



# EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

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## Western Assistance in Theological Training for Romanian Evangelicals to 1989

Daniel Manastireanu

### Speaking Personally

I remember it well. It happened on 21 August 1977, about five years after my disenchantment with idealistic Marxism and my becoming a Christian. I was baptized in a Baptist church and soon became enthusiastically involved in various church activities. In addition, I became involved in a series of dissident activities inspired by Rev. Josef Tson, the most prominent evangelical pastor in Romania. He had returned to Romania in 1972, following theological studies at Regent's Park College, Oxford University, England.

Tson started challenging Communist authorities in order to obtain more religious freedom for evangelical churches. His main thesis was that Communism failed to create the "new man." Christian faith, however, was able to create this new kind of person. This is why, argued Tson, Christians could play a legitimate role in Communism. I was fascinated by Rev. Tson and followed him everywhere, like many evangelical young people of my generation. The Communist police were obsessed with our activities and followed our every move. (I discovered how literally true this was after 1989 when I obtained access to my secret police files.)

In spite of my respect for Tson, I nevertheless felt closer to the more radical spirit of Rev. Pavel Nicolescu, who was in the process of establishing the Romanian Committee for the Defense of Religious and Conscience Rights. His was probably the only dissident initiative in Romania that did not try to accommodate the system, but dared to contest the philosophical grounds of Communism.

It is in this context that I had a providential meeting which changed the course of my life. On that August day in 1977, a friend invited me to his home to meet with two missionaries working with the Navigators, an evangelical mission about which I knew nothing at the time. I found out later that they had begun working in Romania in 1975. Surprisingly, they had spent about two years meeting regularly with only one person, Benjamin Faragau, now a well-known Bible teacher and pastor of a Baptist church in Cluj. When they decided to extend their ministry in Romania, they contacted a number of young evangelical leaders, including me. Two men, whose names I shamefully have forgotten, showed me "the

process illustration," a diagram summarizing Jesus' discipleship strategy. I had never seen such a clear presentation of Christian purpose. As a result, I was instantly convinced and became involved in the Navigator ministry for the next 15 years.

After about a year of training, the Navigators challenged me to choose between discipleship and politics: their discipleship ministry (which was completely underground) or my political activities (which were more public and involved the perpetual danger of scrutiny by the secret police). After lengthy deliberations, I chose discipleship over politics. I am convinced now that this radical decision allowed me to enjoy the privilege of staying in Romania, while most of my dissident friends were forced to leave the country.

### Navigators, Campus Crusade, and InterVarsity

The Navigators taught me how to study the Bible and gave me a passion for discipleship. For this and many other reasons, I am still grateful to them. What I, my friends, and the people in our discipleship ministries learned from the Navigators, others in Romania gained through several ministries including InterVarsity and Campus Crusade (invited to Romania by Josef Tson and Nick Gheorghita, a medical doctor who later became pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Oradea).

The leadership development efforts of these missions did not happen without pain. Given the unavoidable underground character of this sort of activities, pastors knew very little about the specifics and often complained that these parachurch organizations were stealing their most gifted young people. At the same time, some of the older church leaders felt threatened by their younger counterparts, who were more daring in their relationships with the Communist regime. Those in authority in churches feared that such dissident activities would compromise the delicate balance they had established with the authorities, by more or less legitimate means. One older leader joked that "during Communism there were two kinds of Christian leaders. Some were like donkeys, carrying the heavy loads of the congregations, while the dissidents, like Tson and Nicolescu, were like

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**Western Assistance:** (continued from page 1) dogs, barking and stirring up the authorities.” Official evangelical leaders took pride in their (doubtful) wisdom which they believed helped them “save the church.” Obviously, these leaders who made accommodations with the state objected to the overt challenges to the Communist regime initiated by Josef Tson and younger evangelical leaders.

Some mission organizations, including the Navigators, attracted the criticism of many pastors, including Josef Tson, because they operated upon the basis of a low ecclesiology, with little regard for the lines of church authority. Others, like Campus Crusade, claimed that they were training leaders for local churches, but often preferred to establish their converts in discipleship groups meeting separately from existing evangelical churches. Similarly, InterVarsity groups were accused of promoting an elitist attitude, as they concentrated on working with students and allegedly separated them from the rest of the young people in churches.

Whether such evaluations are fair or not, one has to admit that these Western missions disciplined, directly or indirectly, thousands of young Christians in Romania from all evangelical denominations, particularly Baptists, but also Pentecostals, and, to a lesser extent, Brethren. Moreover, these missions trained the majority of those who are now in leadership positions in evangelical churches and other types of Christian ministries in Romania, from Paul Negrut and Vasile Talos, the present and former presidents of the Baptist Union, to George Verzea, European Director of Evangelism Explosion, and Radu Gheorghita, a biblical scholar presently teaching at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri.

A major difficulty facing many of these missionaries was their lack of contextual training. Reflecting on this over the years, one of my missionary friends avows: “Our team had little understanding for cultural differences or the impact and need for contextualization. We came over with the mentality that what worked in the U.S. would also work in Eastern Europe.” Another missionary confesses openly: “Our understanding of the local church was basically non-existent.”

If this is true, then what is the explanation for the obvious success of such missionary efforts? My friend quoted above suggests three explanations: Romanian receptivity; the high level of dedication of those receiving instruction; and, Romanian Evangelicals’ openness to the West. Another missionary discipler added: “Things went well because we did not live there.” What he meant was that since Western

missionaries were not able to supervise the implementation of their teaching, Romanians were able to be creative in the process of contextualizing what they had learned.

### **Evangelical Theological Schools**

No survey of leadership training in Romania under the Communist regime would be complete without mentioning the official theological training provided by evangelical denominations in Romania. The oldest of these programs is the Baptist Seminary in Bucharest, an undergraduate theological school established in 1921. Under the Communists its activity was heavily restricted. Thus, the school was not allowed to teach above the college level and for some time was allowed to register only four students per year! In spite of this, most of some 150 pastors who served the 1,300 Baptist churches that existed in Romania at the end of the Communist regime were trained in this school. This meant that some of them had to give pastoral oversight to more than ten churches. To the extent that Communist authorities allowed it, the seminary cooperated with other Baptist schools in the West, particularly with the International Baptist Seminary in Rushlikon, Switzerland. Such international connections also helped in providing some literature for the extremely poor library of the seminary.

