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Has the Role of Women in Evangelical Churches in the Former Soviet Union Changed in the Past Two Decades? An Interview with Pastor Shirinai Dosova

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Editor's Note: Shirinai Dosova participated in a conference in Moscow in 1997 on the role of women in the church. Seventy-one women from seven former Soviet republics representing 12 denominations shared movingly and memorably in this meeting. This editor was able to sponsor the gathering with grant funding and the able assistance of Galina Obrovets from Moscow's Second Evangelical Christian-Baptist Church. Presentations from this conference appeared in a theme issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 6 (Winter 1998): 1-16; and in a Russian-language volume, Rol' khristianki v sovremennom obshchestve (Wheaton College Institute for East-West Christian Studies, 1998). For Pastor Dosova's presentation, "Proclaiming Christ Boldly From Moscow to Yalta," see the East-West Church and Ministry Report 6 (Winter 1998), 14.

Biographical Note: Shirinai Dosova, trained as an economist, was born in 1957 in southern Kazakhstan, one of ten children of a Tadjik father and a Ukrainian mother. After her conversion to Christian faith in 1987, most of her family members also accepted Christ. The Good News Annunciation Church, which Pastor Dosova founded in 1991, grew out of her preaching on Arbat Street in Moscow. In 1991 she also traveled to Central Asia where her preaching led to the founding of several churches. In 1992 she participated in follow-up after Billy Graham's evangelistic campaign in Moscow. Pastor Dosova has worked with Light in the East mission for 29 years, and she continues outreach in Central Asia to this day. She teaches inductive Bible study in Bible institutes in Russia, Central Asia, and the United States. Pastor Dosova is a single mother with one adopted daughter.

Editor: What biblical passage best reflects your understanding of the role of women in the church?

Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Editor: What is the percentage of women in an average evangelical worship service in Russia today?

Sixty-five to seventy percent.

Editor: Are women today required to wear head coverings in worship?

In most new churches this question is not relevant. And many conservative churches over time have become less demanding of head scarves. I think ministers have been influenced by trends in the world and by their own children. Many conservative churches have become more tolerant in relation to head scarves.

Editor: Are there churches today that separate men and women in worship?

I do not know of any churches in Moscow that separate men and women in worship. In the past in Almaty, Kazakhstan, this was sometimes the case (one or two percent), but no longer.

Editor: What are church attitudes concerning birth control today?

In some churches couples believe it is necessary to control the birth rate and to do it by known means. But in other churches birth control is a sin. They teach that because children are a gift from God, birth control should be discouraged. Often young people do not view this question as did their parents and grandparents. They want to live life for themselves, get established in their jobs, see the world, and then deal with children.

Editor: What are church attitudes concerning domestic violence?

Older ministers often side with the husband and teach that the wife should accept suffering for the sake of her children and for the sake of her husband's salvation. New churches have a different understanding of marriage and divorce. While they may advise women to remain with abusive husbands, they will also advise women to pray to seek the will of God.

Editor: Have there been changes in the number of women succumbing to drugs, alcohol, and trafficking since 1997?

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Merging of Protestant and Orthodox *(continued from page 1)*

The number of women who have lost their way has increased dramatically. Many women from neighboring countries, who came to work in Moscow and in Russia but have not been able to find jobs, have become prostitutes, have been infected with AIDS, and are afraid to return home to their families. Alcohol and drug addiction among women is increasing.

Editor: Do evangelical women continue to hold to traditional, patriarchal family patterns as in the past?

No, the traditional family pattern is weak. Today most women can make good money, they are in no hurry to have children, and many want to live for themselves.

Editor: Have Russian Orthodox, Muslim, or Russian secular attitudes towards women affected evangelical attitudes?

Of course, all of these factors have had a huge impact. As for Orthodoxy, a woman should be meek and humble; as for Islam, a woman should be a wife and mother; and as for secular influence, the attitude is: "Take everything from life, succeed, earn all you can, give birth alone, raise a child without a father, and, at the same time, be confident and compelling." Today secularism has the most influence upon women.

Editor: Have Western women missionaries been a factor in any changes in the role of women in evangelical churches?

I think yes and no. Western women missionaries have shown clearly that women can have larger roles to play in church, that they should not be afraid to go into missionary service, and that they can be leaders in missions. But the role of women in evangelical churches has also been changing because the world is changing quickly, and most churches are adapting to the new realities on the basis of changes in society.

Editor: Since 1997 have there been other changes in the role of women in evangelical churches?

More women are involved in ministry. Not enough men are volunteering their time to the church of their own free will, which is forcing churches to recognize the ministry of women and to give them more opportunities to work in the church.

Editor: Have women taken larger leadership roles in evangelical charities and compassionate ministries?

Not so much so far, but this trend of women directing

compassionate ministries is increasing.

Editor: Do women serve as pastors in Russia?

Lutheran and Charismatic churches welcome women as pastors in our country. Thank God this number is growing. But in Baptist and Pentecostal churches nothing has changed in the past 25 years. The brothers in these churches are conservative and uncompromising with respect to the service of a woman as pastor.

Editor: Has Lutheran and Methodist ordination of women had any effect on other Protestant denominations?

Attitudes toward me as a pastor have changed, but this has not changed church practice. I do not feel support in the Baptist brotherhood for my service as a pastor. But I am glad that, one by one, brothers are quietly treating me well, are welcoming, and are courteous to me. Personally, I have a very good relationship with all of them. But this is because our church is independent. I think they would not take me into their union. I am often invited to the Evangelical Christian Union, welcomed, and sometimes given the opportunity to say something briefly. In a newer church there is a tendency to have pastors' wives speak the Word of God.

Editor: Do women serve in teaching roles in churches and seminaries?

The official policy of many churches is that women have the right to teach. Women are encouraged to share poetry in church, and in seminaries they are able to teach psychology, philosophy, and the history of Christianity, but not the Bible. In some churches (Lutheran, Charismatic, and the Salvation Army) women increasingly are teaching the Bible, and these women have significant authority and respect in their churches.

Editor: Have evangelical pastors changed their attitude toward your ministry?

Their attitude has not changed, but they have become more tolerant. The Evangelical Christian Union and the Baptists do not recognize my status as pastor. Nevertheless, I find understanding among the brothers. I do not often see them and therefore do not have a problem with them. Perhaps my collaboration with the well-respected mission, Light in the East, leads the brothers to exercise humility and obligates them to give me respect. ♦

More women are involved in ministry. Not enough men are volunteering their time to the church of their own free will, which is forcing churches to recognize the ministry of women.

Women's Ministry in Evangelical Churches in the Former Soviet Union: A Response to Shirinai Dosova

Natalia Turlac

I read with great interest the interview with Shirinai Dosova, one of the most outstanding leaders among Evangelical women in the former Soviet Union (FSU). She is well-known all over the FSU for her great efforts in evangelism in Central Asia.

However, the most fascinating part of her story has been her outreach to Muscovites on Old Arbat Street in the 1990s.

It is noteworthy that Rev. Dosova chose Galatians 3:28 as the passage that best reflects her

understanding of the role of women in the church: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” However, my perception is that most Evangelical male pastors understand this passage to mean that Christ’s work of salvation applies to all, not in the sense that Jesus opened the door for women’s active leadership in the church.

Women in the Pews, Head Coverings, and Birth Control

Rev. Dosova is quite correct in her estimate of the percentage of women present in worship in Evangelical churches in the FSU (65 to 70 percent). However, in many rural Baptist congregations the percentage of women in attendance is as high as 80 to 90 percent. For many women, a worship service is a welcome break from the reality of domestic violence and the heavy drinking of their husbands.

In most Baptist and Pentecostal churches that were in existence before the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, head coverings were a requirement. Central Asian churches led by Russians and Germans were especially strict in this regard. However, this issue lost its relevance in a great number of congregations planted after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. Independent churches tend to have a larger degree of freedom than those that belong to unions and church associations, which generally impose greater restrictions on women.

While most Evangelical churches before 1991 required men and women to sit separately in worship (which is an ancient synagogue tradition), it is less common now. However, this custom still typically applies in Central Asian churches, as well as in churches that were unregistered in the Soviet era.

The issue of birth control is usually not mentioned from church pulpits. However, pastors speak against contraception privately. Evangelicals in general favor large families. This is especially the case among Baptists in the Bryansk Region of Russia, in some parts of Ukraine, and among unregistered Pentecostal churches. Moreover, some Pentecostals speak of childbearing as an important ministry given by God to men and women. In contrast, pastors of independent churches planted by Western missionaries after 1991 are less likely to take such a stance.

