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Introducing Coverage for Malkhaz Songulashvili, *Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia*

Mark R. Elliott, Editor

As soon as I had opportunity to peruse Malkhaz Songulashvili's comprehensive account of the history and current status of Georgia's Evangelical Christian Baptists (337 pages of text, 90 pages of appendices, and 62 pages of bibliography of Georgian, Russian, English, French, and German sources), I immediately recognized a volume that had import well beyond the confines of a small, post-Soviet republic in the Caucasus. For the first time in 24 years as editor of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report*, I chose to recruit multiple critiques of a truly path-breaking study. As a consequence, in addition to reprinting an excerpt from the book, this issue includes reviews by four theologians and church historians: James J. Stamoilis (author of *Orthodox Mission Theology Today*), Danut Manastireanu (longtime World Vision administrator for Eastern Europe and the Middle East), Paul Crego (Library of Congress), and David Bundy (New York Theological Seminary). The wide range of significant issues addressed by Songulashvili and his reviewers include Georgian Baptist borrowings from Orthodox liturgy and iconography;

the interface of evangelical and Orthodox theology; a comparison of Georgian Baptists and Romania's Lord's Army; the heresy of phyletism (the fusing of Christian allegiance and national patriotism); the ordination of women; and the defense of freedom of conscience for all, including for those who hold beliefs even a majority consider objectionable.

Unfortunately, for the present issue, even with considerable effort, I was unable to secure Russian evangelical and Orthodox responses to the ongoing Georgian Baptist Church experiment. However, for the next issue I have managed to recruit Russians to critique Songulashvili's volume. In the meantime, I will close with a quote from British Baptist pastor and missiologist Darrell Jackson: "More conservative Baptists have been critical of... [Georgian Baptist] reforms, although an official European Baptist inquiry in 2003 found in favor of their remaining within the family of European Baptists" ("Experimentation in Worship: A Georgian Baptist Case Study," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 13 (Summer 2005), 15. ♦

A Merging of Protestant and Orthodox Theology and Practice: Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia

Malkhaz Songulashvili

In Georgia, beginning in the late 1980s, every faith group began to enjoy the freedom to revive religious life. Understandably, the Georgian Orthodox Church assumed a more prominent role in the life of Georgian society than others, but nobody minded since other groups were also given freedom to develop their own ministries. One of the clear symbols of this time of change was the publication in 1989 of the first complete translation of the Bible since 1742, with the blessing of the Georgian Orthodox Church and with the active participation of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church.¹

Catholic Renewal

In the late 1980s, Roman Catholics had only one active church for the three Transcaucasian countries of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Fr. Ian Sezinski, a Polish priest, served all three countries for almost two decades. In the late 1980s, the Catholic faith was revived in traditionally Catholic villages and towns, mostly in southern Georgia. After independence in 1992, a Vatican embassy was

established in Tbilisi. Both the first papal nuncio, Archbishop Jean Paul Gobel, and his successors invested great energy in reviving the Catholic faith in traditionally Catholic areas. In 1992 Archbishop Gobel brought two Stigmatini monks from Italy—Giuseppe Passotto and Gabriel Bragantini. One was established in Tbilisi and one in Kutaisi to revive church life. Both learned the Georgian language. In 2000 Giuseppe Passotto was consecrated in Rome as the first Catholic bishop of Georgia.

Armenian Apostolic and Lutheran Renewal

In the Soviet era, the 300,000-strong ethnic Armenian community had only two churches in Georgia, both in Tbilisi. But after 1992, Armenian Apostolic church life was revived among ethnic Armenians. Closed Armenian churches were reopened in South Georgia where there is a compact Armenian population in the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti. After the death of Romanian-born Archbishop Gevork Seraidarian (1932-2002), who led the Armenian Diocese in Georgia for almost 20 years,

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a new bishop, Vazgen Mirzakhanian, was appointed by the Catholicos of all Armenians, Karekin II.

No active Lutheran Church was left in Georgia by the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The large Lutheran Church in Tbilisi was built up in 1945. Paul Tillich's disciple Gert Hummel, a professor of Saarland University, Saarbrücken, Germany, and honorary professor of Tbilisi State University, began the revival of the Lutheran Church among people of German ethnic background. Because of his and his wife's tireless work, the Lutheran faith was revived and churches reestablished in Tbilisi (1992), Sukhumi (1995), and Rustavi (1998). Hummel even sold his personal property in Germany to build a new church on the grounds of the old Lutheran cemetery, which was returned to him by President Edward Shevardnadze's special decree.

Evangelical Christian Baptist Renewal

The story of the Evangelical Christian Baptists (ECBs) in this period was entirely different from the revivalist work of other Christian communities in Georgia. Its missiology would not allow it to concentrate on any particular ethno-linguistic-geographical group. Instead, it worked with the entire Georgian population. Its primary concern was the revival of the Christian faith and preaching the Gospel to those who had never heard it; evangelism became its priority. On the verge of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the congregations of the Georgian Evangelical Christians-Baptists declared their independence from the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB). Within two years, they had shortened their name to Evangelical Christian Baptist Church of Georgia.

The Rise of Religious Nationalism

The void left by the abolition of Communist ideology in many parts of the Soviet Union was filled by religion. Majority religions in all the former Soviet republics made efforts to revive religious nationalism. In reaction to Soviet suppression, Georgian nationalism, as well, acquired strong religious characteristics. Religious nationalism emerged as part of political discourse during the reign of the first president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1990-1992), and has been a principal feature of all the governments of Georgia since.

The Constitutional Agreement on Orthodoxy

In such a situation, the Georgian Orthodox Church acquired a political function in deploying religion to legitimize secular authority, but for this it sought something in return, namely formal recognition by the state. For the implementation of this project, the Orthodox Church first sought support from other religious groups. For the first time, both the state and the Georgian Orthodox Church agreed to designate as "traditional" the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical

Christian Baptist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Jewish community, and Islam. In return, the Orthodox and the government asked these groups to lend their support to the Constitutional Agreement that was to grant the Orthodox Church special privileges and rights. Subsequently, the state provided a venue in Georgia's Parliament for negotiations between Orthodox and other traditional religious communities. As a result of the negotiations, individual common declarations were signed.

Ultimately, on 14 October 2001, the president and the patriarch signed the Constitutional Agreement at Svetitskhoveli Cathedral in Mtskheta in the presence of leaders of traditional churches and religious groups, giving the Orthodox Church legal status in the Georgian Constitution and granting it a number of rights and privileges. Some Georgian lawyers maintained that, as a result, the Georgian government was building a clerical state.² But nobody would believe them. With the signing of the Constitutional Agreement, religious nationalism was ascendant and the Georgian Orthodox Church acquired legal means to strengthen its position in Georgian society.

Georgian Folk Christianity

Through the centuries, Georgians developed their own cultural and folk Christianity, including the very strange practice of animal sacrifice, which has not always been compatible with institutional Orthodox faith. In the mountains of Georgia, people still hold fast to their religious traditions and practices, which parallel Orthodox Church life. These beliefs and practices, which are especially strong in more isolated mountain communities, are identified in Georgia as *mamapapebis rwmena* (faith of the ancestors).

Faith in ancestors was also one of the main challenges for Evangelical Christian Baptists, even prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union. Evangelical Christian Baptists worked hard to return the religious character to the practices of folkloric Christianity, interpreting and reinterpreting them in the light of the Christian Gospel. Inspired by folkloric feasts, Evangelical Christian Baptists developed Gospel-oriented Christian feasts that were celebrated in the open air. For instance, the Feasts of the Ascension and the Transfiguration and Easter morning worship are always celebrated in the open air. These services also attract many young people, both from the Baptist and Orthodox traditions. Very much like some traditional folk feasts, they are celebrated among picturesque mountains, which bring the beauty of creation and liturgy together.

The Cross, Icons, and Candles

Veneration of the cross has been particularly characteristic of Christianity from early times. However, in public worship, early Evangelical Christian Baptists in Georgia were heavily influenced by the iconoclastic tradition of Russian

Evangelical Christian Baptists worked hard to return the religious character to the practices of folkloric Christianity.

and East European Baptists. The cross in Russian ECB spirituality was, and still is, a particularly unacceptable symbol, which is associated with Orthodoxy and the Orthodox persecution of dissent. Nevertheless, while in Georgia the ECB discouraged the wearing of personal crosses, privately everyone owned and displayed crosses and icons at home. Reverend Giorgi Bolgashvili was the first Georgian Baptist minister who tried to reintroduce the cross in a worship setting, but because of pressure from Russian Baptists, he had to give up the attempt. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the regaining of ecclesial independence from Moscow, Guram Kumelashvili, the first head of newly independent Evangelical Christian Baptists, reintroduced the cross on the façade of the cathedral of the Baptist Church in 1992. Further reforms in the church introduced icons as a part of artistic renewal in a devotional setting in 1997-1998. Candles were also legitimized as the liturgical movement within the church made headway. Thus, the most important obstacle to sharing the Gospel with the Georgian people—iconoclasm (opposition to the visual portrayal of images of the divine)—gave way to the Eastern spiritual practices that were embedded in Georgian culture and reinterpreted by Evangelical Christian Baptists.