In this context we need to add that some Baptist leaders received official approval to study theology in the West. Such approvals were never given without the recipients paying a certain price. What that price was precisely will be clarified only when we have access to secret police files of our denominational leaders.

The Pentecostal denomination in Romania, which traditionally cooperated with both the Church of God, Cleveland, and the Assemblies of God, established its first college-level seminary in Bucharest in 1976. The first group of 15 students graduated in 1980. Communist authorities allowed for only a very small number of students in this school: on average, three students per year.

The Communist Department for Religious Affairs, a specialized branch of the secret police, thoroughly scrutinized pastoral candidates in both Baptist and Pentecostal churches. Applicants suspected of being too radical did not receive the necessary approval to register as students or to serve as pastors.

Brethren churches in Romania do not have ordained pastors and, consequently, did not feel the need to establish theological schools during the Communist period. However, they tried to meet the need of training for their lay leaders through regular teaching conferences led by mature leaders in various regional centers. The facilitators were usually older leaders who had had some form of theological training in other Christian traditions before joining the Brethren. The authorities heavily restricted this nonformal training, which completely disappeared during the last decades of Communist rule.

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## Western Assistance

The leadership training promoted by different Christian missions focused mainly on building Bible study, ministry, and character skills, rather than on formal theological education. In contrast, a new type of leadership development for Romanian Evangelicals appeared in 1979 when Western missions cooperated in the formation of Biblical Education by Extension (BEE). Key figures included Nelson (Bud) Hinkson, European leader of Campus Crusade, and Josef Tson. Starting from the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) model created in the 1960s in Guatemala, Campus Crusade and the Navigators, along with a number of other organizations, came together to create a new nonformal system of theological training. This was done in response to the growing needs of local evangelical churches in Romania and other countries in Eastern Europe. It was intended to compensate for the relative ineffectiveness or inadequacy of the established evangelical seminaries. This initiative had great success, and many evangelical leaders in Romania are grateful for the benefits of the training they received through it.

From the beginning BEE, now known as Entrust, promoted a dispensationalist theological perspective as taught by Dallas Theological Seminary, which somewhat restricted the exposure of Romanian leaders to the diversity of theological positions articulated within the world evangelical community. This dispensationalism collided with some official Baptist theological stances, such as the amillennialism that is traditionally promoted by Romanian Baptists. It also reinforced the lack of social awareness that traditionally dominated Romanian Evangelicals. At the same time, it should be noted that while BEE's leader, Jody Dillow, was dispensationalist, as were the textbooks, a large number of the staff did not hold to this theological position.

The greatest difficulty facing any effort towards building a theological education in Romania was the lack of adequate literature. Communist authorities were keenly aware of the power of the written word. They therefore strictly controlled the production of religious literature. BEE attempted to respond to this challenge by adapting and translating Western texts or producing a number of original training courses, which were then illegally smuggled into Romania by Open Doors, International Teams, and other organizations which specialized in this kind of ministry. In 1981, Josef Tson left Romania again and became involved with the Romanian Missionary Society (RMS), based first in Chicago, later in Wheaton, Illinois. Following the suggestion of Nick Gheorghita, Tson engaged RMS in the preparation of theological literature in Romanian. As a result, in about eight years, RMS produced and smuggled into Romania thousands of copies of over 60 theology textbooks.

To these sustained training efforts we should add a number of *ad hoc* initiatives. Wheaton College, for example, under the dedicated coordination of Coach

Don Church, arranged for a series of theologians to come to Romania to lecture on a variety of theological topics. Other groups and institutions in the U.S., Britain, and other countries, contributed to similar initiatives. Among them, Slavic Gospel UK and its president, Trevor Harris, deserve special mention because of their commitment to leadership training and support in Romania.

Also, the Second Baptist Church in Oradea established a so-called "school of prophets" in the early 1980s. This unofficial theological training program for laymen sought to meet the great need for better teaching in the Baptist churches in Transylvania. It is in this context that respected evangelical personalities including Walter Kaiser, Carl F.H. Henry, and John Stott came to teach Romanian students.

Instruction usually took place in private homes, in secure rooms of certain church buildings, or in secret camps in the mountains, away from the eyes of the police. Participants were in most cases young lay leaders in evangelical churches. Men predominated, given the patriarchal tendencies among Romanian Evangelicals, but in rare cases some women also participated. During these training sessions we had the benefit of the teaching of such personalities as Mark Noll, Robert Yarbrough, Clinton Arnold, Gordon Fee, David Benner, James Hoffmeier, Vick Gordon, Herbert Jacobsen, Steven Franklin, and many others.

### Training a New Generation of Evangelical Theologians

Towards the end of the Communist period, Josef Tson and British missionary Les Tidball initiated another innovative project. BEE could not offer its students the degrees they needed to give them credibility in the Romanian education system. Thus, Spurgeon College in London was contacted with the suggestion that lecturers from this theological institution launch a distance learning theological training program in Romania, with financial support from the UK branch of the Romanian Missionary Society. While this initial plan encountered difficulties, Tidball was able to make headway through London Bible College, under the competent academic coordination of Dr. Graham McFarlane. An informal network of pastors and lay leaders already involved with other mission organizations recruited students who were able to study in English. The 42 initial students were divided into seven smaller groups, meeting in different cities across the country.

The system was quite simple and very effective. Couriers smuggled into Romania a number of English-language theological textbooks where they were distributed to students prior to their meeting with the lecturer. They then met with their Western instructor for a few days, listening to lectures and discussing the topic of the course. In the next six weeks, students studied the texts and wrote essays on topics suggested by the lecturer. The essays had to be sent to the U.K. through the next lecturer. After the teacher corrected and graded the papers, they were returned to the

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students. Obviously, because of the Communist regime, all aspects of the program had to be conducted in a completely clandestine manner in order to avoid the inquisitive eye of the secret police.

Finally, many of these secret nonformal training efforts came to an end, not because of Communist opposition, but because of the collapse of Communism in 1989. A new generation of evangelical leaders, formed in difficult conditions under Communism, was confronted after 1989 with new, unanticipated challenges that will be the subject of my next article. ♦

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*Editor's Note: The author's evaluation of evangelical theological training in Romania since 1989 will be published in the next issue of the East-West Church & Ministry Report.*

## Christian Aid in the Wake of Beslan Terrorism

Sergey Rakhuba

### "Black Fame"

On 3 September 2004 a tragedy that shocked the entire world struck the quiet North Ossetian town of Beslan in Russia. A well-planned, cruel attack by Chechen insurgents led to the death of 331 people, including 186 children from Beslan School Number One. TV screens carried chilling images around the globe for several days after the horrific attack. People immediately rushed to Beslan to help in any way they could. This north Caucasus village suffered the death of so many innocents that it is now known for its "black fame."