Domestic Violence and Trafficking

Growing up in an Evangelical Christian-Baptist congregation in Moldova, I rarely heard mention of domestic violence from the pulpit. I agree with Rev. Dosova that in family conflict situations male church leaders tend to support husbands, while encouraging women to submit. However, Evangelical women are beginning to take a more active role in voicing their concern over domestic abuse.

In my opinion, human trafficking is a greater threat in the former Soviet Union than drugs and alcohol. The collapse of the U.S.S.R. and economic uncertainty led to the trafficking of thousands

upon thousands of women out of Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Central Asia to Europe and the Middle East for sex, forced labor, and organ harvesting. Even some Christian women were deceived by traffickers with promises of legitimate work abroad, only to be forced into slave labor. Most churches do not address the issue publicly.

Women in Subordinate Roles—with Some Exceptions

I think that while some young Baptist and Pentecostal women are eager for opportunities to study and work outside the home, most Evangelical women are still very much family-oriented and tend to place their families before successful careers. They regard their husbands as leaders in the family even though they prefer to participate in the decision-making process.

On one hand, Evangelical women are heavily influenced by Russian Orthodox and Muslim understandings of the role of women in the family, specifically that their primary task is to help their husbands, maintain the households, and raise children. However, women are increasingly realizing that they can do more than this. New economic opportunities have made women stronger. For example, the number of Christian women who have obtained driver’s licenses is on the increase, thus providing greater mobility and greater freedom. Christian women in the former Soviet Union understand that they cannot match Western Christian women in the range of available opportunities. Still, the influence of the West and media has exposed them to different points of view.

While I agree with Rev. Dosova that more women are engaged in ministry today, I would argue that the overall picture has not changed dramatically. While Charismatic churches allow greater participation of women in pastoral ministry (for example, in Maxim Maximov’s New Life Church in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and in Sunday Adelaja’s Embassy of God Church in Kyiv, Ukraine), most Baptist and Pentecostal congregations limit the pastoral office to men.

The example of Rev. Dosova notwithstanding, the number of Evangelical women in pastoral roles in the former Soviet Union is quite insignificant. While independent churches have a degree of flexibility in their attitudes toward women pastors, the ordination of women to the pastorate among Baptists and Pentecostals is still very much a taboo. Most Baptists and Pentecostals are critical of Lutherans and Methodists for ordaining women and consider it an “unbiblical Western practice.”

My observation is that since 1991 mission organizations and Christian charities in the FSU have provided more avenues for women in ministry than churches. Barred from the pulpit, many women have discovered that they can do a lot to help orphans, the ill, the suffering, and the poor.

In addition, men typically allow Evangelical women to teach other women and children in

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A Response to Shirinai Dosova (continued from page 3)

Sunday school. In contrast, only a handful of women have been allowed to preach. One exception was the Moldovan Baptist woman evangelist Lydia Caldararu, who from the 1930s to the 1970s preached from prominent pulpits. In seminaries, most women teach non-theological classes (usually general education courses, music, psychology, or social work). In some schools, women are allowed to study theology.

Because of greater access to Western Christian cable TV channels, Evangelical pastors have become more accustomed to seeing Western Christian women preach, for example, Joyce Meyer. Rev. Dosova's ministry in Moscow has also contributed to greater awareness that some women are indeed called to pastoral ministry. However, women pastors such as Rev. Dosova are still a rare phenomenon. Baptist and Pentecostal pastors maintain the status quo, reserving the pastoral office for men.

In conclusion, I would say that churches in the former Soviet Union have just started their journey toward acceptance of a greater role for women in the church. On one hand, they are influenced by their Orthodox and Muslim context. On the other hand, they witness changes in women's roles in the church in the West. Any progress in this area comes very slowly, with no significant breakthrough in sight. Personally, I expected that churches would have offered more freedom for women in ministry by 2016. Evangelicals in the former Soviet Union are still in the process of trying to determine their purpose and mission in a rapidly changing political and social environment. In this regard, women's ministry is no exception. ♦

Natalia Turlac, Toronto, Canada, engages in anti-trafficking work and ministry to families with children with autism spectrum disorder in her native Moldova and in other former Soviet republics.

Response to Shirinai Dosova

Galina Obrovets

The role of women in evangelical churches and ministries in Russia has definitely and positively changed over the past 20 years and continues to grow in a healthy way. It has become normal practice for Evangelical Christian-Baptist and Pentecostal women to gather at regional and local conferences for the discussion of vital problems. More than that: All the information women need concerning projects and conferences may now be found on the web. For example, websites of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist Union of Russia include a section on women's concerns (<http://www.hve.ru/ministries/women>; and <http://baptist.org.ru/faith/about/ministries/women>), while Pentecostal websites do the same (<http://www.hve.ru/ministries/women>; and <http://www.hve.ru/ministries/women/3595-zhenskaya-konferentsiya-proshla-v-izhevsk>). Women have become very active in social ministry and have become leaders and directors of such ministries more often than men. Ministry to orphans and Christian counseling are two areas in which evangelical women are in the lead.

In the past 20 years the ministry of women within evangelical churches has become pronounced. Church choir conductors were rare in Soviet times, whereas now up to 95 percent are women. The same tendency may be seen in children's Sunday schools where the majority of teachers are women. Also, some evangelical churches have restored the ordination of deaconesses.

In Russia Charismatic, Lutheran, and Methodist churches now ordain women as pastors. In contrast, very few Pentecostal churches ordain women pastors, and no such ordinations occur in Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches. The question of women's ordination was raised at the conference, "Women: Christian Perspectives," held at St. Petersburg

Christian University, 21-22 April 2016. At this gathering most men reacted negatively to the idea of women's ordination.

The 1997 conference, "Women's Role in Church, Family, and Society," at which Shirinai Dosova was one of many speakers, marked the beginning of significant, positive changes for women in evangelical churches. This meeting gave a wonderful impulse and direction for the development of various women's ministries: organizing conferences on social work, counseling, women's educational programs, and the launching of the publication of women's magazines. One example of fruit from the conference involved Christian women from Siberia who took the collection of published presentations from the conference, *Rol' khristianki v sovremennom obshchestve [The Role of Christian Women in Contemporary Society]* (1998), and used it as a springboard to further develop their own outreach. These Siberian sisters listed all women's ministries described in the conference publication as a blueprint for an expansion of their own work east of the Urals.

The 1997 women's conference, for which I served as coordinator, also prompted my own greater involvement in women's ministry through my work with the Moscow-based Center for Biblical Resources (www.sestra-m.ru). In 1998 I organized an all-Russian conference in Moscow for evangelical women leaders, with a published collection of presentations from the Moscow conference appearing afterwards. In 2000 I worked with others to hold an International Women's Conference in Moscow for 300 participants, which included my presentation of the first issue of the Christian Women's magazine, *Sestra [Sister]*, which I serve as editor. This magazine was published quarterly in full color for ten years until 2010 and was distributed in Russia and other former Soviet

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republics. *Sestra* is now available on the web: www.sestra-m.ru; email: sestra.journal@gmail.com. An additional Russian-language Christian women's magazine is published in Belarus: *Nadezhda dlya tebya* [*Hope for You*]; <http://www.zhizn.by/>; email: zhizn.by@gmail.com. Finally, readers should take note of the summer 2016 issue of *Bogomysliye* ([http://](http://www.bogomysliye.com)

www.bogomysliye.com), devoted to women in the history of Christianity and women in ministry in contemporary society. ♦

Galina Obrovets is editor of Sestra magazine and a member of the Second Baptist Church, Moscow, Russia.

Women in Evangelical Churches in the Former Soviet Union:

A Response

April L. French

Shirinai Dosova's interview offers a glimpse into the views of a well-known female pastor within an evangelical milieu that predominantly holds to a theological convention of female submission at home and male leadership in church in a region with a strong history of patriarchy. Indeed, the vast majority of women in post-Soviet evangelical circles adhere to some version of these views, akin to what Nadieszda Kizenko, in her recent study of women in post-Soviet Russian Orthodoxy, refers to as "feminized patriarchy."¹ One can only imagine the resistance faced by Dosova and other women who are preachers and ministry leaders in the former Soviet Union.