Previous ECB iconoclasm was a clear indicator for Georgians that the message the ECB preached was foreign and therefore not worthy of even being heard. By giving up the iconoclastic tradition, Evangelical Christian Baptists came closer to the people. The language of art and symbols is the language that Georgian people listen to and understand. In the past, ECB evangelists had to argue with those whom they evangelized that none of the elements of the Georgian cultural expression of spirituality were valuable, and consequently the practice of using crosses, candles, and icons was idolatrous. In its new evangelistic practice, the ECB does not condemn icons, candles, or crosses; rather, its preachers interpret them in the process of sharing the Gospel. Something that was considered the enemy of evangelism in the Russian ECB tradition became a friend to evangelistic endeavor.

Georgian Baptist Institutional Revival

In the Soviet era in Georgia, 40 Orthodox churches, 13 Baptist churches, six synagogues, two mosques, and one Catholic church were officially registered.³ At that time, ten Baptist churches were Russian-speaking, one was Armenian-speaking, one was Ossetian-speaking, and only one was Georgian-speaking. The Communists were reluctant to let Georgian Baptists officially establish Georgian-speaking churches outside Tbilisi, forcing Georgians to travel from rural villages to attend services. Since Georgian Baptists from the beginning had strong sacramental aspirations and practices, every member of the congregation made the effort to be at the Tbilisi church for the Eucharist, which was celebrated once a

month. This congregation, which was later to become the cathedral of the Baptist Church in Georgia, was the mother church for most ECB churches in the country.

With the arrival of religious freedom, almost all those who were attending services in Tbilisi once a month, because of the distance, requested that the Tbilisi church send ministers to their villages. In the early 1990s, the church office was receiving so many requests that the five ordained and four lay ministers were not able to accommodate them all. For this reason, the Theological Seminary in Gurjaani was established in 1993. Students, primarily from the Tbilisi Baptist congregation, traveled to Gurjaani once a month for intensive courses in biblical studies, theology, and pastoral ministry. The seminary was established by a medical doctor, L. Akhalmosulishvili, and Tbilisi State University lecturer Malkhaz Songulashvili. In ten years, 83 students graduated from the seminary, and most were immediately engaged in the ministry of the ECB. They became the core group that was responsible for the enculturation of reforms.

Liturgical Renewal

Liturgical renewal in the ECB community had strong evangelistic motivations. Very much like the Orthodox Church, the ECB considered the liturgy the main means of evangelism. The order of the liturgy was designed in such a manner that, regardless of when worshipers joined the service (at the beginning, middle, or end), they would be able to hear the core message about the unconditional love of God toward human beings. The Word and sacrament have become more prominent in the liturgical life of the church, since both are considered important means for communicating the message of the Gospel. In fact, the ECB considers both the Word and the Eucharist equally sacramental. This should not be considered in contrast to the ancient understanding of the Word and sacrament, since evidence exists that Word and sacrament were considered equally important in the early church. Theologian Steven R. Harmon studied this subject for the publication *Baptist Sacramentalism*.⁴ In conclusion, Harmon wrote, “If the function of Scripture in Gregory of Nyssa’s Catechetical Oration points in the direction of a sacramentality of the word, then so does the function of scripture in the worship of Baptist churches.”⁵

Harmon also refers to the writing of the sixth-century Gallican bishop, Caesarius of Arles, a bishop of the undivided church, who was even more explicit about the sacramental meaning of the Word than Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century:

I ask you, brothers and sisters—tell me: What seems greater to you, the Word of God or the Body of Christ? If you will give a true reply, you surely must say that the former is no less than the latter. Therefore with as great anxiety as we show when Christ’s Body is

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ministered to us, lest nothing fall out of our hands onto the ground, with as great anxiety we should see to it that God's Word which is dispensed to us may not perish from our hearts because we are thinking or talking about something else.⁶

New Prominence for the Word in Georgian Baptist Worship

In the renewed liturgical tradition of the ECB, following its independence from Russian Baptists, the Word became more prominent than it had ever been. Baptist churches in the former Soviet Union did not have any practice of liturgical reading of passages from the Bible lectionary. Preachers would read New Testament texts primarily as they preached, but there would be no specific place for Bible reading, especially with the participation of laity, as a distinct moment in the order of the service. By contrast, in the Georgian-speaking church, a liturgical dynamic developed around the Word (the Book of the Gospels), which is brought solemnly into the church in procession and placed at the altar. In the Evangelical Baptist Peace Cathedral, the reading of the Book of the Gospels is announced by blowing the *shofar*, a Jewish trumpet made of a ram's horn, after which the book is read, preached, dramatized, and shared in the language of choreography, music, and iconography. One more characteristic of the evangelistic nature of the ECB liturgy is a clear commitment to the understandability of the entire celebration for those who attend the service, even for the first time. The language of the liturgy is modern, and ancient liturgical texts are translated into modern Georgian.

The Eucharist also became a more explicitly Gospel-proclaiming act, in which Christ's saving and loving actions are solemnly celebrated. The entire setting of the Eucharist—the solemn procession of the Eucharistic elements, readings from the Bible lectionary, preaching, drama, liturgical dance, icons, chanting, and singing—all these have been instrumental in confessing Christ, both to the faithful and to the world, and in proclaiming the Gospel of salvation. An equally important aspect of the liturgy is sending—the dismissal at the end of the service when the minister or bishop blesses the faithful to go out of the church and act as agents of God's love in the world.

In Georgian spirituality, beauty has always been an important means for communicating the message of divine love. The ECB realized that both "ephemeral" arts (dance, music, drama) and "lasting" arts (icons, liturgical objects, banners, and vestments) can be means for communicating the Gospel. Such has been especially true for iconography. ♦

Notes:

¹ The translation of the Bible was commissioned by Catholicos Patriarch Ilia II in the early 1980s. The translators—Orthodox (Z. Kiknadze, B. Bregvadze); Baptist (Malkhaz Songulashvili); and Jewish (N. Babalishvili)—were recruited by the catholicos patriarch from Tbilisi State University. The paper and cover material for the publication of the Bible were donated by the United Bible Society. Fifty-three thousand copies of the Bible were printed by the state press, out of which 50,000 belonged to the Orthodox Church and 3,000 to the Baptist Church.

² V. Loria and B. Gelashvili, "Beware, Georgian Government is Building a Clerical State," *Morning Newspaper*, 24 March 2001, 9.

³ *Statistics on Religion in Georgia* (Tbilisi: 1972), 3.

⁴ Steven R. Harmon, "The Sacramentality of the Word in Gregory of Nyssa's Catechetical Oration: Implications for a Baptist Sacramental Theology" in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. by Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, Vol. 2 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 238-53.

⁵ Harmon, "Sacramentality of the Word," 252.

⁶ Caesarius of Arles, "Sermons," *Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1956), 361.

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Editor's note: The concluding portions of this article will be published in future issues of the East-West Church and Ministry Report.

Response to Malkhaz Songulashvili: Georgian Baptists and the Process of Enculturation

James J. Stamoelis

Contrasting Georgian and Russian Baptist Experience

From a missiological standpoint, there is much to admire in the "reformation" of the Evangelical Christian Baptists (ECBs) of Georgia. Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili writes about "the context for radical changes in the life of the ECB community"

in the fifth chapter of his well-researched and extensively documented book. Working through it, one sees hints of the direction he will lead his church. His early admiration for Georgian culture and his focus on the apostle to Georgia, St. Nino, prefigures the methodology Songulashvili employs. The fact that the "enlightener" of the Georgian people was

The language of the liturgy is modern, and ancient liturgical texts are translated into modern Georgian.

a woman provides him with ample justification for ordaining women into all ranks of the clergy.

Depending on one's experience, the current practice of the ECB may seem strange and not characteristically Baptist. The subtitle of the book is "The History and Transformation of a Free Church Tradition." The transformation includes the introduction of icons, clerical garments and vestments, prayer candles, and ordained women. Songulashvili admits that the leaders of the former Soviet Baptist churches, with the exception of the Baltic states, have condemned Georgian Baptists for apostasy (310). He points out that "the word 'liturgy' was banned among the Baptists of Russian and German orientation ...because it was thought to be too closely associated with the 'dead ritual' of the Orthodox Church" (296). Songulashvili takes pains to point out the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church as the preserver of Georgian culture. For this he is thankful and cites earlier Georgian Baptist pioneer and martyr, Ilia Kandelaki, who blamed Russian imperial policy and not the Orthodox Church for the atrophied faith of the Georgian people (110 and Appendix 7). Songulashvili claims the Georgian Orthodox Church did not persecute the Baptists, which was different from the experience of the "parent" body of Russian Baptists who were vilified by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Range of Baptist Beliefs

Setting aside the question of reaction against Orthodoxy by his co-religionists in the former Soviet Union, what do we make of the charges of apostasy? Is the ECB really a Baptist Church? To answer that we must first consider what is the definition of a Baptist Church? While considerable variation exists among Baptists, core beliefs include: 1) proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, 2) adult baptism of believers, preferably by immersion, 3) freedom from state control via separation of church and state, 4) the priesthood of all believers, and 5) liberty of conscience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly, while most Evangelicals would add justification by faith alone through the completed work of Christ, one searches in vain for such a statement on the Baptist World Alliance or the European Baptist Federation websites. This is not to impugn these worthy organizations, but only to point out that Georgia's ECB doctrine is not in conflict with these umbrella Baptist organizations. In fact, considerable variation in doctrine exists among Baptist bodies and many varied viewpoints are held on key doctrines. To these core beliefs some Baptist bodies would add specific statements on behavior, more precise theological statements, and some, like Georgia's ECB, detailed statements of social responsibility (Appendix 15).