Gravestones all carved from the same red granite now mark the entrance to town. A huge steel monument listing the names of everyone who died during the siege stands at the front of the cemetery. The cemetery never lacks fresh flowers. They are constantly replenished, summer and winter, especially on weekends. In the Christmas season of 2005, families decorated graves with Christmas trees as a reminder of their children's love for this happy holiday. Mothers in black dresses sit by some of the gravestones and stare emptily at photos of their children. Grandmothers come to the cemetery and grieve for entire families. People here say that Beslan will never recover from its grief.

On the second day after the tragedy, the well-known mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, promised to rebuild the school, and he kept his promise. The new school, which is much larger than the old one that was destroyed, was completed in a matter of several months. Its wonderful classrooms, however, are cheerless because the nearby ruins of the old school building, with its bullet holes and spots of dried blood on classroom walls, still remind everyone of the horror of the terrorist attack. Students and many parents still go back to the old school

to lay flowers and light candles that are constantly replaced and never go out.

### Shock Waves

Hundreds, if not thousands, of families were affected by the tragedy. During the first days after the siege, eyewitnesses say that the streets to the new cemetery were clogged by funeral processions. Several caskets often came from the same home: a father and all his children who had gone together to the first day of school; a mother and all her children; four of five children of Baptist minister, Taimuraz Totiev and his wife Raisa.

While visiting Beslan two months after the siege, I will never forget a drunken man wandering around the remnants of School Number One. He was looking for anyone who would listen to his story - a chilling tale of discovering the lifeless bodies of his loved ones among the debris and burying each one. Local people say that he spends most of his time around the ruins of the school. The shock waves of the Beslan attack still reverberate from the small autonomous republic of North Ossetia across the Caucasus and across all of Russia. The longstanding but nearly forgotten conflict between the Ossetians and the Ingush was instantly reignited. All the schools in Beslan and throughout North Ossetia now have armed policemen manning the entrances. The religious and political environment remains very tense.

### Christian Counseling

Because of the severe trauma suffered by residents of this community, the Association for Spiritual Renewal (ASR) quickly decided to open the Heart to Heart Center to provide psychological and moral support to Beslan survivors. (ASR, headquartered in Moscow, is the Russian affiliate of Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries, Wheaton, Illinois.) Already, by the second half of September, 2004, the Center was

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## **Beslan**

actively working in a rented facility with those traumatized by the terrorist attack. A team of eight Christian psychologists conducted round-the-clock services for children and adults. Additionally, nine Christian workers visited the injured in their homes and in hospitals, providing moral, spiritual, and financial assistance. A committee formed by local church leaders distributed funds for funeral and medical expenses.

## **Humanitarian Aid**

A large portion of the work involved the distribution of financial assistance to the families of the dead and to former hostages. Before the end of September 2004, ASR distributed funds collected in the West to Beslan victims at a time when many did not have money to bury their relatives and did not know what to do or to whom to turn. This very timely assistance was distributed by a local committee of Christian leaders headed by Baptist youth pastor German Gzhiev. In the fall of 2004, 2,300 school children, 700 former hostages, and 2,000 family members of the injured received humanitarian aid in the form of Christmas gifts and food. Within 12 months, more than 6,000 children and adults received psychological counseling and humanitarian aid in the form of gifts and backpacks with school supplies and children's Bibles. In addition, Heart to Heart Center workers opened a 24-hour telephone hotline on local radio. Four counselors provided continuous help to people who had suffered from violence, depression, thoughts of suicide, and other difficult life situations. The work of the Center contributed significantly to the healing process in Beslan and will be an ongoing source for spiritual and psychological support for the Ossetian people.

On 1 September 2005 a team of eight counselors began working at a new Beslan facility called the Heart to Heart Community Youth Center which grew out of the Heart to Heart Christian Center. Built by ASR, this new facility houses a Christian library, computer classrooms, and areas for recreational activities for Beslan's children and youth. Sunday worship services recently began in this youth center and many people are attending. Organizations that contributed to the building of this center include Samaritan's Purse, Global Aid Network (GAIN USA), Danish European Mission, and Norwegian Mission to the East. In addition, ASR provided funds to complete the construction of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist Church in Gizel, a town located near Beslan

that is pastored by Taimuraz Totiev. ASR also worked with Kids Around the World (Rockford, Illinois) and Samaritan's Purse to build a playground for the children of Beslan. A group of some 40 volunteers from the West traveled to Beslan in May 2006 and installed playground equipment on land provided by the Beslan administration. Over a thousand people attended the playground dedication.

True Christian generosity is well-known in Beslan. Many groups have given liberally to support this community. ASR partnered with a number of organizations in its terror relief efforts. GAIN USA and Cross International shipped containers of goods that were distributed to Beslan families. Organizations including Childrens Hunger Fund, Norwegian Mission to the East, Danish European Mission, and many others from all over the world made substantial donations in support of the victims of the Beslan terrorist attack. The following description of the work of various organizations is not exhaustive, but it does demonstrate the range of assistance given to the Beslan community.

## **A Roll Call of Christian Assistance**

**Association of Humanity**, Igor Nikitin, St. Petersburg, and its representative in Beslan, Brother Kozirev, purchased a house in Beslan that is functioning as a counseling center for children and youth.

**Calvary Chapel Church**, Sochi, visited the injured and families of the terror attack victims in homes and hospitals and provided material and spiritual support on behalf of many American Christian families.

**Caritas International**, the relief, development, and social service organization of the Roman Catholic Church, organized immediate assistance to Beslan victims. It arranged for round-the-clock access to two psychologists and provided medicine and other supplies to local hospitals that were caring for children from School Number One. Additionally, as people are trying to recover from the effects of the tragedy, Caritas International has provided long-term medical and psychological support to victims and their families and support for families whose breadwinners were killed during the siege.

**Child Evangelism Fellowship**, Moscow, conducted training seminars and provided training materials for local churches in Vladikavkaz and Beslan on how to work with traumatized children.

