economic and political contribution they bring to society. Humanity has no more value than a cog in the machine, and as soon as individuals can no longer be useful for production purposes, their social value decreases dramatically.

This underlying attitude led to a major devaluing of the human person under communism, not just in the eyes of authorities but also among ordinary people, and may be one of the reasons communism has accounted for so many millions of deaths wherever it has been implemented. We who have lived under communism carry this kind of devaluation and dehumanization over with us into democracy. Such a diminished sense of the human person is unlikely to result immediately in societal frameworks based on responsibility and personal initiative.

### Dignity in Community

According to the Christian understanding of

humanity, people are created in the image of God. Therefore, humanity, collectively and individually, has both dignity and a purpose: to live for the glory of God. Every human being has a unique calling and has a role to play in the body of Christ. Christianity teaches that Christ died for the whole of humanity, but would have been ready to die for just one sinner. As a result, every human being is infinitely valuable because each person has been bought at the price of the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Human beings were not created either to be numbers or masses (characteristic of communist collectivism) or to live in isolation and selfishness (specific to capitalist individualism). In contrast to both these views, Christ calls people to live in community, according to the image of the Holy Trinity, where the divine persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in perfect harmony. This is the model that underlines the Christian concept of person and the Christian definition of the ideal society.

### The Post-Authoritarian Mindset

It is estimated that in most former communist countries at least one in every 10 people worked in one way or another for the secret police, including within churches and all other organizations. The only groups that could not be controlled by the communist regime were those meeting underground, but only until such groups were infiltrated by undercover agents or informers. People living under authoritarian regimes always had to be on their guard and exercise great care in everything they did so they would not be targeted as "enemies of the people."

Consequently, it can easily be imagined that a residue rampant in post-dictatorial contexts is a high degree of suspicion among people in all social structures. Another contributing factor in this ongoing sense of suspicion and skepticism is that many people who formerly held positions of responsibility in the leading party and the secret police not only have been rarely made responsible for their crimes, but frequently continue in positions of power in political and economic life, overtly or more discreetly.

When Hitler's Nazi government fell, and Germany was occupied by the Allied armies, the international community set up the Nuremberg tribunal and condemned the crimes of the Nazis and Nazism itself. Then Germany and other European countries went through a thorough process of de-nazification.

It is very strange then to us who endured communism that even though communism caused far more deaths than Nazism—perhaps 100 million (Mark Kramer, ed., *The Black Book of Communism* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999])—in our case there clearly is no political will, either in the international community or in former communist countries, to initiate a similar trial of communism. The only countries in which this influence has been limited, at least to some extent, are those which have passed through their parliaments a special law (called the law of lustration) preventing, for a number of years, former communist and secret police leaders from entering parliament or holding positions of authority in governing administrations and business.

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## Suspicion and Breakdown of Community

Paradoxical as it seems, communist collectivism, while setting out to seek the good of the masses, in fact destroyed the fabric of society and instilled in many people utter selfishness and lack of concern for the community. As a consequence of living under very difficult economic conditions for an extended time, people started to concern themselves only with their own interests and neglected “the common good.”

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## Situational Ethics

As an outworking of classic Marxist theory, which argues that private property is the root of all evils, whenever the communist system was instituted in a country, one of its first moves was to confiscate all major private property (factories, larger buildings, mineral reserves, land, etc.). What this confiscation produced in the hearts of country people and factory workers alike was, naturally, not great enthusiasm but rather a feeling of disconnection from the land and the means of production and a total lack of interest in their demeaned work status. Thus, in time, quality of work and levels of production decreased, leading in the end to total collapse of the communist economic system.

Hard pressed on every side, economically, politically, and not least of all spiritually, people living under authoritarian regimes developed a sort of situational ethics. To survive, people in the countryside stole from the fields, and workers stole from their factories anything that could be sold in the market or could be made use of in the home. A key consequence of this situation was the total undermining of society’s ethical fiber and value system. When loss of shared ethics is coupled with an ineffective police force and a corrupt legal system, the unavoidable outcome is the reign of lawlessness.

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## Lack of Respect for Law

When people’s common attitude towards compliance with laws is downgraded, the democratic ideal of building a “state of law” is very difficult if not impossible to accomplish. Further complicating matters, authoritarian regimes operate in the juridical sphere with the purpose of creating a very complicated legal system, making it unintelligible and compliance impossible. In such a system courts become totally corrupt and operate under political control. Authoritarian regimes allow no place for the concept of the independence of the judicial system. It is obvious then that establishment of a modern democratic society could only be hindered and slowed down by perpetuation of this kind of mentality in the period of transition from dictatorship to a free society.

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## The Road to Corruption

People living in dictatorial societies rarely hold genuine respect for authority and government, which are invariably seen as inherently oppressive. This attitude frequently carries over into the period of transition to democracy, creating all sorts of anti-social behavior. One area in which this situation affects nearly every ordinary citizen is that of government administration. Officials of state bureaucracy generally have a very arrogant attitude to all who come to ask them for some legitimate service that they are paid to provide, making the life of any petitioner absolute misery. As a result, people

tend to offer bribes or to use the influence of some acquaintance in a high position in order to obtain what they want, whether or not it is legitimate to do so. This practice breeds rampant corruption, which is a chronic problem for most dictatorial and post-authoritarian administrations.

Creation of a modern society in which different institutions work effectively in the public interest requires radical change in individual and community mentality and behavior. To that end, citizens living in post-dictatorial contexts need to engage in a process of social transformation that could take at least two generations, which brings us back to the metaphor of “40 years in the desert.”

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## Freedom or Anarchy?

When people have lived for generations under oppression, it is very difficult for them to understand what freedom really entails, and it is also very easy to idealize freedom. For many, freedom means simply the ability or “right” to do whatever they want, without any restrictions. This belief, however, is not about freedom, but anarchy, and is certainly not conducive to democracy.