Soviet Enculturation...

In a prefiguring of his defense of his church's adoption of clerical dress, Songulashvili criticizes the dress of Baptist leaders in old photographs that

is identical to that adopted by Soviet leaders (298). Given the prevailing styles of dress, it only makes sense that Baptist leaders would have worn the same. In a similar manner Songulashvili comments on the lack of adornment in churches, complaining that only Bible verses appeared on the walls, similar to the Communist slogans painted on Communist meeting rooms. Likewise, he sees church meetings mimicking Communist Party Congress arrangements of leaders seated at a table on a raised platform, but with no altar or communion table (299).

...Versus Georgian Enculturation

From a missiological stance, it is appropriate to adopt elements of the culture that are not hostile or in contradiction to the gospel. The caveat would be to avoid confusion with the meaning of the elements adopted. While adopting elements of Georgian Orthodox worship creates a familiar atmosphere for those acquainted with Orthodox services, it raises the question of the meaning of the symbols in the ECB Church. If the meaning is the same, why not just join the Orthodox Church?

The Word, Icons, and Vestments

Songulashvili criticizes earlier forms of ECB worship as having insufficient emphasis upon the Bible. His move to place the Bible at the center of worship corresponds closely with the focus on Scripture and Scriptural allusions in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy. Scholarly studies have been done to demonstrate the amount of Scripture in the liturgy. One such study by Demetrios Constantelos clearly documents that more than 25 percent of Orthodox liturgies are direct biblical quotations, with biblical allusions moving that percentage even higher ("The Holy Scriptures in Greek Orthodox Worship," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 1966). So for a Baptist who claims to honor the centrality of the Bible, it is a short move to adopt a liturgy that is in essence biblical.

With regard to icons, the real question is not their use as visual aids to the worshipper, but whether icons are worshipped, rather than venerated, and whether or not saints depicted on them are addressed in prayer. Well-chosen religious art may assist the faithful in experiencing God by lifting worshippers above their limited horizons. As I type these lines, I am gazing upon Rembrandt's "Return of the Prodigal" which hangs in my office, reminding me of God's grace and mercy. This same painting adorns a wall in the church I attend. Likewise on my wall are several icons, some of Christ, some of the saints. One of my favorites is of Sts. Cyril and Methodius who brought the Word of God to the Slavs. I do not worship or pray to the saints, but I do recall their devotion to Christ which I seek to emulate. Georgian Baptist use of icons is representative of the Emerging Church Movement in the West as many congregations, cognizant of the need of humans for the ascetic, use icons to inspire the congregation.

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Response to Malkhaz Songulashvili (continued from page 5)

As to clerical dress, I served as associate pastor for eight years in a Baptist Church in which the ministers wore robes every Sunday. I still use that same robe when I perform weddings if the couple prefers me to dress formally. Many of my Baptist pastor friends wear clerical collars on occasion. The use of special garments is to suit the occasion.

Orthodox and Evangelical Theology

Having edited a book comparing Orthodox and Evangelical theology (*Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*), I know differences exist. I am also aware that, as Songulashvili points out, citing 19th century Russian Orthodox theologian Khomiakov, methodological differences also exist between Western Christianity and the Orthodox East (200). The concept of *theosis*, so central to Orthodoxy, can be compared to the Protestant doctrine of sanctification. So on many basics of the faith, Orthodox and Evangelicals are in substantial agreement. The differences come as Evangelicals perceive Orthodox to be worshiping icons and praying to saints. It is sound theology to call Mary Theotokos (God bearer). Songulashvili cites Baptist theologian Timothy George who accepts the title and is quoted as saying it is “necessary as an expression of faithfulness to Jesus Christ, the Holy Scriptures, the apostolic tradition and the heritage of the Reformation” (261). The real question is not the title but what role Mary plays in the drama of redemption. Is salvation through faith in Christ alone? Songulashvili writes that “The Georgian ECB has admitted that Mary deserves a more prominent role in the salvific mission of God” (261). Appendix 8 records the dialogue between Georgian Orthodox and Georgian Baptists that occurred in 1979-80. The consensus document speaks of the inner being of Mary as entirely holy and divine. If this is what Georgian Baptists as well as Georgian Orthodox believe, it would seem to contradict the clear teaching of Scripture on the sinfulness of all humankind except for the God-Man Jesus the Christ.

On the issue of the ordination of women, it should be noted that Baptists in the West are not of one mind. For example, Southern Baptists do not, while American Baptists do, ordain women. Songulashvili grounds Georgian Baptist support for the practice in the special relationship of Georgia to the Theotokos, to St. Nino, the first apostle to the Georgians, and to the early church’s recognition of women’s ministry, thereby challenging the stance of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Use of the Vernacular in Scripture and

A Comparison of the Georgian Baptist Church and the Lord’s Army in Romania

Danut Manastireanu

I truly am honored to have the opportunity to respond to a number of aspects of Malkhaz

Worship

One of the characteristics of Orthodox Churches is their strong connection to the culture of the people. As I have pointed out in my writing on Orthodox mission, the use of the vernacular language in worship and the translation of the Bible into the common tongue were the foundation stones of successful mission work. The ECB has created a liturgy in modern Georgian, in contrast to the Georgian Orthodox Church’s use of archaic ancient Georgian. (See Appendix 14 for the Georgian Baptist rationale and Appendix 17 for a sample ECB liturgy.) In keeping with the best of Eastern Orthodox missiology the ECB uses a modern Georgian translation of the Bible to communicate deeply the people’s heart language.

The Danger of Religious Nationalism

The danger seen in all folk churches, Protestant and Orthodox, is the creation of the impression that one is a member of the church by being a member of the nation. The danger in such national faith is that it obscures the necessity for each person to actualize faith. Furthermore, the close identification of the church to the nation often robs the church of its prophetic role to challenge culture. To Songulashvili’s credit, he has spoken out against Islamophobia, xenophobia, and homophobia, but this stance is rare when culture and church are closely united.

In Closing

In closing, Songulashvili’s book has left me with questions. In addition to the ascetic imagery and liturgical celebration, how does the ECB present the necessity for repentance and conversion in its Georgian cultural context? I would like to learn more about the challenges that Songulashvili and his fellow clergy face in presenting the gospel of Christ to unbelievers. In Georgian Baptists’ bold experiment, I would like to know how the ECB measures its effectiveness. Songulashvili claims to be leading an insiders’ movement and points to the “illustrious representatives of wider society” attending services in the ECB cathedral (333). Beyond ceremonial appearances, in true Baptist fashion, one must ask if there is evidence of conversion and commitment to Christ. ♦

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Songulashvili’s book on the Baptists in Georgia. For full disclosure, I have to confess that I am a friend of Bishop Songulashvili, whom I genuinely admire

as one of the most Christ-like people I have ever met, even if we do not agree on everything, theologically or otherwise. (I never waste my time with people with whom I fully agree.) Despite our differences, we deeply respect each other because of our common commitment to the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic,” and to a radical and holistic understanding of our gospel call. Furthermore, I love Georgia and I have often visited the Baptist Peace Cathedral in Tbilisi, where I have preached a number of times. Yet, when it comes to ideas and academic matters, objectivity, as much as is humanly possible, has to prevail. I hope I will succeed in that regard.

The Lord’s Army—A Brief Overview

Since other articles in this issue describe the Baptist Church in Georgia, I will begin with a concise description of the Lord’s Army in Romania, which I will compare with the Georgian Baptist Church. In 1923 Father Iosif Trifa, from Sibiu, initiated an Orthodox renewal movement in Romania, which reached approximately 300,000 members, with about one million participants before the Second World War. During the Communist period, the movement was forced to go underground, and it barely survived the heavy persecution to which it was subjected. Despite the difficulty of obtaining precise numbers, it is estimated that the movement presently has approximately 50,000 active members, counting all its factions.

Moving on to comparisons between Georgian Baptists and the Lord’s Army, keep in mind that the former is a small denomination while the latter is a movement within the Romanian Orthodox Church to which some 86 percent of Romanians pay allegiance to one degree or another. Thus, valid comparisons coexist alongside significant contrasts.