**Christian Bridge**, U.S., President Michael Morgulis traveled throughout the area with his

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*A group of some 40 volunteers from the West traveled to Beslan in May 2006 and installed playground equipment. Over a thousand people attended the playground dedication.*

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assistants and offered prayers for hurting people at the Beslan Cemetery and in their homes. Christian Bridge also provided some financial support to families.

**Christian and Missionary Alliance,**

Krasnodar, raised funds among its churches all over Russia and provided financial assistance to the injured and their families. They also support the work of the Heart to Heart Counseling Center by mobilizing and sending counselors and volunteers from other regions to come to Beslan to help the community.

**Church of the Seventh-day Adventists**

provided much material assistance to the injured, as well as counseling assistance to the families of victims. Adventists also provided Christmas gifts to all families.

**Denver Seminary,** Denver, Colorado, sent a group of American psychologists to provide psychological help to the injured after the terrorist attack. This group worked in a Beslan Baptist church and conducted a counseling seminar, training local Christians how to help others in the community with post-traumatic recovery.

**Faith Mission of Christian Mercy** provided counseling and material assistance to the injured and traumatized. The main work of Faith Mission has been the provision of spiritual assistance and financial help to the injured and their families. This ministry is supported mainly by Russian immigrants in the U.S. who have provided material assistance to families who lost loved ones during the terrorist attack.

**Living Water Christian Evangelical Center,** city of Armavir, provided counseling and material assistance to the injured and their families.

**The Lutheran Hour** (Russia) program (LHM), a ministry of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the **Lutheran Church-Canada,** and **Lutheran Women in Mission,** responded to the events in Beslan in three ways. First, as children were being sent to area hospitals for treatment, LHM provided children's videos to the hospitals at the request of hospital administration officials. Second, the LHM free crisis line was made available for those in need of counseling. The crisis line was staffed by professional psychologists. Third, LHM organized the "Children of Beslan" program. Children from a Russian orphanage drew pictures that were printed on note cards and other items. The money generated from sales of these items in the United States and around the world was used to support children in Beslan.

**Northern Ossetian Mission of Christian Mercy (NOMCM),** Vladikavkaz,

visited the injured and provided moral and humanitarian assistance to victims of the attack. In cooperation with ASR, the Northern Ossetian Mission organized a Personal Gift Project that included children's Bibles, toys, school supplies, and music CDs. These donations also included counseling materials produced and made available by Focus on the Family. Since the tragedy, NOMCM has worked with ASR to produce radio counseling programs and a 24-hour Christian hotline.

**Peace Regional Mission of Christian Mercy** raised and distributed funds to school siege victims.

**Russia Inland,** Moscow, working together with Christians from England, brought several soccer teams, organizing soccer games for children in the area to help them recover from the trauma.

**Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists,** President Rev. Yuri Sipko was one of the very first Christian leaders in Russia to visit Beslan, just two days after the tragedy. He provided personal comfort to local church leaders and to the Christian community.

**Slavic Gospel Association (SGA),** the designated Western fundraising organization of Russia's Evangelical Christians-Baptists, provided substantial financial assistance to Baptist church members in Beslan. SGA continues to help the local Baptist church by funding an addition to its building and constructing a new road to the church. SGA also provides substantial financial support for the Totiev brothers—local pastors who suffered enormously by losing their own children in the attack.

**The Orthodox Church in America** established the "Beslan Relief Fund" on the morning of 7 September 2004. Church members had already begun donating money to help the victims in Beslan on Sunday, 5 September 2004. According to figures from the Church's 2005 Charity Appeal, in the year following the events in Beslan, the Orthodox Church in America raised Over \$100,000 for Beslan relief.

**The Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate:**

According to a press release from the Russian Orthodox Church: "On March 10, 2005 . . . an agreement was signed between the Stavropol and Vladikavkaz Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Diocese of Berlin and Germany of the Russian

While people and organizations from all over the world wanted to help in Beslan after the attack in September 2004, there was no solid system in place to coordinate assistance.

## Beslan

Orthodox Church Outside of Russia on the joint construction of Epiphany Convent in Beslan. A therapeutic and trauma center will be built at the convent as well.” The hospital will be the first rehabilitation center in Northern Ossetia specializing in treating those who suffered from the Beslan tragedy.

**Word of Life** (Ulf Eckman Fund) and **Beslan Church of God**, local charismatic churches, supported by international funds, provided assistance to the injured and to the families who lost loved ones.

## Lessons Learned

What lessons have Russia, the Christian community, and the world learned from Beslan? The main goal of the attack was to create fear in Russia and to fan the flame of ethnic tensions into open warfare throughout the North Caucasus. This did not occur, but it is widely assumed that the terrorists will attack again, as they did on 13 October 2005 in the neighboring autonomous republic of Kabardino-Balkaria. After more than a year and a half, the state commission for the investigation of the causes and circumstances of the terrorist attack in Beslan released the results of its investigation. As expected, it concluded that people had failed. Everyone was guilty, but no one was held responsible. The court in Vladikavkaz, which Mothers of Beslan regularly picketed, reached a guilty verdict on the sole terrorist who was captured: 30-year-old Chechen Nurpasha Kulaev was sentenced to life in prison in May 2006, while the crowd outside the court room was demanding death.

All families who suffered from the attack received some compensation from the state. According to Mr. Mayerbekov, secretary of the Beslan Commission for Funds Distribution, families who lost a loved one received \$50,000 per person killed and \$35,000 per person injured. This is not including funds received from organizations that provided funds directly to the families. These funds and those received from nongovernmental organizations have been spent on medical bills, family rehabilitation, and home improvements. Many child survivors and their families have received overwhelming attention from the governments of other countries. Many have even had to choose in which country to receive medical treatment. Immediately after the attack, the Christian community in Beslan was united by an incomprehensible grief and the desire to reach out across denominational lines in order to minister to the victims and their families. Time

has passed, and everything has reverted to the way it was before. Beslan, now known all over the world, is thought by many people to still be in need of material help. They are trying to send groceries or toys to kids in Beslan who are now asking for more modern computers, video games, and humanitarian aid shipments that are still stuck in huge customs warehouses.