Clarifying Terminology

While Dosova's experience is instructive and her thoughts insightful, I would like to offer additional comments from my perspective as an historian of Soviet-era religion and an observer of evangelical congregations in Russia for the past 14 years. Since my most recent time in Russia was spent in congregations within Evangelical Christian-Baptist (ECB) churches, much of my commentary will have to do with this denomination. Before proceeding, I would also like to clarify terminology. In the interview, Dosova mentions two categories of churches: "conservative churches" and "new churches." We should be careful when using such terminology, since the "new churches" to which she is referring were largely established by missionaries from countries such as the United States and South Korea, where evangelicals often hold well-articulated conservative positions with respect to women and have brought their own brand of theological conservatism to Eastern Europe and Eurasia—including forms of Calvinism that had been relatively unknown within evangelical circles in the tsarist and Soviet periods. That said, Dosova's assertion that these "new" churches usually do not demand head covering for married women holds true, whereas long-established registered and unregistered ECB, traditional Pentecostal, and Mennonite churches do tend to strongly encourage this practice.

Evangelical Women's Domestic Dreams and Realities

My time in evangelical congregations leads me to conclude, contrary to Dosova, that evangelical women in the former Soviet Union *do* continue to hold predominantly to "traditional, patriarchal family patterning." Even if some young evangelical women

pursue careers, most who take their faith seriously also desire to find godly men for whom they can be godly, submissive wives and with whom they can raise children who will then become godly husbands and wives. This hope is not at all tied to Islamic influence, as one reading of Dosova's interview might suggest, but to the long-standing evangelical teaching and modeling of the importance of family. And although the Russian secular world has influenced evangelical women—perhaps most significantly in large cities where some women might be able to "make good money," as Dosova suggests—this does not automatically preclude them from desiring a strong, traditional, evangelical family.

Domestic Abuse

Some evangelical women, however, do not obtain the kinds of families they desire. Despite the Russian Orthodox Church's recent, baffling stance that laws against "so-called domestic violence" are "anti-family,"² the domestic abuse of women is rampant throughout the former Soviet Union, and evangelical women are not immune to such treatment. While many evangelical marriages in the former Soviet Union are strong and stable, others are fractious and unsafe. In her interview, Dosova mentions the stance of "older ministers" who "teach that the wife should accept suffering for the sake of her children and for the sake of her husband's salvation." A close reading indicates that those who hold this view insist that only unbelieving husbands abuse their wives, with the assumption that a believing husband would never do so. In my conversations with laity from ECB churches in Siberia, I have found that this view is widely held—along with its gendered corollary that if a woman is being abused, she is bringing it on herself, since she is not being submissive enough. Such views lead to some male church members inflicting violence upon their wives (and children) with impunity. This license is the case because evangelical women are much less likely to report such behavior if their congregations are convinced that believers would never do such a thing or insist that the women must not have been submissive enough. I am *not* claiming that all evangelical men treat their families this way—far from it—but, rather, I am arguing that such a culture allows the perpetuation of abuse against women and children, with little or no recourse for the victim(s) or accountability for the abuser. *(continued on page 6)*

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Evangelical Women’s Ministry in Churches

Dosova’s observation that women constitute 65 to 70 percent of evangelical congregations holds true based on my firsthand observations of various congregations in post-Soviet Russia. This is actually a decrease from the years 1943-1991, when evangelical women averaged approximately 80 percent.³ In that period, women were highly active in ministry within their congregations—serving in administrative positions; in direct ministry positions such as deaconesses, leaders of (illegal) children’s Sunday schools and youth groups, and even occasionally as preachers and congregational leaders (but never pastors); in hospitality; in musical and artistic ministries as choir directors; and as respected writers and reciters of poetry in worship.⁴ I would argue that women’s active participation in their congregations—their “leadership from within”—has continued essentially unabated, even in the context of evangelical men’s ongoing assertion of primary leadership. That said, I still respect Dosova’s observation that “more women are involved in ministry” now than in the late 1990s, because she is speaking from her own extensive experience within evangelical congregations.

Dosova claims that “[n]ot enough men are volunteering their time to the church of their own free will, . . . forcing churches to recognize the ministry of women and to give them more opportunities to work in the church.” This argument reflects a common temptation to ascribe women’s active ministry to insufficient male presence or to the unwillingness of men to lead—something I would call the “Deborah argument,” based on a rather frequent explanatory interpretation of Deborah’s leadership as a judge over Israel (Judges 4-5). Yet, reality is often much more complex. For example, Dosova’s own ministry likely came about not because men refused to volunteer for leadership positions, but because she has strong gifts in leadership and evangelism, which has led people to seek her out regularly for spiritual guidance.

Attitudes of ECB Men toward Women in Ministry

Several key ECB leaders in Siberia—all of whom believe that only men should lead congregations—are nonetheless proponents of the active ministry of women. For example, two pastoral leaders in Novosibirsk attribute their initial training as Bible study leaders and preachers to the two women who led their youth groups in the 1970s and 1980s. As a result, they encourage women to serve as youth leaders.⁵ Another ECB leader with a provincial leadership role in Siberia is lobbying on a national level for training and sending out women as regional and international missionaries. Despite facing resistance to such a proposal—because, according to some, “only men can be missionaries”—he continues his steady efforts to change ECB policy in this regard.⁶

The resistance Dosova continues to face is due to her being a *pastor*. As she says, “The brothers in

[some evangelical] churches are . . . uncompromising with respect to the service of a woman as a pastor.” Given this reality, it is encouraging to know that Dosova has been sensing a positive change in the way certain ECB leaders relate to her. It is my hope that such changes will continue and that more women will be empowered to use their gifts for ministry in the former Soviet Union. ♦

NOTES:

¹ Nadieszda Kizenko, “Feminized Patriarchy? Orthodoxy and Gender in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38 (No. 3, 2013), 595-621. Dosova herself teaches on the feminine domestic ideal in an inductive Bible study based on Kay Arthur’s *Marriage Without Regrets*. See Shirinai Dosova, “Rol’ zhenshiny,” partial Vimeo video, Part 2 of Lesson 3 from “Brak bez sozhalenii,” <https://vimeo.com/19007903>; Kay Arthur, “Marriage #10: How to Be an Excellent Wife,” Precepts for Life, <http://www.lightsource.com/ministry/precepts/marriage-10-how-to-be-an-excellent-wife-465349.html>.

² This view was put forth on 20 March 2015 by Archpriest Dmitrii Smirnov, a representative of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Committee on Family and the Defense of Motherhood and Childhood. See Fr. Dmitrii Smirnov, “Vystuplenie protoiereia Dmitriia Smirnova na Obshchestvennom sovete P. Astakhova,” Dmitrii Smirnov’s blog, 5 April 2015; <http://www.dimitrysmirnov.ru/blog/cerkov-56880/>; and Jennifer Monaghan, “Russian Orthodox Priest: Parental Violence Campaigns Are ‘Anti-Family,’” *Moscow Times*, 24 March 2015; <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/russian-orthodox-priest-parental-violence-campaigns-are-anti-family/517976.html>.

³ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Irkutskoi Oblasti f. R-2951, op. 1, d. 18, ll. 17-18, 23-27, 53-54, 69-71, 108-116, 155-162, 176-185, and 198-205ob.; Arkhiv goroda Minusinska f. R-33, op. 1, d. 210, ll. 69-76; and d. 597, ll. 1a-8.

⁴ April L. French, “Leadership from Within: Women in the Evangelical Communities of Siberia, 1941-1991,” unpublished conference paper, St. Petersburg Christian University conference: “Women: Christian Perspectives,” 21 April 2016.

⁵ Iulia Kononenko, “Mozhet li devushka rukovodit’ molodezh’iu,” *95 let Tserkvi EKHB v Novosibirsk* (1998), 33; Eduard Adol’fovich Genrikh, oral history interview with author, Novosibirsk, 9 May 2015; Andrei Grigor’evich Mel’nikov, informal conversational interview with author, Novosibirsk, 29 April 2015; Svetlana Sergeevna Strukova, oral history interview with author, Novosibirsk, 27 April 2015.

⁶ Based on a private conversation, June 2015.

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Women’s active participation in their congregations—their “leadership from within”—has continued essentially unabated, even in the context of evangelical men’s ongoing assertion of primary leadership.

Before and After: Baptist Women in Post-Soviet Ukraine

Mary Raber

Women's Roles: Rigidity and Flexibility

University of Chicago sociologist Louis Wirth (1897-1952) maintained that in any human society the issues that are never discussed are the most important, because they are the ones regarded as already settled. Thus, it would appear that the place of women in Ukrainian Baptist churches is clearly understood by all because, surprisingly, it is little talked about—at least publicly. Generally, when the topic of women in the church is discussed, the discourse reinforces what many Westerners would consider a highly traditional status quo. Weddings, for example, are an occasion for pastors to outline the respective duties of marriage partners, frequently with particular stress laid on the wife's duty to obey, rather than the husband's calling to serve and cherish. Likewise, church-sponsored events on International Women's Day (8 March), often serve to honor women and to warn them not to move out of their sphere.