There is no such thing as absolute freedom. We are all conditioned by our past. When we realize that we all have our limitations – and there is nothing wrong with that – we become aware that we are not gods but simply God’s creation. This reality establishes the rules of the game of life, and if we try to avoid playing by God’s rules we will bear the consequences of those decisions. The filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille once famously summarized the lesson of his “Ten Commandments”: “We cannot break the laws of God. We can only break ourselves against them.”

True freedom involves responsibility, for oneself and for others. Freedom also involves a significant cost, a price not easy to pay. When people living under oppression entertain naïve and idealistic dreams about freedom, they are simply deceiving themselves and are bound for bitter disappointment.

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## Inability to Communicate

Oppressive regimes do not encourage open, sincere communication among people. To survive, people very early learn the art of dissimulation: thinking one thing and saying something else. Because of heavy ideological control exercised by the system, people living in such societies do not learn how to discover and evaluate different options, to form their own convictions, and to argue for them. Nor do they understand the importance of acknowledging and respecting the positions of those holding opposing views. Dictators never encourage such communication skills because their aim is to create obedient and subservient citizens, not mature, independent-minded, reasoning, and responsible personalities.

During transition from dictatorship to democracy, even highly-educated people may appear utterly incapable of respect for someone whose ideas they reject. Negative impacts of this state of affairs on social cohesion and abilities of people and communities to negotiate and solve conflicts are obvious.

Deeply rooted behavioral patterns need to undergo progressive change, but change will not happen overnight or by simply letting things take their natural course. Developing societies need to be

Communist collectivism destroyed the fabric of society and instilled in many people utter selfishness and lack of concern for the community.

*(continued on page 8)*

consciously involved in a process of transformation that includes a number of contributing resources: reformed approaches to education as discovery rather than institutionalized propaganda, renewal of media integrity, rebuilt infrastructures, and new social networks, among other initiatives. ♦

**Danut Manastireanu**, based in Romania, is Director for Faith and Development for the Middle East and Eastern Europe for World Vision International.

*Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Danut Manastireanu, After Liberation, Then What? Enabling and Protecting Communities in Post-Authoritarian Contexts (Monrovia, CA: World Vision International, 2012). For a pdf version of the full text, contact the author at danutm@gmail.com.*

*Editor's note: The concluding portion of this article will be published in the East-West Church and Ministry Report 22 (Spring 2014).*

## Volunteers in Mission: An Interview with Rev. Tom Clark

*Editor's Note: Rev. Tom Clark is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church (UMC) and a member of the UMC West Virginia Annual Conference. A native of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, and a graduate of Ohio State University and Methodist Theological School, Delaware, Ohio, he has served pastorates across West Virginia. Since 1981 he has led short-term mission groups to over 50 countries, and since 2000 he has served as the full-time director of West Virginia's UMC Volunteers in Mission (VIM). Rev. Clark gave the following interview as he prepared to retire from his many years of service with VIM.*

For 13 years in a row we traveled to Russia in winter to host Christmas parties in over 50 orphanages.

**Editor:** When did you lead your first short-term mission?

**Rev. Clark:** It was 1981 to Jamaica.

**Editor:** How many short-term missions have you led, and how many of them have been to post-Soviet states?

**Rev. Clark:** I do not have an exact count, but I have led several hundred mission teams, and about one-third of these have been to Russia, Hungary, and Kosovo. Most of the missions to Europe have been to Russia.

**Editor:** Approximately how many people have gone with you on short-term missions to Russia and Eastern Europe?

**Rev. Clark:** About 1,000 to 1,200, with some going more than once.

**Editor:** Please describe your short-term missions in Russia and Eastern Europe.

**Rev. Clark:** I first led a team to Russia in 1994 with 43 people, with the peak years being 1994 to 2003. In 1994 and 1995 I led teams to Oryol southwest of Moscow to work on rural housing and to help restore an Orthodox Church that had been converted into a barn in the Soviet years. In 2000 I led a team to Kosovo to build a playground. I also led five or six trips to Hungary where we did repair work on two churches. However, I would say 98 percent of my mission teams to that part of the world were to Russia to work with orphans, primarily in Moscow and the Moscow Region, with some teams also ministering in St. Petersburg and Tomsk in Siberia. For 13 years in a row we traveled to Russia in winter to host Christmas parties in over 50 orphanages. Most Russians celebrate Christmas later than we do in the West, so taking teams there after December 25 in time for the Russian Christmas worked well. Especially in the early years our mission trips included donations of material goods. For example, in 1996 we delivered some 3,000 pounds of clothing, shoes, and toys.

**Editor:** How has the situation for Russian orphans changed over the years?

**Rev. Clark:** The government, Russian businesses, and Russian churches are doing much more to support orphanages now. At the same time, it has become much more expensive and difficult to travel with extra baggage on short-term missions to Russia. Airlines formerly allowed us extra bags for free or for reduced rates. As that changed, we had to rethink our strategy.

One year we spent \$7,500 in shipping orphan gifts. After that experience we began to take less baggage and to purchase more of our supplies and gifts in the country. The downside of this approach has to do with less personal involvement. People feel more connected to a mission project when they obtain and pack items for Russian orphans themselves, versus giving money for the same. Personal "sweat equity" is important in missions, both for those going and for those supporting a short-term mission.

**Editor:** What have been the greatest challenges you have faced as West Virginia's VIM director?

**Rev. Clark:** In addition to the supplies issue I just discussed, funding has always been a challenge. The increased cost of airfare is a factor. Making sure people going are serious about ministry in Russia is also important. Finally, dealing with Russian bureaucracy has been a challenge, for example, the sudden shutdown of access to an orphanage with a new director.

**Editor:** From your experience, what advice would you offer those leading short-term missions?

**Rev. Clark:** Start early with fund-raising and involve the local church as much as possible. It is best if the church financially assists individuals who have committed to going on a short-term mission organized by the church. Also, trip leaders need to prepare participants to be flexible and to be open to differences in cultures, including food. Leaders should also encourage participants to try the language, learn the culture, and be willing to stretch—like sled-riding at 30 below zero!