## A Lack of Coordination

While people and organizations from all over the world wanted to help in Beslan after the attack in September 2004, there was no solid system in place to coordinate assistance. Unfortunately, this contributed to an unhealthy spirit of competition among Christian organizations and gave rise to scams among local residents. While visiting some victims' families in Beslan with a team of local believers, I saw groups of women dressed in black dresses and scarves who did not resemble Beslan residents. They approached anyone who looked like a foreigner and demanded that they receive financial help for their “relatives” who supposedly had suffered from the attack. Cults also appeared in Beslan soon after the attack. Sadly, well-known false healer Grirorii Grabovoi came to Beslan and exploited grieving families by promising to resurrect dead loved ones for a fee. He now is in jail awaiting trial.

## Summer Camps

In summer 2005, Samaritan's Purse, headed by Franklin Graham, provided funding for ASR national teams from Beslan to conduct summer camps for children in the war-torn North Caucasus, including children from Grozny, capital of Chechnya, and 200 Chechen refugee children living in Dagestan. The summer camp in Grozny was the first to be held in the region since the outbreak of the Chechen War in 1994. Ossetian and Russian believers from Beslan risked their lives to go to Grozny in order to reach out to Chechen children. After this peacemaking mission, one of the returning young leaders gave the following account: We enjoyed this [camp] very much since we saw huge results. When we asked a group of 50 children what their favorite toy was, many of the boys shouted, “Weapons! Kalashnikov guns!” We understood that many of these children had been living in the midst of war for so long that guns and fighting were all they knew. On the final day of camp, after spending time with these children and teaching them the Bible, we saw dramatic changes. They performed their ethnic dance (the “Lesginka”), they hugged us, and they begged us to come back. We learned our most

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In order to stop the violence and killing in the Northern Caucasus, the church made every effort to reach out to the children there with true Christian love.

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important lesson then: In order to stop the violence and killing in the Northern Caucasus, the church should make every effort to reach out to the children there with true Christian love. This alone can stop ethnic conflicts and prevent future attacks like the one in Beslan. ♦

**Sergey Rakhuba** is vice-president of Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries, Wheaton, Illinois. This ministry's Moscow-based affiliate is the Association for Spiritual Renewal.

## Christian Agencies Aiding Beslan Survivors

**Association of Humanity**, Igor Nikitin, St. Petersburg, and its representative in Beslan, Brother Kozirev; tel: 8-902-423-74-20; Association of Christian Churches of Russia "Union of Christians," Box 126, Leola, PA 17540; tel: 812-710-1500; fax: 812-710-1079; accr@accr.ru; www.accr.ru.

**Calvary Chapel Church**, Sochi, Pastor Michael Andronov; tel: 903-448-20-37; The Association of Christian Evangelical Churches Calvary Chapel, Moscow 125480 Russia, Vilisa Latsisa 11, korp 3/2; tel: 495-496-8056; cccpm@cccpm.org; www.cccpm.org.

**Caritas of Russia**, H.E. Msgr. Joseph Werth, President; Fr. Alexandre Pietrzyk, Director, Ulitsa Krasnoarmejskaya 11, 198005 St. Petersburg, Russia; tel/fax: 7-812-31-78-127; caritas@mail.admiral.ru; http://www.caritas.org.

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**Living Water Christian Evangelical Center**, Bruce Sellers, President, Armavir 352919 Russia, Ulitsa Goryachinka 44; tel: 86137-749-06.

**Lutheran Churches**, [http://www.luther.ru/english/ihm english news/upload/030904-2.htm](http://www.luther.ru/english/ihm%20english%20news/upload/030904-2.htm); <http://swd.lcms.org/PDF/SWDN/0411/swn04-11p.12.pdf>; <http://www.elkras.org>.

**Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church**, Department of External Church Relations, 115191 Moscow, Russia; tel: 7-495-955-67-77; fax: 7-495-230-26-19; cs@mospatr.ru; <http://www.mospatr.ru>.

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# Exposure to Trauma and Stress Among Missionaries in Moscow

Christine Currie

## The Survey

A survey conducted in 2004 by the author explored the level of trauma and stress experienced by missionaries in Russia, particularly in Moscow. Respondents included 26 missionaries representing 15 mission organizations and one independent missionary. Counting children, the survey represented 104 people. As of 2004, respondents had been serving as missionaries for an average of 7.5 years and had served in Russia for an average of six years. The intent of the survey was to measure the occurrence and describe the nature of traumatic events and subsequent stress on families. The resulting analysis leads to several recommendations listed at the conclusion of this article.

## Motivation for the Survey

After 11 years of missionary service in Moscow, the author became increasingly aware of stress as a cause of the departure of missionary families serving in Russia. An informal survey of high school males at a school for missionary children revealed that 85 percent had been assaulted in some way during their family's tenure in Moscow. Several families endured painful infidelities and subsequent divorces. One of the author's missionary friends was murdered.

## Traumatic Events

Respondents noted a total of 41 specific traumas, in addition to seven general city-wide traumas that had taken place over the previous six years - including apartment bombings, bombings on the Metro (subway), Red Square, and McDonalds, the hostage crisis in the Nord-Ost Theatre, the U.S. bombing of Kosovo (which heightened anti-American sentiment), and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack in the U.S. The particular McDonald's that was bombed was one often frequented by missionary families following their children's soccer games, and the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon led to heightened security concerns over Americans living abroad.

The school where most missionary children attend was termed a "soft target" for a terrorist attack, and missionaries became increasingly aware of their vulnerability. Some specific personal traumas included being hit by a car requiring evacuation from Russia for medical treatment, being harassed and/or threatened, car accidents, medical emergencies, having a friend murdered, seeing dead bodies on the street, attacks on missionary children, and witnessing a suicide on the Metro. Missionaries who were in Moscow in 1993 also experienced the attempted Communist coup. While most respondents suffered losses to pickpockets and money changers, other reported crimes included identity theft, attempted rape, being robbed at knifepoint, office robberies,

apartment robberies, and car vandalism. In total, missionaries in Moscow experienced an average of 9.64 traumatic events per family over an average of six years.