Yet, in practice, the boundaries of that sphere in the Russo-Ukrainian evangelical movement have been remarkably flexible. Throughout a history that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, women have served ably (and often at great personal cost) as sisters of mercy, literature colporteurs, administrators, traveling evangelists, editors, Sunday school teachers, cross-cultural missionaries, authors, choir directors, deaconesses, preachers, and radio broadcasters. During times of deep crisis, while male leaders were imprisoned, exiled, or killed, women held churches together and actively interceded on behalf of prisoners of conscience, both male and female. (An excellent, nuanced study of women's roles during Soviet times is Nadezhda Beliakova and Miriam Dobson, *Zhenshchiny v evangel'skikh obshchinakh poslevoennogo SSSR, 1940-1980 gg.* [Women in Evangelical Congregations of the Postwar U.S.S.R., 1940-1980]; Moscow: Indrik, 2015.)

The main exception is the exclusion of women from the ordained ministry. Women do not serve formally in Ukrainian Baptist churches as pastors or teaching elders, although in some places there are women entrusted with a teaching function. Nor are women enrolled in theological education programs that prepare specifically for those vocations, although usually they attend many of the same classes as their male counterparts. On the other hand, Ukrainian Baptist women apparently do not aspire to ordination either. "I've never asked why I can't be a pastor," says one woman with a theological education. "Baptists don't do that [i.e., ordain women], although Charismatics might." Since Ukrainian independence was declared in 1991, that overall picture—active Christian service for many women, except for ordained ministry—has remained largely unchanged. Generally, women are free to participate in various kinds of service unless they are told not to, directly

or indirectly. Naturally, inconsistencies exist, often depending on the attitudes of the men surrounding them, but the ambiguities are noted quietly, not aired publicly. Little in the way of an articulate feminist challenge has emerged.

Speaking Up in Church and Head Coverings

To be sure, the last 25 years have altered some practices. Previously, based on a strict interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 concerning women keeping silent in church, a Ukrainian Baptist woman would probably not have spoken up at a congregational meeting, but would have relied on her husband to ask questions or make statements in public. These days, in most churches, she can ask her own question, although she may not chair the meeting.

Other changes have affected the sensitive matter of women's dress. In Soviet times, short hair and makeup were unknown, and even wedding rings were taboo in some congregations. A pastor may still reprimand a woman if he thinks her attire is inappropriate. Yet here and there the *kosynka*, the artfully folded square of translucent material that married Baptist women sometimes wore as a head covering all the time, and certainly at prayer and public worship, has been quietly discarded. In some urban congregations women freely attend worship dressed in pants, with recognition either that this is a healthy adaptation to modern times or a sad loss of decorum.

The greatest change in the role of women since Ukrainian independence relates to the growth in ministry opportunities that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union. New avenues of service have emerged that previously were non-existent. Two examples are theological education and compassionate ministry.

Natalia Svistun and Christian Education

Natalia Svistun, who chairs the Christian education faculty of Odessa Theological Seminary, remembers that semi-underground Bible school courses were organized in the late 1980s for men only. She volunteered for a job in the kitchen, ostensibly to help fix the daily midday meal for the students, but actually to sneak into the back row and listen to the lectures. Eventually her interest and that of others was noted, and women were included in the Bible school program with a separate stream for those interested in Sunday school ministry.

Bible school systematized her knowledge, but like other women in that first generation of Sunday school teachers, Svistun was already largely self-taught. As a widow with sons who found it hard to sit still, she had had to find ways to engage them in church life. Not only that, but in an era when children were officially forbidden to attend church, Christian families banded together to provide instruction and activities. Bible study was disguised as New Year celebrations, May Day picnics, and birthday parties.

(continued on page 8)

During times of deep crisis, while male leaders were imprisoned, exiled, or killed, women held churches together and actively interceded on behalf of prisoners of conscience.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the social services infrastructure collapsed as well. In many places churches established children's shelters, rehabilitation programs for alcoholics and drug addicts, home care for the elderly, and any number of other projects, sometimes surprisingly ambitious. Often women took the lead.

Most church members are women, yet they are not always acknowledged as stakeholders or decision makers.

Today Sunday school, summer camps, day camps, and all manner of special events for children and youth are an acknowledged part of church life. These crucial ministries, especially among younger children, are regarded as the province of women, although Svistun is working to encourage more men to participate. Since the 1990s she has edited curricula for Sunday schools and camps, largely planned and written by women.

During the last two years Svistun has also developed a certificate program in women's ministry at Odessa Seminary. Other women as well have made a significant contribution to theological education in the former Soviet Union. Besides Christian education, they have taught church history, Greek and Hebrew, spiritual formation, counseling, Christian leadership, and other disciplines. Some have served as deans and librarians.

Since independence Baptist women have also enjoyed greater opportunities in compassionate ministries. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the social services infrastructure collapsed as well, putting extreme stress on children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. In many places churches established children's shelters, rehabilitation programs for alcoholics and drug addicts, home care for the elderly, and any number of other projects, sometimes surprisingly ambitious. Often women took the lead.

Odessa's Choose Life Women's Center

In Odessa, a particularly significant example is the Women's Center "Vyberai zhizn'" [Choose Life], based on an American prototype. The center educates, counsels, and assists pregnant women and women who have undergone abortions. Its very existence signals an important departure for Baptists who have tended to live in isolation from wider Ukrainian society. As people who have been intentionally marginalized, they have also sometimes marginalized themselves and thus have not always identified with their neighbors' concerns. Previously, helping women who are facing an unplanned pregnancy or who have had abortions would not have been possible—nor would it have registered as an opportunity for service among Ukrainian Baptists. Indeed, the center's opening was carefully prepared by an American woman doctor who helped organize Baptist pastors' conferences on the subject of abortion and pastoral counseling.

The center now relies on approximately 50 women

volunteers from several Christian confessions. They serve in a range of capacities, from trained counselors to providing custodial services. In the process they have been drawn into the midst of painful and delicate issues. It is a highly necessary ministry, as abortion is the default method of birth control in Ukraine. According to the center's Ukrainian director, Liubov Abramova, it is not unknown for some clients to have had as many as 30 abortions. The spiritual and emotional needs of these women, the economic issues that face them and their families, and the frequently related problem of domestic violence, are only beginning to be addressed.

Ambiguity Remains

Thus, significant changes have come about for Baptist women since Ukrainian independence. At the same time, just as in the Soviet era and in the tsarist empire before that, ambiguity remains. Most church members are women, yet they are not always acknowledged as stakeholders or decision makers. Recently, when the members of a somewhat more progressive congregation assembled for a meeting with their area senior presbyter, he bluntly asked the pastor, "Why are all these sisters [women] here?" The presbyter had expected to confer with men only.

While women may carry a great deal of responsibility, they may not always be recognized for it. In one city a woman led the way in bringing together donors and developing a system for distributing food and clothing among people displaced by the war in eastern Ukraine. But the local male church leadership presented it to journalists as their own doing. One respected woman activist confided, "Frequently I've put forth ideas that were initially ignored, but later were accepted, and the credit was taken by men. Still, I think it's more important to have the idea realized than to have my name on it." In other words, for many Ukrainian Baptist women, the freedom to take part in ministry—and they have ample opportunity to do so—takes priority over feminist goals. This may change in the future, but at this point in time at least, it is not much discussed, which must mean it is very important. ♦

Mary Raber, a service worker sponsored by Mennonite Mission Network (Elkhart, Indiana), teaches at Odessa Theological Seminary, Odessa, Ukraine.

Response to the Interview with Shirinai Dosova on Women in Ministry

Nancy Raatz

Shirinai Dosova has been a pioneer for women in ministry in the East. Her interview for the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* is interesting and informative. As an American missionary woman who has served actively in Moldova and Russia for the past 13 years, I have been asked to respond to her

interview. My response will center on three questions. First, what constitutes a woman being prostituted? Second, what is the biblical basis for women in ministry? And third, what are the future prospects for women serving in ministry in the former Soviet Union?

Sex Trafficking

In the interview, Shirinai Dosova states that women in Russia who have turned to prostitution have “lost their way.” She claims that women from Russia and other former Soviet bloc states cannot find work and thus become prostitutes. It may seem like a small point in an interview concerning women in ministry, but I believe the path to prostitution deserves further explanation.