Convergence

The two entities share similar efforts of religious convergence (defined as the openness and willingness to learn from other ecclesial traditions). The movement led by Fr. Trifa has sought to incorporate (or rather make more prominent) among its followers characteristic aspects of evangelical Protestantism: the need for new birth, repentance, and conversion; the personal responsibility of each believer to witness for Christ; and the active role of laity in the church, including preaching and teaching.

For their part, Georgian Baptists more recently have engaged in convergence by incorporating in their theology and worship elements that are more characteristic of Orthodoxy: a hierarchical, episcopal church governance; an elaborated liturgy; the use of a Bible lectionary (similar to the revised one used by Anglicans and other Western churches); the use of priestly vestments; the use of incense in the liturgy; the use of icons as aids to prayer and reflection; and the adoption of a sacramental theology.

Spirituality

In contrast to the more mystical and contemplative

spirituality of Orthodoxy, the general character of Lord’s Army spirituality is pietistic, which makes it similar to other renewal movements in Orthodoxy, Eastern and Oriental: Zoi in Greek Orthodoxy, and the Brotherhood of the Armenian Apostolic Church. This pietistic influence derives from the fact that Fr. Trifa initiated his movement in reaction to the prevalence of excessive drinking, swearing, sexual immorality, and gambling in Romanian villages. He saw pietistic values as a way to counteract such moral decadence. It is true that, although the movement is admired by many for the temperance it promotes, not all Orthodox are happy with this pietistic bent. Christos Yannaras, for instance, one of the most prominent Greek Orthodox theologians and a former member of the Zoi Movement, sees pietism as dangerous and foreign to the spirit of Orthodoxy.

In comparison, the spirituality promoted by Georgian Baptist leaders, especially by Bishop Malkhaz, is contemplative. With the exception of the use of iconography and the Eastern liturgical tradition, the spirituality of Georgian Baptists is closer to the classic Western contemplative tradition than to the mystical strain in Orthodoxy. The presence in the church of quasi-monastic orders, one for men (the Order of New Desert Fathers), and one for women (the Order of St. Nino), is another unique characteristic of Georgian Baptists. The fact that Bishop Malkhaz is a third-order Franciscan may have played an important role in the emergence of these orders.

Contrasting Stances on Social Issues

Being an Orthodox movement, the Lord’s Army shares with its parent a very conservative, and in this particular case, a quite rural ethos. For example, as a religious community, the Lord’s Army is patriarchal, with women contributing merely as helpers. By contrast, Georgian Baptists manifest a more dynamic, forward-looking, and radical ethos, clearly committed to gender equality, with women ordained as both pastors and bishops.

The more conservative Lord’s Army, for its part, shies away from controversial issues such as women’s ordination, and even more so from issues related to human sexuality. The traditionalism of the Romanian movement is nowhere more starkly in evidence than when juxtaposed against the radical (and I would say overly daring and perhaps insufficiently reflective) engagement of Georgian Baptists with these same issues. While the Lord’s Army shares with later pietism an emphasis upon personal rectitude to the neglect of collective social engagement, Georgian Baptists are much more involved in addressing social ills, even more so than their counterparts in the West, through charitable work on behalf of the poor and the elderly, in interfaith engagement, and in support for and defense of various persecuted minority groups—Muslims, Yazidis (followers of a Middle East religion combining elements of Christianity and Islam), and homosexuals.

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Comparison of Georgian Baptists and the Lord's Army (continued from page 7)

Liturgical Comparisons

If one witnesses a Lord's Army assembly meeting, as it is called (there are many recordings available of such events on YouTube), the first impression is of a typical, rural evangelical church service. Yet, when the time for teaching begins, the Orthodox character of the movement becomes more obvious. Conversely, when one participates in a Georgian Baptist church service, the use of icons, incense, and clerical vestments, even if with an original touch, gives a clear Orthodox impression, which is, in fact, intentional. However, as the service proceeds, the Baptist ethos becomes more obvious, but is more subtle and less obtrusive for worshippers in an Orthodox cultural context that is the case in Baptist churches elsewhere, which, again, is part of the intention of Georgian Baptist leaders.

Genuinely Orthodox Lord's Army followers (there are also Lord's Army groups that have really become Protestant in their beliefs and practices) attend the Sunday morning liturgy in their parish church, and then participate in a Lord's Army assembly meeting in the evening, usually in a separate building. The Lord's Army also uses the occasion of various church feast days to organize larger and longer meetings, with sometimes thousands in attendance.

Religious Nationalism

Leaders of both Georgian Baptists and the Lord's Army are clearly nationalistic. Being part of the majority Romanian Orthodox Church, Lord's Army followers are tempted, like all Orthodox, by phyletism, a fusion of ethnic and confessional identity, as expressed in the phrase "to be a Romanian is to be Orthodox." The 1872 Council of Constantinople condemned phyletism as a heresy, although majority Orthodox churches never fully embraced this conciliar decision. By contrast, the emphasis on national identity among Georgian Baptists is rather a way of expressing their independence from Russian—including Moscow Baptist—hegemonic attempts to control and dictate to the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union.

Theology

The Lord's Army represents a serious ecclesiological challenge to Romanian Orthodoxy, and at times it has included capable theologians. Fr. Vasile Mihoc, who is currently the official leader of the Lord's Army and one of Romania's most important biblical scholars, is one example. Nevertheless, the movement as a whole has never emphasized the need for deeper theological reflection within its ranks. This, I consider a real pity.

On the other side, Georgian Baptist convergence with elements of Georgian Orthodoxy is a phenomenon of less than 25 years, and it is unrealistic to expect significant theological reflection in such a short time. Songulashvili's Ph.D. thesis and Bishop Rusudan Gotsirdze's master's thesis are the first serious attempts to engage academically with the interface between Georgian evangelical and Orthodox theology. However, the theology of a church can rarely

be the fruit of the labor of just one or two theological minds, as brilliant as these may be. This fact is the reason I have constantly encouraged my Georgian Baptist friends to obtain higher degrees, to thereby sharpen their critical faculties, in order to start toiling on the laborious and complex task of elaborating a Georgian Baptist theology. This process has begun, but the pace is discouragingly slow and certainly not without hurdles.

Creativity

A common characteristic of both ecclesial bodies is the way they encourage creativity in their midst. The practical expressions among Lord's Army faithful tend to take more rural forms, mostly through music, poetry, and drama, while among Georgian Baptists such manifestations are more characteristically urban: painting and iconography, choral music, and liturgical dance. (An interesting supplementary observation is that Romanian evangelical churches—if they have not adopted the highly out-of-place rock concert form of church service—are extensively employing poetry and music created by Lord's Army artists, which are perceived to resonate more deeply with the Romanian soul than translated Western praise choruses.) At the same time, the iconography promoted by Georgian Baptists, even when it expresses veneration for prophetic heroes of Baptist faith such as Martin Luther King, Jr., is closer to the more elusive classic Georgian iconographic style, with its use of discrete mineral colors, in contrast to the more vivid colors characteristic of the imperial pomp of later Russian iconography.

In Summary

Romania's Lord's Army and the Georgian Baptist Church both represent genuine examples of Christian confessional convergence, albeit not without risks and difficulties. Nevertheless, pietistic influences upon Lord's Army Orthodox and Orthodox influences upon Georgian Baptists provide great opportunities for ecumenical interaction and deeper theological reflection. Sometimes, in the heat of the process, such opportunities are lost, as I believe is the case with theological and ecclesiological reflection within the Lord's Army, but, hopefully, not for good. In other cases, such as that of the Georgian Baptist Church, it is hoped that deeper reflection upon the relationship between evangelical and Orthodox theology and practice, will yet be the case. Should that occur, both of these Christian confessions could be enriched. ♦

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Editor's Note: For additional background see Tom Keppeler, "A Summary of Trifa's What Is the Army of the Lord," and "Two Factions in Romania's Army of the Lord," East-West Church and Ministry Report 2 (Summer 1994): 8-9.

Both Georgian Baptists and the Lord's Army are tempted by phyletism, a fusion of ethnic and confessional identity.

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Response to Malkhaz Songulashvili: Tackling Controversy

Head On

Paul Crego

The Historical Background

The narrative of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia begins in the nineteenth century with the Russian imperial habit of moving religious non-conformists to the periphery of its realm. Tsarist banishments of religious dissidents led to the formation of several different Protestant communities, including Baptists, in Georgia and its capital of Tbilisi, a multi-ethnic city and a regional administrative center of the empire. Protestant marginalization at the hands of imperial Russia and its established Orthodox Church gave way after the Russian Revolution and Civil War to Soviet anti-religious propaganda and repression. In general, Georgian Baptists suffered no differently than Georgian Orthodox, but with small numbers to begin with, any hostile measures against them at once threatened their very survival. In practice, Georgian Baptists found themselves dictated to not only by a hostile state but by authoritarian leaders of the officially recognized denomination in Moscow. Thus, independent thinking by Georgians was basically not allowed. As a result, Georgian Protestants were required to hew to traditionally held beliefs and practices as defined by their Moscow sisters and brothers.