## Underreporting by Respondents

How accurate are the survey results? Were the traumas and stresses exaggerated or minimized? It is clear that negative data were underreported because the author knows first-hand of multiple instances of missionary families not including traumatic and stressful events. For instance, one respondent did not report a medical emergency that necessitated a family member being evacuated from Russia. Another female respondent did not report being physically attacked by anti-American Russian teenagers at the time of U.S. bombing in Serbia and Kosovo. When asked why she did not make note of the incident, she replied that it did not seem very significant compared to other incidents. Another respondent had a family member suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome but downplayed its effects. It also is important to note that while 85 percent of high school males in the missionary school reported being assaulted, few of the parents of these youth reported these incidents in the survey. Respondents from 26 families identified 85 crimes for an average of 3.4 crimes per family. Again, this figure represents underreporting, as in almost all cases it does not include personal assaults, especially against teenage males. Nor does it include instances of extortion or pressure to pay bribes. Resolving traffic violations (real and alleged) and paying fines required by neighborhood constables are so common, many respondents did not think to identify them in the survey.

## Changes of Residence

Many families have moved frequently and for different reasons. Generally, there are no legally enforceable landlord-tenant contracts. Agreements are often written, but they are personal, depending upon the good will and intentions of the parties involved for fulfillment. Most commonly, missionary families rent from Russians who typically own two apartments, renting one to the missionary and using that rent to supplement their family income. When a change occurs in a Russian family, that often results in the missionary family receiving an eviction notice or a rent increase. Rents typically change according to local economic factors, including constantly increasing real estate values in Moscow. The Russian capital currently is ranked as the most expensive city in the world for expatriate living, surpassing Tokyo and Seoul (*Moscow Times*, 27 June 2006, p.1). In total, respondents representing 26 families reported approximately 78 moves for an average of three moves per family in six years. They also reported being required to move 26 times for an average of one forced move per family.

## The Cumulative Impact

The cumulative impact upon a missionary family moving every few years is difficult to assess. The survey

(continued on page 10)

*Reported crimes included identity theft, attempted rape, being robbed at knifepoint, office robberies, apartment robberies, and car vandalism.*

Missionaries typically experienced in a six-year time frame 9.64 traumatic events; 3.4 personal crimes (not counting graft and/or bribes); three moves, one being forced; and significant rent increases – in addition to the stresses of cross cultural adjustment, language learning, and the general uncertainty of Russia today.

## Exposure to Trauma *(continued from page 9)*

probed for a response to the “unexpectedness” and “forced” nature of changes in rental agreements, but only 12 respondents reported having their rent raised “unexpectedly.” Many answered that their rent had been raised, but they expected it. A better question would have been, “How many times was rent raised and what percentage did the raise represent?” The author’s family may serve as a typical example, with three moves since arriving in Moscow in 1993. All three changes of residence were involuntary. The first landlord, 1993 to 1997, increased rent 133 percent over four years. The next landlord actually decreased rent when the dollar fell against the ruble in 1999, and in 2003 gave three months’ notice when his family needed to move back in. This man, a Russian Baptist, is perhaps one of the best landlords any missionary has had in Moscow and the relationship with him was excellent. However, the present landlord has raised rent 88 percent over three years, and in December 2005 insisted upon another 25 percent increase – or eviction. In a sense, none of these changes were unexpected, but the long-term impact of the constant uncertainty and the sense of powerlessness in negotiating rental arrangements add great stress to missionary life in Moscow.

## Additional Questions and Responses

### Have you ever seen a dead body on the street or elsewhere?

Eighty-one percent of respondents reported seeing a dead body at least once, and most of those reported multiple instances.

### What are the most stressful circumstances on the mission field?

The sources of stress and the number of times that they were mentioned among 26 respondents follow:

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| • Ministry conflicts (including cultural adjustments, mission team disagreements, and certain national leaders intent on obtaining money)    | percent<br>16 (61.5) |
| • Language difficulties  | 14 (53.8)            |
| • Urban living   | 11 (42.3)            |
| • Separation from family and friends   | 11 (42.3)            |
| • Finances   | 10 (38.5)            |
| • Problems with police and government officials  | 9 (34.6)             |
| • Safety   | 8 (30.8)             |
| • Russian living   | 8 (30.8)             |
| • Difficulty in forming friendships  | 6 (23.1)             |
| • Children (including unhappy children, helping children cope with mission life, and the feeling that one’s family is obliged to be perfect) | 5 (19.2)             |
| • Spiritual warfare  | 4 (15.4)             |
| • Schooling issues for children  | 3 (11.5)             |
| • Conflicts with one’s mission organization  | 2 (7.7)              |

### What Would Help You Stay on the Mission Field?

When asked what would most help them to continue their ministry, respondents gave the following replies:

- Counseling for various missionary family problems 15 (57.7)  
This was stated in various ways:
  - “Effective, confidential Christian counselors in the locale when needed”
  - The need for a “safe place” to talk
  - “Confidential and anonymous counseling on the field”
  - “Some sort of neutral caregiver for missionaries, where missionaries can feel safe to talk about various issues”
- Counseling for children 8 (30.8)
- A sense of having friends who really care 6 (23.1)
- A place to go outside the city to relax 4 (15.4)
- Effective pastoral ministry within one’s mission 3 (11.5)
- Access to marriage and parenting seminars and resources 3 (11.5)
- Greater support from the mission

## Conclusions

It is clear that missionaries in Russia, and in Moscow in particular, experience significant trauma – sometimes in the form of one-time events, sometimes in the form of several events over a short space of time, and sometimes in the form of ongoing, cumulative stress. Trauma and cumulative stress work to create heightened anxiety that can lead to depression, burnout, physical symptoms, and various “acting out” behaviors – conditions that can cause the missionary to leave the field.

It is also clear that surveyed missionaries tended to underreport trauma and cumulative stress. Why? Perhaps they did not consider or recognize these events as traumatic. Perhaps they simply expected to endure certain difficulties as missionaries and were prepared to trust God in all matters. Because they knew others in the missionary community experiencing the same difficulties, perhaps they did not want to complain or appear weak. Because they were highly motivated and trained individuals, perhaps they expected that they should be able to overcome cross-cultural challenges. Or perhaps they were so busy that they just never stopped to account for all the negative events experienced over time. Although this author served as a missionary in Moscow for 11 years before researching this topic, the tally of what missionaries typically had experienced in a six-year time frame still came as a surprise: 9.64 traumatic events; 3.4 personal crimes (not counting graft and/or bribes); three moves, one being forced; and significant rent increases – in addition to the stresses of cross cultural adjustment, language learning, and the general uncertainty and instability of Russia today.

This inability or unwillingness to recognize or admit the impact of trauma complicates the process of providing missionaries with needed assistance. It seems clear that help needs to be

## Exposure to Trauma

given as incidents occur, before they accumulate and contribute to missionaries leaving the field.