A great deal of misunderstanding surrounds the issue of prostitution and human sex trafficking in the East. My husband and I served in the Republic of Moldova for ten years where we established an after-care ministry for victims of sex trafficking. (See Andrew Raatz, “Healing the Natashas: Observations on Trafficking Aftercare in Moldova,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 18 [Spring 2010], 16, 15; [Summer 2010], 11-13.) A large percentage of the women who came through our ministry had been sold into prostitution in Russia, but whether in Russia, Turkey, or the Middle East, they did not take prostitution as a job because they could not find other work. Rather, they were promised legitimate work abroad; upon arrival their documents were seized; and they then were forced into sex slavery. They were held against their will and forced to prostitute themselves for their pimps. Beatings, starvation, and death threats kept them captive. Most women are not engaged in prostitution because they have “lost their way,” but because they are slaves. It is time for the evangelical churches in Russia to stop seeing prostitution as an occupational choice, but to realize it is a system of slavery holding women in oppression and destroying their value and dignity.

The Biblical Basis for Women in Ministry

In contrast, the Bible underscores the value, worth, and dignity of women. We see women redeemed from their past and used of God when we read the narratives of Rahab, Bathsheba, and Mary Magdalene. We see women serving in leadership in the characters of Miriam, Deborah, and Priscilla. Jesus valued women in his actions toward them. The Apostle John tells that it was women who first heard, believed, and proclaimed Jesus’ resurrection. Women were leaders in the early church. Romans 16 is almost entirely about the Apostle Paul’s co-laborers, a good portion of whom were women. The early church believed they were living in the last days, as proclaimed by the prophet Joel, and that the proclamation of Christ to their broken world required the labor of both men and women.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel 2 in explaining to the crowd what had happened: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and

women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18). Peter understood that the outpouring of the Spirit was for men and women. He understood that God would use men and women to establish His church. We are living in the last days. It is time for the church in the East and West to realize that God’s Spirit is poured out on ALL flesh, and both men and women are needed fully in the work of the church.

Recently I received ordination in my denomination, the Assemblies of God, in the United States. I stood among 12 candidates for ordination, five of whom were women. We ranged in age from mid-thirties to early sixties. As I sat hearing their names called and watching them walk across the platform, I was struck by the great number of young women in the class—some young singles, others married and being licensed to preach alongside their husbands—all stepping forward into the calling God had on their lives and our denomination recognizing that call.

My mind drifted back to 30 years earlier when I attended Bible college. Few women sat in the ministry classes because few believed they could be ministers. A professor proclaimed that the church would not accept women as ministers and told females to change their major. The message to young women was that preaching is a place for men only. The night of my ordination I realized that a huge change had taken place in my lifetime. The shift did not happen overnight and is not total. Men still far outnumber women in our pulpits, as lead pastors, and on church staffs. Still, I see positive change: women are preaching, they are lead pastors, they are on church staffs. They are leading ministries to children and victims of trafficking. They are Christian college presidents and in denominational executive leadership positions.

The Prospects for Women in Ministry in the East

Likewise, I have seen a shift in the East with women in the church in the 13 years I have served in the East. Women lead worship in churches. They head Christian schools. They lead ministries outside church walls. This is a massive shift from 20 years ago. Recently I shared the preaching at a women’s event in southern Russia with a pastor’s wife. I preached one session, and she preached the other. No one questioned that either of us preached the Bible. That is what we came to do. These examples bring hope for the place of women in ministry in the East. The work, whether in the East or the West, will be completed with men and women serving alongside one another to bring the hope of the Gospel to a lost world. ♦

Nancy Raatz is an Assemblies of God missionary serving in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Most women are not engaged in prostitution because they have “lost their way,” but because they are slaves. It is time for the evangelical churches in Russia to stop seeing prostitution as an occupational choice, but to realize it is a system of slavery.

A Report on a St. Petersburg Conference on the Role of Women in the Church

Jon Coody

Marina S. Karetnikova and Tatiana Nikolskaya

On 21-22 April 2016, the theme of the St. Petersburg Christian University (SPbCU) annual theological conference was “Women: Biblical-Christian Perspectives,” dedicated to the memory of Marina Sergeyevna Karetnikova, esteemed historian of Russian Protestantism and former lecturer at SPbCU who passed away 24 January 2016 at the age of 85. Marina Sergeyevna’s life and ministry were exemplary for all those seeking to understand the crucial role that women have played in the history of the Christian Church in Russia. SPbCU historian and lecturer Tatiana Nikolskaya pointed out in her opening address that Marina Sergeyevna had many students, and many of them, including men, count her as a *nastavnik* [mentor] in the faith, not only because of her scholarship and instruction, but also because of her exemplary life of service to others. This holistic understanding of the role of women in the church and society was invoked in various ways throughout the conference.

April French and Nadezhda Belyakova

Over 30 papers explored the roles of women in Russian churches and society through the lenses of history, biblical studies, theology, practical theology, leadership studies, and psychology. It is no secret that Russian Christianity tends to hold more traditional and conservative views on women’s roles in the Church, but in practice women’s roles have often pushed boundaries, as some presenters pointed out. For example, April French, a doctoral student at Brandeis University, informed participants of the crucial roles played by Baptist women in Siberia during the Soviet period. From her analysis, it appears that due in large part to the courage and bold actions of women, many congregations were not only held intact under persecution, but also actually thrived in the face of adversity. Nadezhda Belyakova, a Moscow-based historian, attested to similar trends among Protestant women of the Soviet period, and added helpful information on how these trends are and should be researched.

Valeriy Alikin and Daniil Samoylenkov

Among biblical studies presenters, Valeriy Alikin, rector of SPbCU, presented from the New Testament a view of women’s roles in the church more expansive than is typical in the Russian context. Alikin’s concern was to reconcile Paul’s apparent injunction against women teaching in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:12), with what appears to be the actual presence of women teachers in the early Church. From

a more traditional viewpoint, Daniil Samoylenkov, lecturer in Old Testament at SPbCU, examined the biblical figure of Ruth as an example of piety in ancient Israel and explored implications for women in the church today.

Diversity Among Presenters and Perspectives

Diversity was apparent not only in viewpoints, but also in religious and cultural perspectives. Presenters came from cities across Russia, as well as from Switzerland, Germany, and the United States. Included were both Protestant and Orthodox, along with one Jewish representative, Elena Rubenstein, a reformed Jewish rabbi who presented a stimulating exposition of Jewish understandings of women in leadership as they unfold biblically and through rabbinic teaching. Alexander Negrov and Alexei Belov of Hodos Institute and SPbCU’s Graduate School of Leadership presented findings from their recent study of leadership among young people in 13 countries across Eurasia.

Lively discussions following presentations underscored the fact that while questions regarding women’s roles in the church and society are often assumed to have been resolved long ago, the reality is that many questions remain unanswered, and many participants felt that women have not been properly acknowledged. Despite what some participants deemed to be controversial views offered by presenters, those in attendance demonstrated an openness to hearing other perspectives and an eagerness to discuss the issues in a civil manner. From a Western perspective, it is worth noting that labels such as *complementarian* and *egalitarian* were not heard at the conference, though further discussions may contribute to the formation of such terminology unique to the Russian context and language. Closing remarks at the conference in general suggested that continued critical reflection and discussion on this topic might give impetus to more formal acknowledgment of the crucial roles that women have played in the development of Christianity in Russia, helping the church to meet new challenges in a changing world.

Selected audio presentations from the conference may be accessed at <https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=OBwxLxx\CO-9cX5Vk90UjZzeFV3bVk&usp=sharing>; and selected abstracts may be accessed at <http://spbku.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Annotatsii-k-dokladam-dlya-konferentsii.pdf>. ♦

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

Malkhaz Songulashvili

Editor's note: The first part of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report 24 (Summer, 2016):1-4.

Overcoming Negative Evangelism

Upon gaining independence from Russian Baptists, the Georgian Evangelical Christian-Baptist Church (ECB) expressed complete disapproval of methods of evangelism that focused on a “negative message” that condemned traditional (Orthodox) religious practices, which was part of the legacy they had received from Russian Baptists. Accordingly, ECB leaders have sought to suppress the “negative message,” stressing that their church should be known for what it supports and affirms, rather than for what it is against. To avoid the influence of the past and to uphold the idea that evangelism is not a ministerial task alone, the ECB established schools of evangelism for laity in which the basics of a theology of missions are taught, the evangelistic experiences of participants are examined, and new patterns of sharing the gospel are demonstrated with the use of drama.