**Editor:** What have been your greatest satisfactions in short-term ministry?

**Rev. Clark:** Seeing the positive impact on Russian orphans has been pretty satisfying. Even with all the blue jeans disappearing from one clothing shipment, we still had much to share with the children. I have been encouraged seeing people new to overseas missions learning how to give and help someone else. One parent, for example, shared with me that a son returning from Russia had been absolutely changed. I have seen our VIM trips serve as life-changing experiences. I have appreciated the chance to put people in places where they have been able to have a positive spiritual impact. ♦

I have appreciated the chance to put people in places where they have been able to have a positive spiritual impact.

# Group Discipleship in Bulgaria: Wesley's Class Meeting Meets Social Media

Jay Glenn Sunberg

*Editor's note: The first half of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry 21 (Fall 2013): 10-13.*

## The Initial Weekend Seminar

After the six participants committed to taking part in the Sofia Discipleship Project, dates for an initial weekend seminar and the 10-week project itself were negotiated. Due to changes in participants' schedules beyond their control, the initial weekend seminar was condensed into four hours on a Sunday morning. Since two participants (P1 and P2) no longer live in Bulgaria, SKYPE was employed to provide the initial weekend seminar consisting of five main components. The first involved an exploration of a biblical definition of discipleship based on James 1:27 which sets forth compassion and holiness as the key ingredients.

The second seminar component examined Wesley's theology and practice of personal piety, including class members' commitment to watch over each other's spiritual development, the band (a more intense and intimate form of group accountability), "works of mercy" and "works of piety," and Wesley's insistence on the importance of visiting the poor. The third seminar component explored contemporary applications of Wesley's practice. David Lowes Watson's work was especially helpful in redefining Wesley's "works of mercy" as "acts of compassion" and "acts of justice," and his "works of piety" as "acts of worship" and "acts of devotion."

The fourth seminar component enumerated discipleship project expectations. Participants were expected to complete all assignments thoroughly and honestly, knowing that their identity would be protected. Participants were also expected to report honestly on their progress each week by "checking in" on the project website on Saturday or Sunday of each week. Finally, participants were highly encouraged to engage their fellow participants each week with either encouraging or admonishing comments on the website as necessary.

The final seminar component dealt with the working out of the specifics of a covenant statement. Participants discussed what specific discipleship practices they considered to be the most essential and confirmed their commitment to the newly created covenant statement by either signing the document itself, or by sending an email indicating their affirmation of the statement.

## Spiritual Autobiographies and the Initial Weekly Activity Log

The first of the initial assignments for participants was the writing of a spiritual autobiography, the purpose of which was to give an opportunity for each to articulate how they had seen God's hand at work in their lives. They also were asked to describe their call to ministry and to give an assessment of their current spiritual lives.

The second assignment given to participants was a weekly activity log which identified participants' allocation and prioritization of their time. The log was designed to provide answers to three

questions. 1) Do data from the week activity log support participant claims of busy schedules? 2) Is the travel time required for urban life and work truly prohibitive enough to warrant participants' hesitation to give time to another weekly meeting? 3) Finally, what does the weekly log indicate about the priority of spiritual practices in individual lives? Participants' autobiographies and activity logs were made available to all other participants who, in turn, were then given the opportunity to comment on each other's assignments with words of encouragement or admonition as necessary.

## The Course of the Project

In summary, the ten-week group discipleship project committed participants to do their best to keep their discipleship commitments and to record their progress on the project website at the end of each week. They were also strongly encouraged to dialog weekly with fellow participants, providing encouragement or admonition as needed. Participants received an e-mail at the beginning of each week reminding them of their commitments, instructing them again on what was expected and encouraging them to do their best throughout the coming week.

At the end of the first week, participants had their first website "check in," similar to accountability reporting at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Participants were simply to check a box if they adequately completed the discipleship task for the week. They were then encouraged to write an overall comment about their experience for the week. Participants received additional e-mails most weeks of the project to encourage them as well as to give further instructions as needed.

In the sixth week, near the middle of the project, the first face-to-face participants' meeting occurred. Since participants were in three different countries at the time of the meeting, the meeting was done through SKYPE technology. The purpose of the face-to-face meeting was to personalize the project, to give participants the opportunity to "check in" personally, to provide encouragement, and to answer any remaining questions. Participants expressed frustration with their project experience due to the busyness of their schedules. Other tasks and responsibilities were demanding so much of their time and energy that they felt they could not participate in the project as they had hoped. After about 45 minutes of discussion, the meeting concluded with group prayers.

During the final week of the project, participants received two closing assignments. The first involved another weekly activity log, the purpose of which was to determine if the project had made any measurable effects on how participants prioritized their time. The second concluding assignment of the project was a final questionnaire to measure participants' perception of the progress they had made through the duration of the project.

Five weeks after the conclusion of the project, a

David Lowes Watson's work was especially helpful in redefining Wesley's "works of mercy" as "acts of compassion" and "acts of justice."

(continued on page 10)

second participant face-to-face meeting took place, again with the assistance of SKYPE. The purpose of this meeting was to give another opportunity for participants to speak directly to each other in terms of accountability, to check on participants' progress in discipleship after the conclusion of the project and without the benefit of weekly group accountability, and to ask the question, "Where do we go from here?" Responses of the group fell into two categories. Two participants (P4 and P6) indicated that their discipleship practice following the project had decreased. Without the obligation to report to the group weekly, the demands of life and ministry had overtaken the consistent practice of discipleship. On the other hand, four participants (P1, P2, P3, and P5) reported improved post-project discipleship practice. One participant made a strong plea for continued group interaction in some form because of an ongoing need for accountability and a desire to preserve the close fellowship of the group. All participants expressed the desire to continue sharing in each other's lives however possible. In the end the group decided to take a month to pray about future directions.