A third point is also evident from the survey. Missionaries in Moscow not only wanted counseling services; they, in fact, considered such help to be crucial in enabling them to remain on the mission field. A majority (57.7 percent) reported that counseling services would help them to continue on the field and 30.8 percent specifically mentioned counseling services for children as a significant need. In addition, missionaries want help from counselors who understand their perspective and who can relate to the unique circumstances they face.

Finally, when problems are finally recognized and the need for help is acknowledged, missionaries want that help to be “safe.” A surprising fact revealed by the survey was how many people wanted counseling services from *outside* their mission organization, as that seemed safer. As noted above, several respondents said that they needed a “safe place” where they could talk about problems without fear of “punishment.” In a poignant quote, one missionary stated, “We need help with our struggles, but nowhere is safe – or so it seems.”

## Recommendations

Missionaries surveyed in Russia tended to underreport trauma and cumulative stress. If not addressed by professional treatment on the field, this trauma and stress can lead to the premature departure of valuable workers from Russia. Therefore, ongoing educational opportunities addressing trauma and its impact would be beneficial, both for adults and for missionary children. Mission leaders and mental health providers must be more proactive as they anticipate the trauma and stress endured by missionaries in the Russian context. Ongoing, on-site counseling services are a necessity. In addition, mission organizations need to support the need for “safe” counseling outside the mission – a need heightened in the minds of missionaries exposed to the traumas and cumulative stresses of life in Russia today. ♦

*Christine Currie and her husband Mark have served as missionaries with New Hope International since 1993. Christine is the mental health counselor at Hinkson Academy, Moscow, from which all four of the Currie children have graduated.*

*Mission leaders and mental health providers must be more proactive as they anticipate the trauma and stress endured by missionaries in the Russian context.*

## Expatriate Christian Workers and Czech Evangelicals

Daniel Fajfr

In 1995-2000, forty-five full-time missionaries worked in the Czech Republic.<sup>1</sup> In addition, short-term workers came to the Czech Republic organizing English camps, sport activities, and other forms of outreach. The focus in this article will be the relationship between non-charismatic Protestant missionaries and local evangelical churches in the Czech Republic, especially the Evangelical Brethren Free Church (Cirkev bratrská). The Czech Evangelical Brethren originated with the formation of the Free Reformed Church in Prague in 1880. Today, it includes 6,000 members in 59 local churches. From 1995 to 2005, this denomination arranged partnerships with seven Western mission organizations: the Evangelical Free Church Mission, Mission to the World, SEND International, TEAM, Covenant Mission, Athletes in Action, and the German Alliance Mission.

### Low-Profile Western Help

People of great empathy and understanding came from Slavic Gospel Association (SGA), European Christian Mission (ECM), and other organizations to minister in Czechoslovakia. Later, in the 1980s when state oppression of the church diminished, visiting missionaries organized seminars in flats. It was a similar structure to that used by political dissidents associated with Vaclav Havel and others.<sup>2</sup> The idea was based on the legal possibility that even in a police state one was allowed to meet with friends in one's private house or flat. Therefore one or two people from abroad came for a visit to a family, and other

“friends” of the family were invited. Thus, missionaries met with “friends” who were key Christian leaders, lay pastors, and church workers preparing for the ministry. Such seminars were mostly interdenominational. Navigators developed this opportunity which had a significant impact on the progress of personal evangelism, the only possible evangelistic method at that time. Later, Biblical Education by Extension and Child Evangelism Fellowship used this network for the education of lay pastors, youth leaders, and Sunday School teachers.

### False and True Missionaries

After the political changes in 1989, Czech Christian leaders were full of expectations, hope, and sympathy for new teams of missionaries coming to help local churches with mission and evangelism. Very soon, however, it became clear that the word *missionary* had different meanings. Instead of workers involved in mission, some missionaries came to Czechoslovakia as “experts” ready to teach. Pavel Cerný, one of the key leaders of the evangelical movement in the Czech Republic, characterized these so-called missionaries in this way:

In our context, the word “expert” means someone who is really very experienced in the theory and practice of some ministry and particular work. We find it very offensive to discover that some missionary who comes to our country as an expert, let's say in church planting, has never planted a church before.

*(continued on page 12)*

*In the 1980s missionaries organized seminars in flats. It was a similar structure to that used by political dissidents associated with Vaclav Havel and others.*

## Expatriate Christian Workers (continued from page 11)

We have met many so-called experts who just know some theory. Many national leaders through the years became almost angry hearing some missionary saying: "We have 'know-how' and you have people to do it; ten steps how to plant a church; seven steps how to make your church grow; etc.! But there are no functioning examples, no models of that ministry in our context." To do mission work in a foreign country and to avoid studying local church history, theological vocabulary, and ecclesiology is arrogance. This failure means very often not to do mission work but to split and multiply denominations.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that most such "experts" quickly left or were asked to quit their ministry. At the same time, other Western missionaries came as servants with a real love for the Lord and for the Czech people. They helped and are still helping in the process of evangelization and church planting.

### Czech Versus Missionary Expectations

Czech leaders made mistakes, as well, by not clearly communicating their expectations for expatriates: What should their responsibilities be and what goals were to be set for their involvement? A survey of 216 Czech Evangelicals conducted in 2003 included questions on collaboration between local churches and expatriate missionaries. Among those surveyed, 89 said they had had experience with expatriate mission workers, while 127 had not. Most missionaries mentioned had come from the United States, with the remainder coming from 11 other countries: England, Ireland, Germany, South Korea, Canada, Ukraine, Sweden, Holland, Switzerland, Australia, and Slovenia. Respondents favored work with missionaries in local churches over church planting efforts. In contrast, missionaries working in the Czech Republic viewed the planting of new churches in partnership with Czech workers as their primary goal. For Czechs, the concept of church planting is a very new area of missions. In addition, church leaders prefer to enlarge their local church rather than invest resources in planting a daughter church.