Experiments Adopting Old and New Practices

In addition to this tsarist and Soviet era narrative, Songulashvili provides a detailed history of the Georgian Baptist Church's development after the fall of the Soviet Union, which witnessed the emergence of an independent state, but also Baptists in the Caucasus winning their independence from Russian Baptists. As a result, Georgian Baptists were able to institute reforms, some of which were liturgical, in keeping with patterns of worship familiar to Georgians over many hundreds of years through Orthodoxy, Georgia's historically dominant form of Christianity. Liturgical and other changes were instituted not merely to imitate Orthodoxy, but to explore ways in which Baptists could worship as Georgians were long accustomed. These liturgical reforms included the use of incense, more frequent communion, the use of the Revised Common Lectionary, and the establishment of the offices of bishop and archbishop. Moving beyond traditional Georgian practice, Georgian Baptists also began ordaining women pastors and have now also elected a woman bishop, Rusudan Gotsiredze.

The Issue of Homosexuality

The most controversial change Georgian Baptists have introduced concerns the issue of sexual orientation. Bishops Malkhaz and Rusudan have moved beyond tolerance to loving acceptance of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons. In this volume Bishop Malkhaz gives historical background concerning the emergence of conflict over homosexuality as it became more public,

both in Georgian society at large and in the Baptist community in particular.

The precipitating events were a small demonstration in Tbilisi in observance of the International Day Against Homophobia, 17 May 2013, and a counter-demonstration of thousands, almost all Orthodox Christians, who pursued the initial demonstrators who fled for their safety. Bishop Malkhaz spoke openly against the counter-demonstration: "I publically condemned both the violence and the religious justification of homophobia. I offered my apologies to the LGBT community who were physically and emotionally abused in the name of Christ. It was a privilege to be on the side of the most marginalized and hated group in the country." Physical attacks on the bishop's own home followed his public statements condemning violence against homosexuals.

Other Georgian Baptists opposed the position taken by Bishop Malkhaz. They pointed out that homosexuality had not received any detailed discussion within the church prior to the public pronouncements on the subject made by Bishop Malkhaz. These dissenting Baptists asked how Malkhaz could speak for his church on this controversial issue without a previously agreed-upon consensus within his own ranks. Bishop Malkhaz at least does acknowledge the consequences of his outspokenness on the issue of homosexuality, that differences of opinion have led to hard feelings and ill will within Georgian Baptist ranks.

Defense of Persecuted Groups

Bishop Malkhaz has also defended Muslims who have faced discrimination and violence at the hands of an increasingly nationalistic Georgian society. On more than one occasion he has specifically expressed and has condemned overt hostility toward Muslims. This defense of minorities has included not only homosexuals and Muslims, but also Yazidis, Jews, and some other small religious communities found in Georgia.

The Orthodox Church in Georgia forms a large majority of the population and is of ancient historical provenance. Its position in Georgian society is expressed both in the context of constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion, and also in the fact that the Orthodox Church has certain privileges guaranteed by the state in Georgia. These legislatively prescribed prerogatives do not amount to Orthodoxy being an established state religion, but the Orthodox Church behaves as though it were the state church. This elevated station, both legally afforded and perceived, means that Orthodoxy's attitudes and actions on societal issues often carry the day. In this regard, it should be noted that many in the Orthodox Church speak of homosexuality as a disease, but not merely as a disease within an individual person, but

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Many in the Orthodox Church speak of homosexuality as a disease that must somehow be eradicated from society. This attitude is virtually a call to violence, and it is an attitude that Bishop Malkhaz certainly condemns.

also as a disease that must somehow be eradicated from society. This second attitude is virtually a call to violence, and it is an attitude that Bishop Malkhaz certainly condemns. ♦

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Response to Malkhaz Songulashvili, Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia—A Matter of Conscience

David Bundy

The Songulashvili volume is filled with discussions of freedom, freedom that is a matter of conscience and conviction. Notably it is not posed as freedom from, but freedom to, in this case, freedom to be more fully and overtly Christian and Georgian. This short essay argues that the positive, conscience-driven ethic of the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church, as represented in the work and life of Malkhaz Songulashvili and the Peace Cathedral of Tbilisi, is consistent with the history of Georgian Baptists.

The Historical Roots of the Georgian Baptist Conscience

The history of the Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptists makes clear that its conscience, as lived out by Songulashvili and his fellow believers, was formed in the crucible of more than a century-long experience involving isolation from the rest of the Baptist world and resistance to Soviet-imposed domination of church structures and policies. The antecedents of current social stances of Georgian Baptists stretch back to the late 19th century compassionate ministries of Lord Radstock, F. W. Baedeker, and Colonel Vasili Pashkov spawned in St. Petersburg drawing rooms. The resulting Pashkovite Movement, a product in part of European continental pietism, insisted upon the sharing of wealth through ministry to the poor, the marginalized, and the imprisoned. In 1944 the Soviet government engineered the merger of surviving Pashkovites and their successor denomination of Evangelical Christians with Baptists. It is possible that Songulashvili has underestimated the importance of the social conscience of his denomination's Pashkovite and Evangelical Christian roots. Like Radstock and the Pashkovites, Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptists have made social ministry central to their understanding of Christian faith.

A Striving for Independence

Until the dismemberment of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, Georgian Baptists had to contend not only with Soviet restrictions, but with the tight reins of the Russian-dominated leadership of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB). Thus, the small Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptist Church was under the authority of, in conflict with, and under surveillance of AUCECB leaders, as well as state authorities (172-75). Often it was a "struggle for survival" (173).

Three generations of Baptist leaders appear to have been extremely important in the formation of

the Georgian Baptist conscience: Ilia Kandelaki (1891-1927), Theodore Kochoradze (b. 1892; bishop, 1945-1967), Ekaterine Kutateladze (1894-1967), and Giorgi Bolgashvili (bishop, 1967-1984). Kandelaki, proud of his Georgian ethnic and cultural heritage, sought a place in Georgian society for Baptists, urged the renewal of the Orthodox Church, sought a Bible translation in modern Georgian, and died a martyr, assassinated by Soviet authorities. His successor, Kochoradze, established a Georgian (not Russian or German) Baptist congregation, led evangelism throughout Georgia, fraternized with the Orthodox, and sought to renew the Baptist liturgy, adopting and adapting traditional Georgian Orthodox Christian patterns. Kutateladze, a crucial lay leader in the Tbilisi congregation, translated the Gospels and Psalms into modern Georgian, although these translations could not be published. Both Kochoradze and Kutateladze lost their families during the hard years and nevertheless became effective counselors (85-224). They also both involved the entire congregation in ministry and evangelism.

Giorgi Bolgashvili upset his AUCECB superiors by struggling for freedom to worship as Georgian Baptists saw fit, his preference for ministry among the Georgian population, his championing of Georgian culture, and his development of a distinctively Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptist spirituality. Along with other Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptist leaders, he engaged the Orthodox Church in theological dialogue, and he preached regularly in the Georgian Patriarchal Cathedral of Sioni in Tbilisi (203, 212, and 228).

The demise of Soviet-era structures brought Georgian Baptists new challenges of faith, conscience, and Christian practice. In particular, Georgian Baptists accepted a new responsibility in the process of rebuilding their nation, and they came to a full realization of what Christ had in mind in reference to his followers' obligations toward "the least of these."

Matters of Conscience for Evangelical Christian Baptists

During the struggle to end Communist Party rule and to establish a truly democratic government, Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptists publicly supported the demand for free elections and an end of dictatorship, and often provided hospitality and refuge for those in the opposition (227). At the same time, some Georgian Orthodox, in their attempts to establish a religious monopoly, began persecuting the nation's Muslim minorities. People were beaten,

prayer rooms were destroyed, and assemblies for Muslim prayers were forbidden. Georgian Baptists led by Songulashvili went to Muslim villages to pray with Muslims and placed themselves in harm's way to protect them. Songulashvili also began work, not only in Georgia but internationally, for reconciliation between Muslims and Christians. Georgian Baptists also ministered to the physical needs of Muslim refugees from the war in Chechnya (xxvii-; 292-94).

Likewise, when conservative elements of the Orthodox Church attacked homosexual persons and their sympathizers in public, Georgian Baptists from Tbilisi's Peace Cathedral again gave hospitality and refuge and conducted welcoming services for "marginalized persons." These were contentious issues, even in Georgia, but Malkhaz commanded sufficient support to stay the Georgian Baptist course in defense of persecuted minorities. Still, differences of opinion among Baptists did lead to Songulashvili's resignation as Archbishop for Georgia. He does, however, retain his position as Metropolitan Bishop of Tbilisi and has been appointed professor of comparative religions at the prestigious Ilia State University in Tbilisi (Songulashvili, xxvi-xxvii).