An understanding of the loving character of God became very prominent in the period of civil wars and enormous turmoil that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1990 the southwestern part of Georgia, populated mainly by Muslim Georgians, experienced a landslide disaster that affected thousands of the population. The Georgian Orthodox Church immediately reacted, identifying the event with God’s punishment of Georgian Muslims who did not want to convert to Christianity.¹ Such judgmental views on disasters are characteristic of Russian Orthodoxy as well. For instance, after the tragic earthquake in Haiti on 12 January 2010, Patriarch Kyrill showed no sympathy for the suffering, viewing Haiti’s troubles as a result of Haitians’ loss of moral standards. He said, “Haiti is a country of poverty, crime, hunger, drugs, corruption, and the loss of moral standards by the people.”² Earlier, in 2005, Kyrill, as head of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department of External Relations, had commented on the tsunami disaster in Thailand, linking the loss of life with punishment for sin.³ In contrast, the ECB has made clear that this punishment theory is not a part of the Christian message. Instead, the ECB organized services in memory of Georgian Muslim victims of the 1990 landslide, inviting intellectuals and others to such services. Georgian academics were given an opportunity to participate in such services, either passively by simply attending, or actively by delivering speeches in sympathy for the suffering. ECB leaders also gave special talks in university and various other academic settings about the core message of the Gospel, which were neither narrowly denominational nor confessional, that stressed a gospel of love instead of a gospel of punishment.

Summer Camp Evangelism

ECB summer camps and youth activities,

organized regularly in Georgia since 1992, shared the gospel of love with children and youth from Baptist, Orthodox, and nonreligious families. The war in Chechnya and the influx of Chechen refugees into Georgia made an enormous impact on the ministry of the ECB. The challenge was to care for young Muslim children, sharing the love of Christ without offending the religious feelings of Chechen families. Muslim-Christian summer camps proved very helpful for both Muslim and Christian children, since both sides started to realize that peaceful coexistence and sharing faith values with each other, without compromising their faith, was possible and enriching.

Evangelization of the Marginalized in Society

Soviet policy on physically and mentally handicapped people was clear: they had to be hidden away from the eyes of society by means of institutions placed in rural areas of the country. The large-scale economic hardship that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the civil wars that followed caused the partial closure of many of these institutions. The ECB was approached by the people in charge of these institutions, since the state was no longer able to provide for the disabled. After a few clergy visited these institutions, almost the entire ECB community became involved in looking after people in orphanages and mental asylums. Since these marginalized populations were considered society’s outcasts, no one cared whether they were evangelized. In particular, enthusiastic church youth visited these institutions, sharing the love of Christ with handicapped children. Within the framework of theological education, the question of disability was studied from a theological perspective.⁴ Residents were given biblical literature for children. The books would be read to them, since most of them were not able to read and write. Church youth also performed concerts in these institutions at Christmas, New Years, and Easter. Sometimes children and others were brought to the Baptist Peace Cathedral in Tbilisi to attend services and to participate as best they could.

The ECB also developed an active prison ministry. Every Lenten season, churches publicize a prisoners’ week, with pastors urging the faithful to do something for those who have been confined behind prison walls. As a result of these activities, a small group of inmates became committed Christians in the Kutaisi Maximum Security Prison in western Georgia. Three prisoners were baptized in a very un-Baptist manner, by pouring water over their heads.

Gender Equality and Evangelism

One of the characteristics of new ECB evangelism has been affirmation of gender equality, with women as well as men involved in the proclamation of the Gospel and other ecclesial responsibilities. The Georgian ECB

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Upon gaining independence from Russian Baptists, the Georgian Evangelical Christian-Baptist Church (ECB) expressed complete disapproval of methods of evangelism that focused on a “negative message” that condemned traditional (Orthodox) religious practices.

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has been criticized by fellow East European and former Soviet Baptists for promoting the role of women in the church.⁵

In most former Soviet countries women have gained higher status in all spheres of social life—except religion. There have been female prime ministers, presidents, governors, and university presidents in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic republics, and Georgia. However, leadership positions in most faith groups are still denied to women. The ECB Church seems to be the one exception, at least in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Women have always been most active in evangelism. They have been witnesses to their faith in their families, among their relatives, and with colleagues. They have been most instrumental in bringing up children with Christian values. The recognition of their special role in evangelism resulted in the natural promotion of women to high ecclesial positions by the ECB. The church now has a growing number of female clergy, deacons, presbyters, and one bishop.

Female ECB clergy have already started making their contribution to the work of evangelism in various parts of the country through summer schools and pilgrimages for women. These pilgrimages to various sacred and historical sites involve handling hardship, finding the beauty of relationships with fellow pilgrims, helping each other on the way by sharing water and meals at an open fire, and celebrating their relationship with God in silence, meditation, and the celebration of the Eucharist in the ruins of churches, on mountaintops, and in deserts.⁶ Pilgrimage is also considered the best way to get to know people and to understand others. One of the ECB pilgrimages in the mountains of Tusheti in eastern Georgia included four female ministerial students, one male minister, and two teenagers. At the end of the pilgrimage, the two teenagers asked for baptism and were baptized in a little alpine lake in the high mountains.

By emancipating women for full participation in the proclamation of the Gospel, the ECB emancipated the Gospel itself, because the Gospel could not possibly legitimize discrimination of any kind. As the ancient Georgian liturgical text for the ordination of female deacons (deaconesses) states, Since Christ “didst sanctify and equalize man and woman,”⁷ the ECB cannot discriminate, especially when it comes to the mandate of the Christian to proclaim the gospel. The Roman Catholic Church, which despite historical evidence of the ordination of women in medieval Europe, still refuses to ordain women or even to recognize that women are capable of ordination.⁸ However, the fact that in the Orthodox Church the question of women’s ordination remains open offers some flexibility for ECB female clergy to seek recognition of their ministry in majority-Orthodox Georgia.

Reaction varied to the 2008 consecration of Rusudan Gotziridze as a female ECB bishop. Some Orthodox and some Pentecostal women were upset by the consecration. Otherwise, the response was mostly positive. The consecration itself was attended by a

number of theological students from the Orthodox theological seminary and a few Orthodox priests. Most were supportive of the ordination and excited about it. Orthodox theologian, Vasili Kobakhidze, in his congratulatory speech at the Baptist Peace Cathedral, maintained,

Today, by consecrating the first woman bishop, the Baptist Church of Georgia has made a historic statement in the East. By consecrating Rusudan Gotziridze as a bishop, the Baptist Church declared that man and woman are equal in the eyes of God, and women should not be considered as the “source of evil and sin” any more.⁹

The 1994 Orthodox Christmas Epistle Attack on “Foreign Cults”

Following Georgian independence, the ECB enjoyed its liberty along with other churches and religious groups in Georgia. It was no longer persecuted or controlled by the state. The catholicos patriarch’s Christmas message in 1994, however, signaled otherwise. The Christmas epistle stated that “foreign cults (Roman Catholics, Baptists, Salvationists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hare Krishnas) are taking advantage of economic hardship in Georgia and are buying the souls of the Georgian people.”¹⁰ The Baptist leadership, headed by Reverend Guram Kumelashvili, immediately met with the patriarch and was assured that the Christmas epistle was a regrettable mistake. The leader of the Salvation Army in Georgia, Captain R.E. Lee, was not even allowed to meet the patriarch. As an alternative, he wrote a lengthy letter stating that the Salvation Army was invited to work in Georgia by both the patriarch and the Georgian government following the civil wars in Georgia. Captain Lee wrote,

I accepted your offer of friendship and reassurance in your office, when you encouraged us to do more than give out aid. Listening to you say that you wanted us to win souls as well, I felt honored to be a part of the Christian community which you lead... We would not have come to Georgia without your backing and that of the government... [I]f there is an official position change on your part, we need to be notified.¹¹

The patriarch’s Christmas letter deserves some attention. Why were Roman Catholics, Baptists, and Salvationists identified with cults? Why were Baptists and Roman Catholics identified with foreigners, after having endured suffering under the Communists along with the Orthodox? If the Salvation Army was really invited by the Orthodox Church to give aid and “win souls,” as is stated in Captain Lee’s letter, then why did the patriarch now object?

The patriarch’s letter reflects the reality of the influx of Western parachurch organizations and fundamentalist missionaries in Russia and in the rest of the former Soviet Union, rather than in Georgia. His letter mimics what Moscow Patriarch Alexii II had already written in 1991 when he expressed his dismay at the “massive influx” of foreign missionaries

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who came to Russia to make converts.¹² Two years later, in 1993, the Moscow Patriarchate made more specific charges against “foreign proselytizing faiths,” which now included Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants, and Evangelicals, alongside various types of religious mavericks and totalitarian cults.¹³

The Georgian Patriarchate also repeated the charges against foreign proselytizing groups in relation to Georgia. The truth of the matter was that, because of the political instability and civil wars in the early 1990s, there were hardly any foreign groups working in Georgia. The period of civil war was followed by a time of religious violence in the mid-to late 1990s when it was simply not safe for non-Orthodox to be involved in evangelism. The campaign against foreign sects in Georgia copied that in Russia, even though the religious reality was different from that which prevailed in Russia. Yet this campaign was supported by pro-Russian forces in the church as a means of confronting the growing influence of Western and European civilization in Georgia.