### **Overall Group Assessment**

The overall group assessment of the discipleship project was very positive, even though assignments and weekly check-ins were often late and group interaction through responses to each other's website posts could have been much better. Participants only fulfilled 50 percent of their discipleship commitments; yet even with less than ideal performance, the progress of the group was very encouraging. Participants were able to achieve a level of spiritual conversation and accountability not previously experienced.

### **Imbalance in Discipleship**

The struggle of one participant (P6) with imbalanced discipleship practices most clearly illustrates the whole group's difficulties at this point. Even though this participant has the challenge of maintaining healthy discipleship while traveling, he still is not exempt from "works of mercy." The project had a positive effect on this individual's discipleship life, however, only in areas where he was already strong, in "works of piety" (acts of devotion and acts of worship), rather than in "works of mercy" (acts of compassion and acts of justice).

This struggle with imbalance in discipleship practices represents the danger of isolationism. Wesley characterized this form of discipleship as inward religion. Paul Wesley Chilcote has paraphrased Wesley's thinking as follows: "Religion that is purely inward... is a subtle device of Satan. Christianity is essentially a social religion, and to turn it into a solitary religion is to destroy it" (*Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004]. 48). According to Wesley, then, discipleship practices that are weighted to either "works of piety" or "works of mercy" fall short of fully forming the character of Christ's followers.

According to Wesley, discipleship practices that are weighted to either "works of piety" or "works of mercy" fall short.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Discipleship formation needs a more central position in the preparation for and the practice of ministry.**

The Evangelical community is blessed with excellent educational institutions that place a high priority on the acquisition of knowledge and the perfections of skills. Forming the character of Christ in students is also important, but often not pursued with the same degree of priority. The amount of attention given to educate and train students tends to push the formation of Christ to the responsibility of individual students. What if these priorities were reversed? What if those called into full-time ministry came to an institution whose highest priority was guiding the process of the intentional formation of Christ in its students? What if it became unthinkable to graduate a student who did not habitually practice healthy discipleship?

The point here is not to advocate the demise of knowledge acquisition or skill development. On the contrary, in the complexity of the world today, it is important to have the best educated and trained ministers. The point, rather, is simply to raise discipleship formation to a higher, more central position in ministerial preparation.

The words of Jesus to his disciples on their preparation for ministry were, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised... You will receive power." The unschooled, ordinary Christians of the first century changed their world because they had been with Jesus. Too often educated and skilled men and women depart from Jerusalem before they have spent adequate time with Jesus.

#### **2. Discipleship and ministry need to be measured in terms of faithfulness and fruitfulness instead of in terms of success and accomplishment.**

Too many believers have succumbed to a non-Christian view of success in the church, propagating the task-oriented success model learned outside the walls of the church. As the church grows, pastors are pressured to make compromises to meet the ever-growing demands on their time. When especially capable believers enter the ministry, excitement grows with the anticipation of the successes that most certainly will come through their ministry. The assumption is that if they are mature enough for ministry, they are also disciplined enough to be consistent in discipleship, a naïve assumption that the experience of the Sofia Discipleship Project has proven false. As time progresses, Christian workers more often become less and less disciplined in their spiritual lives and inch closer to burnout or abandoning the ministry.

Jesus' words to his disciples were, "Remain in me, and you will bear much fruit." Fruitfulness has little to do with success and accomplishment. Fruitfulness has everything to do with faithfully remaining connected to the vine. For Christian workers to be effective in kingdom terms, a re-arrangement of priorities is necessary. Success and accomplishment need to be replaced by faithfulness and fruitfulness. We must have a strong connection to the vine through a healthy

commitment to discipleship formation.

### **3. Discipleship needs to be a group exercise as opposed to an individual responsibility.**

If anything was clearly revealed through the experience of the Sophia Discipleship Project it was the sharp contrast between the effectiveness of discipleship as a group activity as opposed to the ineffectiveness of discipleship as an individual's responsibility. The project underscored the fact that individual believers often are not the best stewards of their own souls. When discipleship is hidden from the sight of others, it becomes too easy to hide shortcomings in the experience. The involvement of other believers in our discipleship keeps each disciple rooted and grounded and held accountable. Believers need to know and be known; they need to move beyond the surface and share life and discipleship together; and they cannot afford to go months on end without being in the Word, as was the case with one participant (P2).

The Sofia Discipleship Project was characterized by improved consistency and satisfaction with discipleship practices. Although it was an imperfect group endeavor, its intentionality and group interaction produced positive results. The discipleship practices of participants significantly improved over the course of the ten-week project.

### **4. Discipleship practices need to be balanced between "works of mercy" and "works of piety."**

It is important to remember that not only did Jesus say, "Remain in Jerusalem," He also commanded, "Go into all the world." For believers, remaining in Jerusalem and going into all the world should hold equal importance. The contemporary church needs to balance the "remaining" and the "going." The command to remain should not be an excuse to retreat from the command to go. Remaining is not a safe enclave away from the evils of the world. It is an infilling of power to be fruitful in the world. Believers "remain" so that they can more effectively "go." The church fears the world's evil and danger, but it is the same world that God loved so much that He gave His Son to die for it. A discipleship that ignores "works of mercy" hides the light of Christ under a

bowl. Conversely, a discipleship that neglects "works of piety" cuts off the life-giving nourishment needed from the vine. Balance between the two is essential.

Though short of ideal at ten weeks, the Sofia Discipleship Project was long enough to illustrate the value and potential of group discipleship. Although the wisdom of hindsight would suggest helpful adaptations for the future, the project did demonstrate that the utilization of social media can be an effective means of facilitating group discipleship accountability. Social networking can help overcome the perceived challenges of lack of time, the difficulties of urban transportation, and isolation from significant spiritual influences. The intent of the project was not to determine whether a social media format was better or worse than a traditional face-to-face format for group discipleship accountability. Rather, the goal was to demonstrate that utilization of social media could be a viable and effective option for group discipleship. At minimum, the project results indicate that social media do not significantly deter effective group discipleship for most participants. Instead, most participants made a significant, identifiable improvement over the short ten-week span of the project.