Despite opposition, Songulashvili holds fast to his formulation of the meaning of Christian conscience:

We need to speak up about the injustice and unfairness in this world not because we have the power to do it, but because we do not have the power to remain silent, because we do not have the power to turn a blind eye to the suffering of the world around us, we do not have power to live in the world deprived of compassion, solidarity and freedom, we do not have the power to look quietly at how the weak are being persecuted, how imperial forces are unleashed against human dignity (xxviii).

This is the Evangelical Christian Baptist conscience as found in the narrative of Malkhaz Songulashvili's *Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia*. It is a conscience forged through turbulent trials over 150 years of struggle and is consistent with that history. Songulashvili and his co-believers are working to make conscience an integral part of Georgia's future, this despite the fact that "it is not safe to critique the authorities...for their injustice... [or] to preach a Gospel that condemns nationalism, separatism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, and ethnocentrism" (335). ♦

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Israel's Russian Jewish Christians and Russian-Language Evangelism in Israel

Lisa Loden

Russian Jewish Immigration to Israel

Modern Israel is a country of immigrants. For Russian Jewry, this has been the case since the late nineteenth century when those fleeing the pogroms of Eastern Europe and Russia began to settle in what was then known as Palestine. These Jews were quite diverse and came from a wide variety of locations in the Russian-speaking world. The largest group, the Ashkenazi, made up the first group of settlers. Their culture was a pre-Soviet Jewish tradition, most of them having had some sort of Jewish education. Many originated from territories that became part of the Soviet Union after World War II, including western Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia. Children born to Jews in the 1920s and later formed another group from the U.S.S.R. Following the Second World War, most of these mainly secular immigrants had moved or been driven out of their villages and relocated to cities. The third group of Jews came from the Sephardic communities of Central Asia and the Caucasus. These Jews lived a traditional lifestyle and practiced religious rituals. The fourth group, the "ultra-Orthodox," closely followed the leading of particular rabbis. The Jewish community in the former Soviet Union had only one common bond – the Russian language.¹ Jews from each of these communities and persuasions immigrated to Israel and continue to do so.

Compared to the numbers of Jews coming from other countries, the rate of Russian immigration is astoundingly high: according to Israeli government statistics for 1948-2012, out of a total of 3,108,678 immigrants, 1,223,723 are from the former Soviet Union. According to the Law of Return, a Jew is defined as anyone who has at least one Jewish grandparent or a Jewish spouse. However, to be considered Jewish for the purpose of marriage in Israel, a person must have been born to a Jewish mother or have undergone a conversion process. While conversions done abroad by non-Orthodox rabbis remain valid, if one lives in Israel, only conversions according to Orthodox Jewish requirements are officially accepted. Many of the immigrants from the former Soviet Union have resisted these conversions because the process is lengthy and obligates them to adopt an Orthodox lifestyle. This group of non-converted Russian immigrants is officially classified as "other."

Policy adviser to the Jewish Agency, Yogev Karasenty, has estimated that the number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union who fit the definition of "other" is between 200,000 and 250,000² With close to one million Russian-speaking immigrants arriving during the 1990s, Russian speakers today comprise approximately one-fifth of the population of Israel.

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Russian Jews in Israeli Culture and Politics

Russian immigration, known as *Aliyah*, is considered to have been a success story. Due to their numbers, Russian immigrants have had a visible impact on Israeli society. This is seen in many ways, from the numerous storefronts with signs in Cyrillic characters to the many Russian-speaking immigrants who have assumed critical roles in the highest echelons of Israeli politics.

In 1996 Anatoly Sharansky, a well-known dissident during Soviet times, formed the *Israel b'Aliah* Party, which joined Netanyahu's government coalition with seven seats in the *Knesset*, the Israeli Parliament. Today he heads up the Jewish Agency. Another prominent Russian Jewish immigrant is Yuli Edelstein who served as head of the Absorption Ministry from 1996-1999 and who is today the speaker of the *Knesset*. Avigdor Liberman, who chairs the *Israel Beiteinu* (Israel Our Home) Political Party and who served as the foreign minister under a previous government, is the most well-known Russian-background political figure today.³ Other prominent Russian Jewish political figures include Marina Solodkin, Yuri Stern, Roman Bronfman, and Michael Nudelman.

Though many Soviet immigrants, especially the elderly, face poverty and significant cultural barriers, overall statistics do show a community on the rise. According to a 2013 report by the Adva Center, an Israeli social policy think tank, 56 percent of Russian immigrants in 1992 were in the poorest third of Israeli society — either below the poverty line or at risk of poverty. By 2010, the figure had dropped to 38 percent. Over the same period, the percentage of Russians in the upper third of Israeli earners grew from 10 to 27 percent.⁴

The Russian Orthodox Church in Israel

A significant number of Russian-speaking immigrants identify themselves as Russian Orthodox. Statistics vary greatly as to their number. Speaking in 2010, Oleg Usenkov, the press secretary of Sophia, the association of Russian Orthodox Christians in Israel, said: "I think that there are at least 70,000 to 100,000 Russian Orthodox living in Israel today. Perhaps the real figures are even higher, but, in any case, this is quite a large section of Israeli society." Usenkov, a Jewish immigrant from Moscow, became an Orthodox Christian prior to immigrating to Israel. He maintains that many immigrants from mixed Jewish-Russian families turned to Christianity after their relocation.⁵ Today these Russian Orthodox Jewish Christians see their identity as being fully Israeli. As Dr. Ilya Litvina, a member of Sophia, puts it: "We are an Israeli church. We are Israeli citizens. And our goal is to serve the Christians of Israel who are part of Israeli society. We seek rapprochement, not alienation, and with God's help we will succeed in our goal."⁶

The influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in

Israel was strongly felt in the late nineteenth century. In 1860, Tsar Alexander II founded the Russian Palestine Society, which during a period of over 50 years, established hospices for pilgrims, Christian schools, a theological seminary, and a number of churches throughout the region, ranging from Jerusalem to Beirut.

Jews in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union

The history of relations between Israel and Russia is complex. The two countries are intertwined in many ways, in good measure because of the size and influence of the Russian Jewish community. In 1913, the Russian Empire was home to the world's largest Jewish population, numbering between 5.3 million and 6 million Jews. This constituted approximately 50 percent of the world's Jewish population at that time.⁷

Following the fall of the Russian Empire and the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1917, the life of Russian Jewry changed radically. From the beginning of the Communist era, the Jews in the Soviet Union were systematically oppressed by the regime which sought to obliterate all traces of Jewish tradition and identity. The Soviet goal was for Russian Jewry to be assimilated into the dominant Russian/Soviet culture. This was successful to a great extent

so that by the time Communism fell in 1991, the Jews of the Soviet Union had lost almost all their knowledge of Judaism, Hebrew, the Jewish people, and Jewish tradition. They had indeed been transformed into "Russian" Jews. Russian had become the native language and culture of the vast majority of Jews in the Soviet Union, irrespective of where they resided. Jewish identity and traditions were preserved only in the southern regions of the U.S.S.R.-- primarily Bukhara and Georgia. At the same time, Soviet Jews nonetheless perceived themselves as Jewish, and their identity cards included this as their nationality. Many followed whatever news was available about Israel.⁸

Soviet Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism

The Soviet Union was the first major world power to grant Israel diplomatic recognition. The young Jewish state had strong socialist roots stemming from the early *aliya* of idealistic Russian Jews who inculcated Soviet values of collectivism in the establishment of agricultural *kibbutzim*. Nevertheless, relations with Israel and Jewry remained tense. The Stalinist period saw a sharp rise in anti-Semitism. During this period and following, in addition to the attempt to eliminate Jewish life and tradition within the Soviet Union, the Soviet regime pursued an anti-Zionist agenda in the arena of international relations. While maintaining that their policies were not anti-

A significant number of Russian-speaking immigrants identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, at least 70,000 to 100,000.

Israel per se, many historians of the period argue that United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379 (10 November 1975) equating Zionism with racism was choreographed by the Soviet Union.⁹

The Soviet Union's anti-Zionist agenda was in fact a staple of the U.S.S.R.'s Cold War propaganda. This campaign intensified after the Six Day War in 1967 and was officially sponsored by the Department of Propaganda of the KGB and the Communist Party. This period saw the rise of Soviet dissidents or *refuseniks*, many of whom were Jews who were denied permission to emigrate. The ban on Jewish immigration to Israel, lifted in 1971, led to many *refuseniks* immigrating to Israel in the next two decades.

Gorbachev's New Policies and Increased Immigration

After 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev, with his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* and his desire to improve relations with the West, permitted most *refuseniks* to emigrate. Since 1991 changes have accelerated. On 16 December 1991, ten days before its dissolution, the Soviet Union sponsored UN Resolution 3379 revoking the previous resolution that had equated Zionism with racism. This led to a resumption of relations between Israel and post-Soviet Russia, resulting in massive immigration of Russian Jews to Israel, as well as a considerable flow of Russian Christian pilgrims visiting Israel. Russian Orthodox pilgrimage to Israel reached its peak following a change of policy, implemented in 2008, that allowed visa-free travel between the two countries.