Religious Nationalism and the Perceived Threat of “Foreign Sects”

In Georgia there were no Western religious supermarkets available where people could freely choose their religion. In Georgia, rather, the space once occupied by Soviet ideology was replaced with religious nationalism. Unfortunately, in the 1990s, the religio-political situation did not offer the opportunity for religious liberty in Georgia, which could possibly have stimulated renewal and reforms in the Georgian Orthodox Church, as a custodian of Georgian culture.

On 5 April 1995, at the synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church chaired by the catholicos patriarch, discussion of proselytizing groups was summarized in the meeting’s minutes as follows:

Some representatives of foreign ideologies and religious sects take advantage of the difficult situation in our country and hide themselves behind the mask of democracy. They coarsely interfere in the spiritual life of our population and by this they inflict great damage on our people. Some humanitarian (organizations), while giving out humanitarian aid, proselytize, that is recruit the faithful into foreign faiths. Because of such influences there are a lot of family conflicts and splits. There are cases where couples are divorced and some murders have also taken place.¹⁴

This statement refers again to the Russian experience of the influx of the parachurch organizations, mainly from North America, who were involved in proselytizing Russian Orthodox. The only humanitarian groups that were involved in relief work in Georgia were the Salvation Army and Caritas, a Roman Catholic humanitarian organization. The ECB was involved in humanitarian aid activity with the help of the Baptist World Alliance. But none of the aid received by the ECB was used for any kind of proselytizing activity. During the war in Abkhazia, medicines were delivered by a large American

aircraft, which the ECB distributed to the state-owned hospital. The statement about large-scale conflicts leading even to murder in simply a fantasy.

Five months later, on 18-19 September 1995, the Expanded Church Council of the Georgian Orthodox Church maintained, “The danger from the invasion by various sects is real, not only for the church but for the state as well. Their activity should be controlled by law.” The call to use the law to control “foreign religious sects” was not an original idea produced by the Georgian Patriarchate. These “foreign sects” in Georgia were in reality respected churches (Roman Catholics, Baptists) that did not come to the country with the opening up of the borders after the breakup of the Soviet Union, but were churches that had endured the oppression and persecution of the Communist regime along with the Orthodox. The idea was to use state law to gain religious hegemony. However, instead of introducing negative, restrictive legislation for non-Orthodox, the government signed the Constitutional Agreement with the church in 2001, which positively granted status in law to the Orthodox Church with numerous privileges, but which also gave recognition to Catholics, Baptists, and other “traditional” faiths.¹⁵

Nevertheless, competition from non-Orthodox churches provoked the Orthodox Church into doing what it should have been doing all along, confirming one of scholar Rodney Stark’s key points regarding religious competition overcoming the laziness of monopoly churches.¹⁶ The Orthodox Expanded Church Council stated that “the missionary activity of the Church should be extended, which first and foremost should be expressed in establishing parish schools in every parish.” At the council, “it was pointed out that it is necessary for the clergy to develop closer relations with the people, especially now, when the strengthening of foreign religions has been felt.”¹⁷

The campaign against non-Orthodox Christian churches and other religious groups, starting with the 1994 Christmas Epistle and continuing throughout the decade, posed a serious challenge to ECB ministry in Georgia. The question of the legitimacy of the ministry of the ECB was at stake. It had to prove that its mandate to evangelize was valid and that its evangelistic activity could not be identified as proselytism.♦

Notes:

¹ “Disaster in Ajara,” *The Grace*, No. 3 (1990).

² Alexander Kyryl, “People of Haiti Deserved the Earthquake,” Grani.ru, 18 December 2002; www.grani.ru/Society/Religion/m.17346.html.

³ Kyryl, “People of Haiti Deserved the Earthquake.”

⁴ A. Kavtaradze, “Human Dignity and the Disabled Children,” diploma work (Tbilisi: School of Elijah, 2006).

⁵ Rubik Pailevonian, A. Shumilin, and Yuri Apatov, “Letter to the Leadership of the Union and Ministers of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches of Georgia,” *Christian Newspaper* (Moscow) 7 (No. 82, 2005).

⁶ The Gareji Desert, where there have been monastic (continued on page 14)

In Georgia there were no Western religious supermarkets available where people could freely choose their religion. In Georgia, rather, the space once occupied by Soviet ideology was replaced with religious nationalism.

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caves since the sixth century, has been particularly popular among the ECB.

⁷ For a Georgian version of the Liturgy of St. James and ordination/consecration rites, see K.S. Kekelidze, *Old Georgian Archieraticon* (Tiflis: 1912), 63; For the first translation of the text in English, see Frederick C. Conybeare and John Oliver Wardrop, "The Georgian Version of the Liturgy of St. James," *La Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 19 (1914). For some fragments with modern English orthography, see Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo, 1990), 166-73.

⁸ Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2007).

⁹ Rusudan Gotziridze, "Ordained Women: Reflections," unpublished paper in Georgian, Tbilisi, 2010, Archives of the EBC of Georgia.

¹⁰ Ilia II, "Christmas epistle," *Literaturuli Sakartvelo*, 7 January 1994.

¹¹ R.E. Lee to Patriarch Ilia II, 25 January 1994, Archives of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia.

¹² Mark Elliott and Anita Deyneka, "Protestant Missionaries in the Former Soviet Union," *Emory*

International Law Review 12 (1998), 413.

¹³ Harold J. Berman, "Freedom of Religion in Russia: An Amicus Brief for the Defendant," *Emory International Law Review* 12 (1998), 313.

¹⁴ "Decisions of the Synod," "The Republic of Georgia," 7 April 1995, 3. Also in *The Grace*, April 1995, 1.

¹⁵ The Constitutional Agreement between the Georgian Autocephalous Apostolic Orthodox Church and the State (Tbilisi, 2001).

¹⁶ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ "The Expanded Council of the Georgian Orthodox Church," 3.

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Editor's Note: The concluding portion of this article will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report.

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Book Review

Songulashvili, Malkhaz. *Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia: The History and Transformation of a Free Church Tradition*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015. Reviewed by Valeriy A. Alikin.

Editor's note: See the previous issue (24 [Summer 2016]: 4-11) for additional critiques of this work.

Malkhaz Songulashvili's work is another engaging volume in a series devoted to the study of world Christianity. The book is designed for both academics and thoughtful general readers who desire to go deeper in understanding how life and faith interact in a local setting, namely in the country of Georgia. The author aims to present the unique mission of the Evangelical Baptist Church in Georgia, which can be summarized in a number of points. First, in considering their mission to their own people to be a divine imperative, Georgian Baptists have understood Orthodox culture to be a gift that can assist them in support of their goal. Second, unlike Slavic republics of the Soviet Union, in the years 1919-60, Baptists in Georgia did not experience pressure from the dominant Church tradition. That is why they do not have bitterness and antagonism towards the Georgian Orthodox Church. Various components of Georgian spirituality, including the liturgy, iconography, pilgrimage, and open-air festivals, can help make the Gospel relevant to Georgian people. In addition, Georgian literature and music are employed to contextualize the Gospel. Third, Georgian Baptists have refused to follow the trend of Georgian religious nationalism and political

Orthodoxy. Fourth, the book provides a helpful, detailed history of the Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia from its foundation in the 1870s to the first decade of the 21st century, with extensive appendices of key documents translated from Georgian into English. In fact, Songulashvili so frequently highlights the importance of these primary sources throughout the volume that the reader may wonder whether or not the author considers these newly available documents as the most important feature of the book.

The book's introduction, with its historical sketches, are important for understanding the uniqueness of the development of Evangelical Christianity in Georgia and recent Georgian Baptist reforms. In the first sketch Songulashvili accentuates aspects of Georgian Orthodox history that play an important role in the current development of Evangelical Baptist Christianity, namely the role of women in the Christianization of Georgia, the veneration of icons, and the autocephalous character of the Georgian Orthodox Church. In the second sketch the author emphasizes the development of various clerical structures within European Baptist unions that also play a role in the development of Evangelical Christian Baptists in Georgia.

Throughout the book Songulashvili repeatedly asks the question: Are Georgian Baptists still Baptists? Surprisingly, he never gives a clear answer. Readers are left to decide for themselves how Georgian Baptists should be viewed. Songulashvili does note that Georgian Evangelical Christian Baptists

Songulashvili repeatedly asks the question: Are Georgian Baptists still Baptists? Surprisingly, he never gives a clear answer. Readers are left to decide for themselves.

are members of the European Baptist Federation and the Baptist World Alliance. Membership in these organizations, however, does not necessarily make a church Baptist.