The project also suggests that church leaders should do all in their power to encourage those serving under them to participate in group discipleship. Doing so makes it clear that discipleship is not solely an individual's responsibility, and it also counters the success and accomplishment model that has crept into the church. Instead, discipleship with accountability facilitates faithfulness and fruitfulness in Christ's disciples.♦

*Edited excerpts published with permission from Jay Glenn Sunberg, "The Sofia Discipleship Project: A Contemporary Adaptation of the Wesley Class Meeting to Meet the Discipleship Formation Needs of the Leadership Team of the Sofia First Nazarene Church," D. Min. dissertation, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Kansas, 2012.*

**Jay Glenn Sunberg is Field Strategy Coordinator for Central Europe, Church of the Nazarene, based in Budapest, Hungary.**

Social media can be an effective means of facilitating group discipleship accountability. Social networking can help overcome the perceived challenges of lack of time, the difficulties of urban transportation, and isolation from significant spiritual influences.

## **God Bless the Doers**

Rich Correll

Seventeen years ago, I was partnering with the Ukrainian Evangelical Christian-Baptist Union in church planting and missions. We discovered that Western agencies were financially supporting 400 "missionaries" through the Union. Further examination uncovered that the "missionaries" were not really "missionaries." They were *oblast* (regional) superintendents, assistant superintendents, selected pastors and educators, and a cadre of relatives – none who actually planted any churches – a smooth bait-and-switch operation. As a result, I suggested term limits for support, refreshing the list from the bottom up with real church planters. Suggestion denied! The survival of the institution outranked the mission of the church.

A few years later, I met with 40 church-planter trainers with whom I work to review the results

for the year. In the midst of our discussions, one trainer said, "You know brothers, if each of us would have planted just one church, we would have more new churches than our training of these 345 students is producing." He was right! I immediately deconstructed the training work and reorganized, focusing on doers in missionary teams.

These two experiences remind me of a Western visitor to India telling Mother Theresa that he would return home and raise money for her work. Her reply was, "God will take care of the finances. What is needed is for you to be here working with the poor."

The primary lesson that I have learned from my 20-plus years of mission work is to partner only with doers. I do not and I will not work with promoters, speakers, or institutional leaders who are simply wordsmiths or program designers. In the words of

*(continued on page 16)*

## More Comments on Operation World Statistics

Yuri Reshetnikov

*Editor's note: The East-West Church and Ministry Report 21 (Fall 2013) carried critiques and analyses of 2001-2010 post-Soviet church statistics published in the four issues of the EWC&M Report Vol. 21.*

Political changes in the former socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe heralded significant changes in church-state relations, associated primarily with the desire for real freedom of conscience. Religious freedom led to a substantial increase in both the number of believers in these countries and the number of religious organizations. Another consequence of religious freedom has been increased religious diversity in these countries. However, one should take into account that the greatest growth of religious organizations occurred in the period 1991-2000, whereas in the subsequent decade of 2001-2010, growth was less dramatic, and in some cases religious organizations encountered slight decreases.

At the same time, calculating precise increases in the number of Orthodox and Catholic believers is difficult because only Protestant churches have fixed membership. Sociological surveys can also help highlight dominant religious groups in a country, but survey data are not suitable for an accurate determination of church membership.

Estimating the number of a church's non-member "supporters" (affiliated regular attendees) is even more difficult. Some of *Operation World* statistics require refinement. For example, it is doubtful that Kazakhstan has 95 Ukrainian Orthodox churches and 206 Russian Orthodox churches. Note that in Ukraine the number of parishes of

the Ukrainian Orthodox in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate is more than twice the total number of other Ukrainian Orthodox churches (Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate and Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church). Speaking of Ukraine, it should be noted that the cited data for 2010 do not quite correspond with the official statistics of the State Committee of Ukraine for Nationalities and Religions. Thus, *Operation World* cites 11,300 parishes for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, while the official figure was 11,952. Also, significantly underreported are the number of religious organizations of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Pentecostals, and others. For unknown reasons, *Operation World* completely omitted one of the dominant religions in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate with 4,508 parishes in 2010. Finally, I believe the Belarus government's hostility toward unregistered religious organizations has led to a significant underreporting of the number of unregistered Pentecostal groups in this country. ♦

**Yuri Reshetnikov, Ph.D.**, is deputy chairman of the Public Council for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Organizations of the Ministry of Education and Sciences of Ukraine.

Calculating precise increases in the number of Orthodox and Catholic believers is difficult because only Protestant churches have fixed membership.

## Roma, Religion, and Regeneration

Tatiana Podolinská and Thomáš Hrustič

### Statistics and Stereotypes

According to a thorough 2013 sociographic mapping of Roma communities in Slovakia, there are approximately 402,000 Roma in the country ([http://www.minv.sk?atlas\\_2013](http://www.minv.sk?atlas_2013)). Half of these Roma live integrated with the majority population, and the other half is concentrated in settlements with various degrees of segregation and marginalization from the general population. Roma in Slovakia live in isolated rural settlements and urban ghettos impoverished to various degrees of generational and segregated poverty.

An anti-Roma mood is on the rise in Slovak society, which is undoubtedly fueled by the predominantly negative image of Roma presented by Slovak media. Several field research studies also have affirmed that the general population has little information about the actual life of Roma, and has the tendency to accept the characterization of the group as "lazy" and "unadaptable," living at the expense of the majority.

### The Research Project

In 2010, the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences conducted a research project focused on mapping the impact of religious missions on the social inclusion of Roma in *Slovakia-Social Inclusion of Roma through Religion* (SIRONA

2010). The project was implemented by a team of 20 researchers managed by Tatiana Podolinská, Ph.D., and Thomáš Hrustič, Ph.D., from the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. In the framework of the 2010 research project, we contacted 30 churches and organizations with potential religious activities in the Roma communities in Slovakia, and we found that 19 of them are active among Roma. At present 14 registered churches and five non-registered religious movements are actively involved among Roma in Slovakia, conducting missions in about 130 localities in total and reaching about 10,000 Roma (actively participating members).