Israel's Russian Jewish Christians

Along with their Jewish relatives, many Jewish Christians also came to Israel from the former Soviet Union under the auspices of the Law of Return. Some converted to Christianity while still in Russia, while others did not and retained their original status as Russian or "other" non-Jewish origin. After arrival in Israel, some immigrants, both Jewish and non-Jewish, embraced Christianity and joined various churches – Greek Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican. Others, in fact the majority who embraced Jesus as Lord, became affiliated with the Israeli Messianic Jewish movement. They either joined existing Messianic congregations or formed their own new Russian-speaking congregations.

Israel's Russian-Speaking Messianic Jews

Messianic Jews in Israel number approximately 15,000. Accurate statistics do not exist because the community is highly resistant to being surveyed. Nevertheless, it is estimated that Russian speakers account for up to 60 percent of the Messianic community today. A large number of Russian Messianic Jews have integrated into existing Hebrew-speaking congregations, but there remain a significant number of Russian-speaking congregations in the country. The growing trend is a shift to Hebrew as the language of worship, especially since the second generation is Hebrew-speaking.

Unlike Russian Orthodox Jews, Russian-speaking Messianic Jews engage in open, direct evangelism. They see this as an integral part of their expression of faith. The Israeli Messianic Jewish community has its roots in Evangelical Protestantism and is strongly committed to mission. Having come from a spiritually repressive regime, the newfound freedom to openly share one's faith is particularly attractive to Russian-speaking Messianic Jews. The types of evangelism vary greatly, including friendship evangelism, evangelistic campaigns, street witnessing, and door-to-door evangelism. In 2007 a country-wide evangelistic campaign employed a Russian translation of Campus Crusade's *Jesus* film. This effort was highly successful, with thousands viewing the film. Extensive follow-up resulted in many coming to faith in Jesus. Since the 1990s, evangelistic literature in Russian has been produced by two Messianic Jewish publishing houses, with the majority of the literature being distributed free of charge. *Betrayed*, a powerful testimony of Christian conversion by Stan Telchin, was first published in 1980 and later translated into Russian. Revised in 2007 and distributed without charge, it has gone through multiple editions in Russian and other languages.

During the past two decades, many evangelistic campaigns and outreaches have taken place in Israel. In the main, the Russian-speaking Messianic community has been characterized by its bold gospel witness, especially to Russian-speaking immigrants whose experience of Communism created a spiritual vacuum that could be filled by the Gospel of Jesus.

The Russian-speaking community in Israel has been plagued with a number of social problems, particularly alcohol and drug addiction, both of which are widespread within this community. Messianic congregations have responded by establishing drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers. One group of Russian-speaking congregations has planted over 12 new churches whose constituency, and even much of their leadership, consist of reformed addicts. These groups are also in the process of shifting from Russian to Hebrew in their worship.

Military conscription is mandatory for all Jewish citizens: men for three years and women for two years. Although no official statistics exist, it is widely known that several hundred Jewish believers in Jesus serve in the military today, with several groups of believing soldiers meeting regularly for fellowship and teaching. A significant number of Messianic Jews serving in the Israeli military come from a Russian-speaking background. Surprisingly, the Israeli military is a hospitable environment for gospel witness. While Christians in the military do not engage in direct evangelism, they often do practice friendship evangelism in a context of openness to hearing the gospel's claims.

In Israel, Jews who are Russian Orthodox Christians do not engage in open evangelism, which means the Israeli public is largely unaware of their

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existence. It is likely that their children will not continue in the tradition of their fathers. This loss has been the pattern for waves of immigration from other countries in which the community did not integrate and contextualize its faith life in the new culture. In contrast, during the past 20 years, a new generation of Russian-background Messianic believers has emerged that has assimilated into Israeli life and culture. They are active in their congregations; they are growing in numbers; they are beginning to take leadership roles; and they are committed to evangelism as an integral part of their lifestyle. ♦

Notes:

¹ Much of the information in this section comes from: <http://www.lcje.net/High%20Leigh/Monday,%20August%208%20Integration%20of%20Russian%20speaking%20messianic%20Jews%20m%20Israeli%20communities%20by%20Maxim%20Katz.pdf>.
² <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/israel/50427.pdf>.

³ <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/.premium-1.623745>.
⁴ Da Aliyah Two Decades On, Wave of Russian Immigration to Israel Is an Outstanding Success; <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/.premium-1.566484>.
⁵ <http://www.jpost.com/Magazine/Features/A-different-sort-of-orthodoxy>.
⁶ *Ibid.*
⁷ <http://www.jewishagency.org/de/russian-aliyah/content/2880>.
⁸ *Ibid.*
⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Anti-Zionism.
¹⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Refusenik>.
¹¹ See: www.lcje.net/.../Messianic%20Resoures%20for%20Jewish%20Evangelism_2015_Barry%20Rubin.pdf.

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The Pentecostal Church of Poland

Wojciech Kowalewski

Demographics and Definitions

According to statistical data, in 2010 the Pentecostal Church of Poland numbered 21,834 believers in just over 200 churches in a nation of 38 million.¹ Within the Polish religious landscape the Pentecostal Church of Poland represents the second largest (after Lutherans) and the most flourishing of the country's Protestant denominations.

The term *Pentecostal movement* has different meanings in Poland, signifying various expressions of faith from classic Pentecostalism to the Charismatic renewal movements to neo-Pentecostal networks.² Zbigniew Pasek, professor of religious studies and sociology of religion, is the author of several academic studies on various aspects of Pentecostalism. He emphasizes in his work the spiritual diversity and the various expressions of faith found within this movement.³ Despite its lack of unity, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements continue to grow and have an impact not only on Protestant churches and organizations, but also within the predominant Roman Catholic Church through Catholic Charismatic renewal.⁴ The focus in this article, however, will be upon the Pentecostal Church of Poland, which is the largest Pentecostal denomination in the nation.

The Pre-World War I Years

When the Pentecostal movement emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, Poland was a partitioned nation subject to the rule of Austria, Germany, and Russia. As a result, the beginnings of Pentecostalism among Poles occurred in three different Central and East European empires. The first Polish Pentecostals emerged in eastern Germany and were involved in the renewal movement within the Lutheran Church. The first Pentecostal conference took place in Lower Silesia in December 1909, and by 1910 Pentecostals had formed a congregation in Wrocław.⁵ The influence of

the Lutheran Church. The first Pentecostal conference took place in Lower Silesia in December 1909, and by 1910 Pentecostals had formed a congregation in Wrocław.⁵ The influence of neo-pietistic spirituality was propagated among Poles in the Śląsk Cieszyński Region by two Lutheran ministers: Jan Pindor (1852-1924) and Karol Kulisz (1873-1940).⁶ The latter founded the Christian Fellowship in Cieszyn, which developed contacts with German Pentecostal churches in Lower Silesia. As a result of this relationship some members began cultivating Charismatic spirituality and eventually were excommunicated by the Lutheran Church. On 15 July 1910, this group registered under the name **Bund für Entschiedenenes Christentum** [Alliance for Committed Christianity].⁷ This Alliance planted new churches and at its peak consisted of approximately 2,000 members. Theologically, this Alliance represented a more moderate wing of Pentecostalism, emphasizing the need for spiritual conversion and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but with no necessary accompanying expression of spiritual gifts. The Alliance is also known for publishing *Głos Prawdy* [The Voice of Truth] and *Śpiewnik Pilegrzyma* [The Pilgrim's Hymnbook], the latter being the most important evangelical hymnbook of the 20th century available in the Polish language.⁸

The Interwar Decades

After the First World War and Poland's renewed independence, Pentecostalism emerged in the central and eastern regions of the country. The first Pentecostal initiatives in independent Poland came from immigrants from the United States and Canada, as well as from missionaries, mainly German, who began their evangelistic work in the 1920s. In May 1929 in Stara Czołnica Pentecostals in Central and Eastern Europe formed the Evangelical Faith Christian Association Church.⁹ In addition to Poles its membership included Ukrainians, Belarussians, Russians, and Germans.

The Pentecostal and Charismatic movements continue to grow and have an impact not only on Protestant churches and organizations, but also within the predominant Roman Catholic Church through Catholic Charismatic renewal.

Theologically this new denomination represented classic Pentecostal views, with an emphasis upon the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the practice of Charismatic spirituality, as well as a strong emphasis upon sanctification of believers.¹⁰ The Bible Institute in Gdansk, founded in 1930 by Gustaw Herbert Schmidt (1891-1958), an Assemblies of God missionary to Poland, played a significant role in training pastors and missionaries and became the primary center propagating Pentecostal teaching throughout the region. Over 500 students studied at the Bible Institute before German Nazis forced its closure in 1939.¹¹ The Evangelical Faith Christian Association continued to grow and included approximately 300 churches and 23,000 members in 1939 at the outbreak of the Second World War.¹²

World War II and the Cold War Years

During the war the Nazis banned Pentecostal churches and their denominational associations. They also arrested many Pentecostals who were sent to concentration camps or were forced to leave the country. Also, as a result of shifting borders after the war, Polish Pentecostals found themselves not only in Poland, but in the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.