Recent Georgian Baptist reforms have proven controversial, leading to division and the creation of an alternative Baptist union. Most at fault has been the introduction of various practices that are not specifically Baptist, namely, the ordination of women, especially the elevation of one woman to the position of bishop, and the introduction of elements of Orthodox liturgy, liturgical vestments, and the use of icons and candles in worship. One may wonder whether any Church should compromise key elements of its tradition in order to reach people for Christ. I suppose in the case of Songulashvili's Georgian Baptists, one should speak of the emergence of a new church tradition.

I agree that the mission of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the form of this proclamation is not crucial, although I accept that the form of proclamation does play an important role.

In addition, proclamation of the Gospel should not be conducted in such a way as to cause a division and the loss of the outward marks of a given church tradition. From Songulashvili's descriptions of Evangelical Baptist Church liturgical services, one may judge that they have a strong evangelistic emphasis and aim to present the Gospel to the Georgian people through the ministry of the Word and Eucharist using various elements of Orthodox Church tradition that are heavily embedded in Georgian culture.

Though the work of Malkhaz Songoulashvili may be criticized on various points, this reviewer, nevertheless, found himself richly informed and impressed by the vast array of ideas and practical insights derived from the history of the Evangelical Baptist Church in Georgia. The author should be congratulated for creating an excellent description of the unique history of the Baptist Church in Georgia from its foundation up to the present day. ♦

Valeriy A. Alikin, *President, St. Petersburg Christian University, St. Petersburg, Russia*

The Pentecostal Church of Poland *(continued from page 16)*

many significant insights for contemporary discussion. Pentecostal political science scholar Tomasz Debowski points to the importance of the social involvement of Evangelical churches in society and provides practical examples of Protestant social doctrine deeply rooted in moral values that are relevant to the struggles of contemporary Poland.¹⁰ Similarly, Pentecostal pastor and scholar Piotr Karas has examined the social activities of Evangelical churches in Poland in the light of social work theory, available legislative solutions, as well as theological reflection. He concluded that it is important to refocus the church so that it becomes an open and transformational community that integrates evangelism with social activities.¹¹ One reflection of this new emphasis is the growing number of Pentecostal charities, foundations, and educational initiatives, such as New Hope Mission and Teen Challenge Mission, among many others, all seeking to integrate evangelistic and social aims.

A clear understanding of the gospel calls for manifestations of God's love through word and deed and an integration of loving service with proclamation that is not triumphalist, but rooted in solidarity with a hurting world. All too often this Kingdom dimension of the gospel is neglected in the contemporary practice of evangelism. A limited understanding of the gospel exclusively focused on proclamation often obscures the holistic gospel that Christ preached. The message of the whole gospel is both Word and life, proclamation and discipleship, and personal renewal and community concern. ♦

Notes:

¹ 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), 41-42.

² Z. Pasek and Z. Wloch, *Historia ruchu zielonoświątkowego I odnowy charyzmatycznej* (Krawów-Szczecin: Instytut Wydawniczy Compassion,

2006), 500.

³ For more on this movement see the official website: www.polskadlajezusa.org.

⁴ W. Gajewski, "Dynamika ewangelikalizmu polskiego. Krytyczne spojrzenie z uwzględnieniem perspektywy pentekostajnej" in T. J. Zieliński, ed., *Ewangelikalny protestantyzm w Polsce u progu XXI stulecia* (Warszawa-Katowice: WBST-Credo, 2004), 91.

⁵ A. Migda, *Mystycyzm pentekostalny w Polsce* (Kraków: Nomos, 2013), 411-14.

⁶ See for instance A. Smieja, "Modele przywództwa we wspólnotach typu charyzmatycznego," *Theologica Wratislaviensia* 9 (2014), 61-70.

⁷ For more information on the WTS see its website: www.wst.kl.pl.

⁸ W. Kowalewski, "Missiological Challenges in Polish Evangelical Theological Education" in P.F. Penner, ed., *Theological Education as Mission* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeil Verlag, 2005), 331-41.

⁹ W. Kowalewski, "Evangelicals and Socio-Political Involvement in Post-Communist Poland" in P. Prochazka, ed., *Dynamizing Evangelical Witness in the Post-Communist Era* (Praha: ECM, 2008), 63-77.

¹⁰ T. Debowski, "Społeczne zaangażowanie chrześcijan ewangelikalnych w Polsce" in S. Smolarz, S. Torbus, and W. Kowalewski, eds., *Ewangelikalizm polski wobec wyzwań współczesności* (Wrocław: EWST, 2013), 247-55.

¹¹ Piotr Karas, *Działalność sojainą kościołów ewangelikalnych w Polsce* (Warszawa: WSTS, 2013), 277-328.

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A clear understanding of the gospel calls for manifestations of God's love through word and deed and an integration of loving service with proclamation.

The Pentecostal Church of Poland

Wojciech Kowalewski

The first half of this article was published in the East-West Church and Ministry Report 24 (Summer 2016): 14-15.

One of the problems facing Pentecostals in Poland is an uncritical acceptance of experience above rational thinking and biblical reflection.

Pentecostal Doctrines

Polish Pentecostals, like other Evangelicals, affirm the importance of the Word of God, the need for personal justification, regeneration, and new birth on the basis of faith in the power of Jesus' sacrifice, which is to be followed by the process of sanctification in a believer's life. What distinguishes Pentecostals from other denominations is their emphasis upon the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts. Polish Pentecostals make a clear distinction between conversion and the baptism in the Holy Spirit leading to the experience of spiritual gifts. The gift of speaking in tongues is often perceived as a sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit.¹

The Charismatic Wave

From a theological perspective, one of the challenges facing Polish Pentecostalism is its uncritical reception of Charismatic waves coming from different parts of the world. For example, in the 1990s some Pentecostals and Charismatics became involved with the spiritual warfare movement. Great emphasis was placed upon intercessory prayer, spiritual mapping (the identification of and combat against demonic forces), and the development of a particular strategy for spiritual warfare which resulted in 1999 in the formation of the "Movement of Intercessors for Poland."² The methodology and approach of this Movement led to controversies within the Pentecostal Church of Poland and eventually resulted in sympathizers forming a new organization, now known as "Poland for Jesus."³

Theological Education

One of the problems facing Pentecostals in Poland is the lack of a theological approach to Charismatic

phenomena, which often results in an uncritical acceptance of experience above rational thinking and biblical reflection. Historically, Polish Pentecostals have been suspicious of academia and theological discourse in general, sometimes interpreting these as "human wisdom" as opposed to "God's wisdom."⁴ On the other hand, the past decade has witnessed a growing interest in the study of Pentecostalism, and as a result, the appearance of a growing number of academic studies and publications. One example is Andrzej Migda's *Mistyryzm pentekostalny w Polsce* [*Pentecostal Mysticism in Poland*], which defines Charismatic experience in the context of the phenomenology of religion, the psychology of religion, and biblical theology.⁵

With ongoing waves of neo-apostolic networks and prophetic movements it becomes important to refine the biblical and theological basis for spiritual leadership in the church.⁶ In this regard, the Pentecostal Warsaw Theological School (WTS) plays a significant role in shaping the future leadership of the Pentecostal movement in the region. Its program includes a B.A. in theology as well as instruction in missions, leadership, political and social studies, counseling, coaching, mentoring, and communication.⁷ The Warsaw Theological School also organizes academic conferences, with scholars representing various fields and church traditions engaging in theological discourse from Evangelical and Pentecostal perspectives. As an example, in April 2014 WTS co-sponsored a conference in partnership with Poland's Baptist Theological Seminary addressing "Difficult Issues in Polish Evangelicalism" including marriage and divorce, in vitro fertilization, psycho-manipulation, gender issues, homosexuality, church unity, and evangelical perspectives on Roman Catholicism.⁸

Missional Engagement with Contemporary Society

The critical issue facing the church in the post-Communist era is its response to the manifold social and economic challenges in post-Communist society. The church needs to resist the temptation of a withdrawal syndrome, that is, the development of a "minority mentality."

The post-Communist era has witnessed growing inequality in terms of wealth and opportunity, coupled with a sense of meaninglessness and alienation among the so-called "losers" of the transformation. Given this situation, Polish Pentecostals increasingly have focused on what they see as their social responsibility. Questions about Christian social and political involvement come to the forefront in many discussions today, which seem to point to a new openness toward the development of a distinctive social theology.⁹

While Protestant social thought at first glance does not seem to be as systematic or as fully developed as that of Roman Catholicism, it nevertheless provides

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