As for the number of persons influenced by the different missions to Roma, the following five churches are most relevant: the Roman Catholic Church; Jehovah's Witnesses; the Greek Catholic Church; Maranatha Christian Mission; and the Apostolic Church. According to internal estimates of the Roman Catholic Church, its mission concerns about 5,000 religiously active Roma; Jehovah's Witnesses reach around 2,000 Roma; the Greek Catholic Church and the Maranatha movement actively work with about 1,000 Roma each; and the Apostolic Church reaches about 500 Roma.

### Indicators of Social Inclusion

Since the 2010 research project focused on the

impact of religious missions on social change and potential social inclusion of Roma, we established a fixed set of 14 indicators of social inclusion:

1. Increased school attendance of children
2. Decline in indebtedness
3. Reduced usury
4. Increased activity in seeking a job
5. Higher capacity to stay on the labor market
6. Decline in petty crime
7. Less problems with alcoholism and other narcotics
8. Less gambling and less addiction to hazardous games
9. Increased literacy rate
10. Enhanced communication skills
11. Enhanced social skills
12. Increased frequency of positive contacts with other Roma from other municipalities
13. Increased frequency of positive contacts with the general population
14. Elimination of common stereotypes.

### **Evidences of Success**

In particular, research findings documented reduced addiction to alcohol and other narcotics (98 percent), significant decline in petty crime (97 percent), and lower indebtedness (96 percent) among Roma who became members of religious movements. We gave those surveyed the possibility to characterize in their own words social changes that occurred as a result of religious change. The most frequent responses included: improvement of marital relations, improvement of relations between children and parents, change in consumer behavior, and change in family financial management. Municipal councils in several studied localities affirmed that converted Roma make efforts not to go into debt.

Social change is often the condition of membership (entrance and staying) in a religious group. In the case of some missions, social change (visible change of behavior) is the sign of spiritual change. There is a tendency to assume that believers who do not show signs of gradual social change have not gone through religious change. Thus, community social pressure is exercised on believers which has an important impact on the stabilization of social change.

The social change that Roma believers witness in their communities proves the possibility of change. Since individuals cannot change the environment in which they are born, and the possibilities to change their external world are also limited, personal change is perceived as the type of change that is available to all. (In this case, it is in the hands of every believer.) An actual change in people within the Roma community (family members, neighbors, or friends) provides proof that religious and social change is possible. ("If my neighbor has been able to change in a very short time, then I can also change, too, for sure!")

With the increase in the number of conversions and examples of positive change, the attractiveness of change to others in the community (non-members) increases, too. As well, it works as evidence for members that they have made a correct decision on their path to change. In hard situations, or where believers subjectively think they cannot

manage to make the desired change on their own, the group constantly gives them strength and affirms that the achievement of such change is possible. Under circumstances where it is hardly possible to offer Roma immediate external material or social benefits, faith provides not only immediate internal guidelines, but also internal benefits in the form of psychological satisfaction.

### **The Role of Priests and Pastors**

Priests, pastors, and religious leaders have great potential to become motivators of internal change and positive external activity. The charisma of a priest or a pastor appears to be one of the key factors of positive social change in communities in which a religious mission has been conducted. Considering Roma poverty patterns transmitted from generation to generation, pastors and priests are aware that a mission must have a long-term, intensive, and highly personalized character.

Religious leaders in Roma localities work with Roma not only in spiritual matters. In effective Roma missions, they also solve many problems produced by the social exclusion of Roma. Leaders work as psychologists, marital, educational, and financial advisors, as field social workers, and even as sexologists. The bonds between converted Roma and their religious leaders are therefore very strong.

Pastoral intervention can also have a positive impact on improvement of Roma school attendance and can motivate an increase in the education level not only of children, but also of adults. Moreover, it can positively influence a more responsible approach to parenthood. It can be stated in general that in a relatively short time perspective and with the use of minimum input costs, pastoral intervention can make a community socially sound and provide not only concrete guidelines but also concrete positive examples to people who have long lived in social need. The research showed that many pastors and priests provide comprehensive assistance to Roma in socially excluded communities, thus largely substituting the lack of social services directed to these communities. In addition to spiritual pastoral outreach, the majority of pastors and priests act as social mentors providing Roma with social counseling.

### **God as Mentor**

In the eyes of Roma believers, the changes they have experienced came not through pastors or priests, but through God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Believers who have gone through a religious change leading to a social change are convinced that God sees everything, not only what they do, but also what they think, and therefore they constantly seek to realize and prove their change in real life. For Roma believers, God works as a permanent, full-time mentor. God can be with them whenever they need Him. In weak moments and hard life situations, which can occur at any time, they can immediately ask for internal consultation with their Mentor who is not only empathetic, but also omnipotent.

### **The Advantages of "Non-Traditional" Missions**

Our research showed that so-called "non-traditional" missions are highly effective in generating

In particular, research findings documented reduced addiction to alcohol and other narcotics (98 percent), significant decline in petty crime (97 percent), and lower indebtedness (96 percent) among Roma who became members of religious movements.

*(continued on page 14)*

Pastoral intervention reduces Roma indebtedness, alcoholism, gambling, drug use, and thefts.

positive social change in the Slovak context: both Pentecostal and charismatic Christian missions and charismatic movements working within the framework of large, traditional churches. The pastoral intervention of these missions reduces Roma indebtedness, alcoholism, gambling, drug use, and thefts. Pastors and priests also teach Roma how to manage finances and adapt their family spending to the amount of available money. They motivate them as well to seek employment. Roma are attracted to Pentecostal and charismatic non-traditional rites and experiential forms of worship—personal contact with God and spontaneously experienced faith demonstrated by singing and emotional (up to ecstatic) manifestations.