In May 1947 Communist authorities enforced the merger of several evangelical denominations in the United Evangelical Church, two of which were Pentecostal: the Alliance for Committed Christianity and the Evangelical Faith Christian Association.¹³ Tensions ran high within this denominational structure, with no signs of a unified vision. Communists persecuted those Pentecostal churches that attempted to function independently and underground. Decades later, in 1987, Pentecostals were able to leave the United Evangelical Church, forming the Pentecostal Church of Poland.¹⁴ At that time this church body consisted of approximately 10,000 members in 82 churches, but not all Pentecostals joined this new denomination.¹⁵

New Freedoms; New Challenges

Since the collapse of Communism in 1989, Polish society has undergone massive transformation that, on the one hand, has given rise to new opportunities and considerable liberties, but on the other hand, has inflicted high social costs and generated new conflicts of interest. Nevertheless, Poland's socio-political transformation has opened new opportunities for the Pentecostal Church of Poland to function freely and to develop its evangelistic and social ministries. This new freedom was confirmed when on 10 February 1997, the Polish Parliament passed legislation that officially recognized the Pentecostal Church of Poland and allowed it to legally run its own missions, foundations, schools, and social and evangelistic ministries.¹⁶ Internationally the Pentecostal Church of Poland is a member of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship and the Pentecostal European Fellowship.¹⁷ ♦

Editor's Note: The concluding portion of this article will be published in the East-West Church and Ministry Report 24 (Fall 2016).

Notes:

- ¹ M. Kamiński, *Kościół świadomy powołania* (Warsawa: WST, 2011), 9.
- ² Thirty Pentecostal and Charismatic church associations were officially registered as of 2010, according to government data. See A. Migda, *Mistycyzm pentekostalny w Polsce* (Kraków: Nomos, 2013), 9.
- ³ See for instance Zbigniew Pasek, *Ruc zielonoświątkowy. Próba monografii* (Kraków: Instytut Wydawniczy Nomos, 1992).
- ⁴ The Catholic Charismatic renewal movement continues to grow in Poland, with some 800 prayer groups meeting regularly. One Catholic Charismatic event organized in Łódź attracted 250,000 people. See W. K. Kay, K. Slijkerman, R. Pfister, and C. Van Der Laan, "Pentecostal Theology and Catholic Europe" in W. K. Kay and Anne E. Dyer, eds., *European Pentecostalism* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011), 329-30.
- ⁵ Z. Pasek and Z. Włoch, *Historia ruchu zielonoświątkowego i odnowy charyzmatycznej* (Krawów-Szczecin: Instytut Wydawniczy Compassion, 2006), 488-89.
- ⁶ Wojciech Gajewski and Krzysztof Wawrzyniuk, "A Historical and Theological Analysis of the Pentecostal Church of Poland," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 20 (2000), 33.
- ⁷ Tim Case and Mark Kaminski, "The Development of Pentecostalism in Central European Countries: Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia" in Kay and Dyer, eds., *European Pentecostalism*, 226. Gajewski and K. Wawrzyniuk translate the name of this alliance as "The Fellowship for Resolute Christianity."
- ⁸ For a more detailed history and characteristics of the Alliance see Z. Pasek, *Stanowczy Chrześcijanie. Studium historii idei religijnych* (Kraków: Instytut Religioznastwa UJ, 1993).
- ⁹ Case and Kaminski, "The Development of Pentecostalism," 226.
- ¹⁰ Pasek and Włoch, *Historia*, 489.
- ¹¹ Gajewski and Wawrzyniuk, "A Historical and Theological Analysis," 35-36.
- ¹² Case and Kaminski, "The Development of Pentecostalism," 226.
- ¹³ Case and Kaminski, "The Development of Pentecostalism," 227.
- ¹⁴ For a detailed historical and legal account of the Pentecostal Church of Poland see M. Kaminski, *w Polsce w latach 1988-2008. Studium historyczno-ustrojowe* (Warszawa: WST, 2012).
- ¹⁵ Pasek and Włoch, *Historia*, 494.
- ¹⁶ Gajewski and Wawrzyniuk, "A Historical and Theological Analysis," 37-38.
- ¹⁷ M. Kamiński, *Kościół Zielonoświątkowy*, 197-99.

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Poland's socio-political transformation has opened new opportunities for the Pentecostal Church of Poland to function freely and to develop its evangelistic and social ministries.

Prokhorov clearly shows that Russian Orthodoxy is a force that has had a major impact upon the spirituality of Russian Baptists.

Book Review

Constantine Prokhorov, *Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990: A Comparative Study of Theology, Liturgy, and Traditions*. Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2013. Reviewed by Gregory Nichols.

When visiting a Russian Baptist service, it is fairly easy to identify the four marks of evangelicalism as defined by David Bebbington: conversion, Christ-centeredness, the centrality of Scripture, and activism. However, some Western visitors may sense the marks of another less familiar Orthodox spirituality, a sense now well-documented in Constantine Prokhorov's book, *Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990*. Prokhorov and I have often found ourselves together in academic settings, and we have had lively discussions concerning the roots of Russian evangelical spirituality. (I myself researched Ivan Kargel, a church leader and pastor who was not Russian by birth, yet had tremendous influence on evangelical theology and spirituality in the Russian-speaking world.) Prokhorov investigated what seems to me to be a familiar focus on the indomitable nature of Slavic spirituality.

After reading Prokhorov's well-researched work, it is clear that he has done an outstanding job of showing the commonalities between Russian Orthodox and Russian Baptist spirituality. He is careful to stay within the years 1960 to 1990, thereby avoiding the influences of recent Western missionaries. He uses words such as *mirror*, *commonality*, *continuity*, *shared mentality*, and *parallel* to describe similarities. I pondered the simple truth that a fish does not know it is wet, which has forced me to wrestle with the question of cultural influences on spirituality. Some of Prokhorov's arguments may lack the logical preciseness that some might desire. Yet when multiple examples of Orthodox-Baptist commonality are given, he is convincing. For example, it might not be logically true to claim that the Russian Baptist custom of kissing fellow believers is a reflection of Russian Orthodoxy, because it is also clearly commanded in the Bible. Yet the spiritual kiss is not retained in Western expressions of Christianity, while it does remain a part

of the Russian Orthodox tradition. Prokhorov also sees a parallel between the baptismal rite of Russian Baptists and the processes of taking Russian Orthodox monastic orders. In addition, the author sees similarities between Russian Baptist reverence for the Bible and Russian Orthodox veneration of icons.

In illustrating Russian Baptist affinities with Orthodox worship and tradition, Prokhorov does not rely exclusively on Baptist confessions, creeds, and public statements, but also draws upon Baptist hymns, poetry, sermons, and comparisons of the actual practice of Orthodox and registered and dissident Baptists. Unfortunately, Prokhorov fails to treat similarities between the Russian Orthodox theology of deification and Russian Baptist teachings on holiness. Still, overall the book is well-organized, easy to read, well researched, and thoroughly documented from primary sources. The author is to be commended for his sound arguments and useful insights regarding the relationship between Russian Baptist and Russian Orthodox spirituality and history.

Has it been a case of the indomitable Russian soul touching Russian Baptists and Russian Orthodox alike? Or has it been a case of Russian Orthodox spirituality infusing all Russian souls including Baptists? Regardless of how one answers these questions, Prokhorov clearly shows that Russian Orthodoxy is a force that has had a major impact upon the spirituality of Russian Baptists. His study is well worth the read. ♦

Gregory Nichols, *Greater Europe Mission, Prague, Czech Republic*

Editor's Note: See also Mark Elliott, "Eastern Orthodox and Slavic Evangelicals: What Sets Them Both Apart From Western Evangelicals," East-West Church & Ministry Report 3 (Fall 1995), 15-16.

Corrections

In William Yoder's "Response to Mykhailo Cherenkov, "The Changing Face of Church and Mission in Eurasia," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 24 (Spring 2016), 6-7, a substantive error occurred in editing. The text as published reads: "Cherenkov writes, 'In Russia. . . , widespread nominal belief has become rinfected with an explosive mixture of nationalist-Orthodox-Stalinist beliefs.' True, such tendencies exist. One example is Moscow's Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, who spoke out against this very mixture and was deposed by Patriarch Kyrill in December 2015." Yoder correctly responds, "Not true. . . It was the other way around. Chaplin's nationalist views very likely contributed to his downfall." The text should have read: One example of such [nationalist-Orthodox-Stalinist] views is Moscow's Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, deposed by Patriarch Kyrill in December 2015."

Also, the following sentence, which ended with a question mark, should have ended with a period: "It would be good if Cherenkov could explain the role of Ukraine's Secretary of National Security Oleksandr Turchynov, who is a Baptist, among the semi-fascist Azov Battalion in the war-front city of Mariupol."

The editor deeply regrets these errors.

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