### **The Disadvantages of Dominant Churches**

From the point of view of positive social change, large, local, traditionally dominant churches were the least effective in working with Roma. Our research determined that the pastoral intervention of these denominations is usually not focused on achieving social change and inclusion of Roma. Rather, these churches stress doctrinal issues and the elimination of “defects” in Roma converts: The emphasis is upon regular attendance of masses, making marriages official, first Holy Communion, vows made during confirmation, etc. Typically, traditionally dominant churches consider it an optional matter whether or not priests choose to also assist Roma in developing social skills, in overcoming alcoholism, drugs, truancy, and gambling, in seeking employment, and in furthering their education.

Locally dominant churches are often passive in their missions among Roma, and because of their conservative approach, they contribute significantly to the creation and spread of stereotypical opinions about Roma, representing them as religiously passive, unstable, and “incorrigible.” In contrast, according to the results of our research, local minority churches and religious groups (usually with smaller membership, non-registered, non-traditional, or unknown religious organizations) have significant potential to generate stable and comprehensive positive social change in their Roma converts.

### **Positive Social Networking for Roma**

Currently, religious groups are often the only institutions in Slovakia which provide inhabitants of Roma communities with an actual possibility of active engagement in a functional social network. Our research demonstrated that one of the reasons why, in general, religious missions are highly effective

in bringing social change to marginalized Roma communities is the fact that they come with a special offer of social networks. The unique nature of the social network brought by religious groups to Roma communities involves building up the community as a family (calling each other sister and brother, etc.).

### **Key Findings**

- Religious change has high potential for social change among Roma. The set of 14 indicators of social inclusion showed a minimum of an 80 percent success rate of change in social habits, competences, and skills among Roma who have gone through a considerable religious change.
- Several cases showed that it is highly ineffective to provide gifts to group members and to attempt to build a mission based upon charity alone. It works the other way around: Many religious missions that request from their members at least a symbolic financial contribution are much more effective, and their membership is much more stable. According to pastors, one of the key reasons is that members of the group then consider that group as their own and participate in its joint formation with more enthusiasm.
- Many religious groups offer social networks in which Roma can dynamically develop their *romipen* (religious songs in the Roma language; Roma as a pastoral language; training of Roma leaders, etc.).
- State administration and policy makers should see pastoral work among Roma as one of several effective social tools for the improvement of social conditions among Roma. ♦

*Edited excerpts reprinted with permission from Tatiana Podolinská and Tomáš Hrustič, Religion as a Path to Change? The Possibilities of Social Inclusion of the Roma in Slovakia (Bratislava, Slovakia: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011). The full text may be accessed from the Slovak Academy of Sciences website: <http://www.uet.sav.sk/?=sk/religion-path-change>. The unabridged Slovak language study from which Religion as a Path to Change is derived is Podolinská, Tatiana and Tomáš Hrustič, Boh Medzi bariérami. Socialna inklúzia Rómov náboženskou cestou (Bratislava, Slovakia: Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2010).*

**Tatiana Podolinská** is director of the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. **Tomáš Hrustič** is a researcher with the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Science.

## **Book Reviews**

**Podolinská, Tatiana and Tomáš Hrustič. Religion as a Path to Change? The Possibilities of Social Inclusion of the Roma in Slovakia. Bratislava, Slovakia: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011.**

*This study, published under the auspices of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, provides documentation and explanation for the impressive positive effect of religious outreach to Roma (Gypsies) in Slovakia. Minorities make up 20 percent of the Slovak population, and of that 20 percent Roma are viewed as the most problem-plagued group.*

Roma left India and northern Pakistan, most likely in successive waves, beginning about 1,000 years ago. In Europe, Eastern Europe, and Russia they have been considered sub-human by governments and society alike. During World War II Germans murdered a greater percentage of Roma in gas chambers and concentration camps than any other ethnic group. Understanding the widespread,

This study provides documentation and explanation for the impressive positive effect of religious outreach to Roma in Slovakia.

hostile attitudes toward Roma makes this academic study all the more phenomenal and a must read for anyone seeking to have an effective ministry among Roma.

In this study Podolinská and Hrustič give concrete evidence of effective evangelism strategies among Roma. *Religion as a Path to Change* makes clear that when churches reach out to Roma who then become actively involved in churches, their reformation is so pronounced that non-Roma begin to accept them. Some of the successful church strategies and principles identified by the authors follow. Roma highly value relationships, and as a result, missions that focus on building personal relationships with Roma fare best. Also, in successful missions pastors and priests have played central roles as psychologists, marital advisors, and social workers, in addition to their role as spiritual leaders. In contrast, a mainline church constructed a building for a Roma church but placed it in an isolated location. In this case, the distance between Roma and non-Roma grew significantly because Roma recognized that the church builders did not want a relationship with them. Roma concluded that the gospel proclaimed by the mainline church clashed with the separation and racism they experienced at the hands of this church.

*Religion as a Path to Change* also documents that involving Roma in project development and leadership greatly increases the likelihood of success. However, lasting and stable missions are not the case when Roma who lack sufficient

education and spiritual maturity are tapped for leadership. “Local minority churches (as opposed to mainline churches in Slovakia) have a big potential to generate a stable church” in which Roma conversions result in changed lives. Work with Roma most often succeeds when pastors and priests show inclusion in their ministry, open themselves to relationships with local authorities, and find culturally appropriate ways in which Roma may grow personally, socially, and spiritually. Church leaders are most helpful when they preach sermons and structure activities that include all members of Roma society: men, women, children, young, and old. Podolinská and Hrustič also found that successful work among Roma requires significant time devoted to particular communities; spreading resources, pastors, and priests thin is a recipe for failure with Roma. In contrast, making a commitment of time and self to one group better develops a stable, life-changing church.

*Religion as a Path to Change* is at times difficult to understand because of the use of technical, social science jargon. Nevertheless, this study is remarkably balanced and well worth the reading. Within its 48 pages are many nuggets of gold for church growth among Roma in Slovakia and anywhere Roma live. ♦

**Frank Dawson**, former Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary among Roma in Russia, now works as a drug counselor in Birmingham, Alabama.

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### **Beman, Larry with Dee Dee Azhikakath. *The Roma of Europe*. New York, NY: United Methodist Women, 2013.**

In this study Larry Beman has compiled an incredible amount of information about Roma, a people long misunderstood, feared, and even hated. Though written specifically for a people group study for United Methodist Women, Beman has succeeded in writing an account of use to a much wider audience including local churches, missionaries, scholars, and anthropologists. In just 89 pages Beman covers Roma origins in India, their culture and history, and the development of the hatred that has been directed toward Roma for millennia. The author also notes signs of hope and grace, including governments that at one time sought to deport or exterminate Roma now seeking ways to integrate them into mainstream society.

This unashamedly Christian study not only teaches about Roma, it also reminds readers of biblical mandates instructing God’s people to care for the poor, the alien, and the outcast. The final chapter is an inspiring look at what United Methodists are doing among Roma in Eastern Europe, how individuals can be involved personally in ministry among Roma, and guidelines for United

Methodist ministry among the poor. An appendix by Dee Dee Azhikakath provides helpful resources for spiritual development and worship focused on Roma.

It is a challenge to decide the study’s greatest contribution: the compilation of extensive information on a people with comparatively little written history, the inclusion of memorable photos that personalize the account, or the helpful bibliography. Still, on some points Beman makes assertions that are debatable, for example, that Elvis Presley had Roma ancestry and that Travelers in England are Roma. As regards Travelers, the confusion may stem from the association of unrelated groups simply because they share similar lifestyles and cultures. With that said, Beman’s study is to be commended for inspiring love for God’s people called Roma. ♦

**Frank Dawson**, former Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary among Roma in Russia, now works as a drug counselor in Birmingham, Alabama.

Beman’s study is to be commended for inspiring love for God’s people called Roma.

**Klingsmith, Scott. *Missions Beyond the Wall: Factors in the Rise of Missionary Sending Movements in East-Central Europe*. Nürnberg, Germany: VTR Publications, 2012.**

The book has significance for global Christianity today because it treats churches once seen as “receiving nations” now operating as “sending nations.”

Volumes are appearing today about the emergence of missionary-sending movements from churches in countries once seen as receiving nations. Scott Klingsmith’s book examines the social, cultural, and spiritual factors which influenced the rise of four missionary sending movements in East-Central Europe (ECE) after the revolutions of 1989: two in Romania and one each in Poland and Hungary. Cases include a single local church, a specific mission agency, and several national cooperative efforts among churches and agencies. One might question how representative the small number of cases could be. Klingsmith, acknowledging that he chose cases that were accessible and with which he had some familiarity, nevertheless suggests that his approach may be more instructive than attempting to treat all missionary-sending movements across an expanse as complex as East-Central Europe. Klingsmith’s near-emic (insider) perspective is the result of years of ministry in the region. He was witness to ECE missionary-sending movements, and many of his informants consider him an insider.

The research is well rooted in the literature, reflecting the influence of biologist and systems theorist Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy, sociologist Talcott Parsons, and missiologist and anthropologist Paul G. Hiebert. Though Klingsmith speaks of “missionary-sending movements,” he acknowledges that it is still too early to talk of such, as all these groups began sending missionaries less than ten years ago. Klingsmith is to be commended for doing such a study when the church in freedom is still so young. His work may well be one of the “base-line” studies to which researchers will refer in decades to come, as movements grow and proliferate. Klingsmith presents a well-organized “slice of reality,” showing what is happening right now, that is, many small

movements. As Malcolm Gladwell, whom he quotes, says, the paradox of the epidemic is “that in order to create one contagious movement, you often have to create many small movements first” (*The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* [Boston: Little, Brown, 2000], 192).

The book has significance for global Christianity today because it treats churches once seen as “receiving nations” now operating as “sending nations.” Klingsmith moves the reader from four detailed case studies to the larger, global situation in ever greater concentric circles, first looking at countries surrounding Poland, Romania, and Hungary (i.e., Ukraine, Moldova, etc.) and then widening the scope to the worldwide scene.

This insightful book will be particularly fascinating to those who have served in East-Central Europe, but also for Western missionaries planning to minister in the region and for leaders of Western missions. For those who contemplate working alongside believers in other post-communist churches and societies, *Missions Beyond the Wall* is a gold mine providing different models churches might consider in seeking to find a truly indigenous way of doing mission. ♦

*Editor’s note: Excerpts from Scott Klingsmith’s dissertation, upon which Missions Beyond the Wall is based, were previously published in the East-West Church and Ministry Report 12 (Summer 2004): 9-12; 12 (Fall 2004): 16, 15; 13 (Winter 2005): 12-15; 13 (Spring 2005): 8-11; 13 (Summer 2005): 13-14.*

**Miriam Charter** is Associate Professor of Intercultural Studies, Ambrose University College, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

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Asbury University  
One Macklem Drive  
Wilmore, KY 40390  
Tel: 859-858-2427  
E-mail: emark936@gmail.com  
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Mark R. Elliott, Editor  
Ray Prigodich, Book Review Editor

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**God Bless the Doers** (continued from page 11)

D. James Kennedy, “Masses and classes only lead to flashes and ashes.” I am always amazed that we put fine speakers on a high place and rarely recognize the authentic Christ-like workers.

I have intentionally chosen to work with the doers who act like Christ – incarnationally in the lives of others in the mess of life. My heroes are the doers of the word! They are the contenders, not the pretenders. God bless you!

With those who depart from the path of being Christ-like workers, I say, “May God bless you as you organize, speak, and promote. May we meet again sometime, but the days are short and words alone fall short.” My exhortation is for each of us to measure the degree to which we are Christ-like in our work and make the changes needed to be as incarnational as possible by His grace. ♦

**Rich Correll** is director of Church Planters’ Training Institute, Grand Rapids, Michigan.