Survey findings also indicate that missionary involvement in local Czech churches includes service as church elders, preaching, teaching, working with children and youth, and organizing evening clubs with pre-evangelism in mind. Those surveyed spoke favorably of mission efforts involving weekend retreats, English camps, sports camps, and teaching English in public schools and homes. While most respondents viewed Western missionaries positively, some were singled out as doctrinally insensitive, demonstrating a lack of qualifications for ministry, and performing poorly in comparison with nationals.<sup>4</sup>

### Overcoming Age-Old Catholic-Protestant Tensions

During the era of atheistic Communism, trials and executions occurred and all churches suffered. For the

first time in 500 years, the Roman Catholic Church possessed absolutely no political power. The state confiscated all its property, arrested many priests and bishops, and liquidated monastic orders. The Catholic Church was reduced to the same level as Protestant denominations. While in the twentieth century Protestant numbers increased up to the Communist takeover, only to fall below their 1910 totals, Catholic numbers dropped dramatically throughout the century.

### The Christian Percentage of the Population of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic<sup>5</sup>

Year	1910	1950	1991	2000
Roman Catholic	82.1	76.4	39.0	31.0
Protestant	2.7	6.7	2.5	2.0

Some Protestant pastors and Catholic priests found themselves in the same prisons. Relationships became stronger because Communists defined all Christians as the common enemy. Possibly as a result of this shared experience, Czech Protestants and Catholics have unusually positive fellowship. However, many expatriate workers, especially from the United States, do not know this history and do not understand the reasons for the close ties between Czech Protestants and Catholics.

### Making Mission Partnerships Work

One Czech evangelical denomination (that prefers not to be identified) concluded partnership agreements with two mission agencies from the United States that stipulated that the Czech partner would have no financial responsibilities for any U.S. missionaries. Such contractual agreements put expatriates in a difficult position, financially supported and dependent on the sending side, but simultaneously subordinate to, and commissioned by, national church leaders. Practice confirms that such partnerships do not always function well.

Missiologist Gail Van Rheen describes one appropriate approach to financing mission partnerships that he defines as the indigenous-partnership model. For the specific context of the Czech Republic, the present author supports a variation of this arrangement in which a self-supported national denomination or local church agrees to partner with a foreign mission agency willing to provide financial help. Van Rheen maintains that, in certain contexts, foreign money (if used carefully) can empower missions without creating dependency." In this case, support money from both sides can be shared according to the needs of a particular church mission activity or church planting project. To be effective, such a partnership requires mature leaders. Also, money, "rather than going

*Respondents favored work with missionaries in local churches over church planting efforts. In contrast, missionaries working in the Czech Republic viewed the planting of new churches in partnership with Czech workers as their primary goal.*

## Expatriate Christian Workers

directly to the recipient, should go through a local accountability structure.” Partners should mutually decide the duration of the partnership, accountability for use of money, and methodologies for their specific mission tasks.”<sup>6</sup> Also, it is important to judge whether or not goals are reached and the degree to which a common vision is still mutually shared. Such an evaluation procedure should be a natural part of any partnership agreement. One mission agency even suggested that partners plan evaluation retreats to insure that both are “singing from the same sheet of music.”<sup>7</sup> According to Ed Dayton and D.A. Fraser, it is important to set aside specific times to evaluate performance and the effectiveness of a partnership.<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion

The Czech Republic, in spite of its rich Christian tradition, is largely a mission field. More than 70 per cent of its ten million inhabitants are unevangelized. Joint mission projects are welcomed if the mission-church relationship is based on the conviction that “sending and receiving churches are on an equal basis.”<sup>9</sup> A credible and challenging partnership must be based on mutual respect and trust and requires the building and maintaining of good relationships. National Christian leaders need to formulate the status and roles of expatriates transparently in order that missionaries can be sure their ministry is relevant. Expatriate workers must be aware of the long and painful history of the Czech church, the reality of lingering influences of the Communist era, and the strong secularization process that has taken place in the last century. Basic principles of cooperation between Czechs and expatriates must be expressed in partnership agreements which clearly state the philosophy of ministry and the responsibilities of both partners.

The way to fulfill particular mission projects based on a contractual partnership is to build a credible team that embodies an attitude of equality. An important part of all planning, goal setting, and decision-making is clear communication. As T.C. Shelling points out, “To communicate a promise one has to communicate the commitment that goes with it; and to communicate a commitment requires more than the communication of words. One has to communicate evidence that the commitment exists.”<sup>10</sup> Another important characteristic of any partnership

will be each side’s respect for the other’s value system. In conclusion, it can be said that expatriate workers have done considerable work during the last 15 years that Czech nationals value highly. At the same time, in the changing contours of mission in the Czech Republic, new possibilities are emerging for expatriates and nationals to work together.

*Edited excerpt published with permission from Daniel Fajfr, “A Critical and Evaluative Study of the Roles and Partnership of Expatriate Christian Workers and Czech Evangelicals,” Master of Theology thesis, International Baptist Theological Seminary and the University of Wales, 2005.*

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Czech Evangelical Alliance, *Basic Information About Evangelical Churches in the Czech Republic in the Years 1990-2000* (Prague: CEA, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> E. Kristova, *Vaclav Havel - Biography* (Brno: Atlantis, 1991), 72.

<sup>3</sup> Pavel Ěrny, “Churches and Missions in Dialogue,” Lecture at the Consultation on Mission, European Evangelical Alliance, Budapest, 1996, 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> D. Bena, *Zásady spolupráce zahraničních misionářů s misijním sborem v. českých podmínkách [The Principles of Cooperation with Foreign Missionaries in the Czech Context]*, Pastoral Seminar (Rybníste, 2004), 1. Part of this paper includes a survey of church leaders from which testimonies are quoted.

<sup>5</sup> *Evangelický týdeník-Kostnické Jiskry*, Czech interdenominational weekly newspaper, No. 18, May 1996, 3.

<sup>6</sup> “Using Money in Missions: Four Perspectives,” *Monthly Missiological Perspectives*, No. 15, 2-3, [www.missiology.org](http://www.missiology.org).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ed R. Dayton and D.A. Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization*, (Monrovia, CA; MARC, 1990), 478-87.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Rickett and Dotsey Welliver, eds., *Supporting Indigenous Ministries* (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, 1997); G.V. Peters, “Pauline Patterns of Church-Mission Relationships,” in *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> T.C. Shelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (New York: Galaxy, 1963), 147.

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*Expatriate workers must be aware of the long and painful history of the Czech church, the reality of lingering influences of the Communist era, and the strong secularization process that has taken place in the last century.*

## Letter to the Editor

I have been a missionary in and out of Russia since 1990. EXCELLENT COMMENTS on your *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 13 (Fall 2005). My thoughts: I see fewer Westerners, but more Western money going from West to East. I think this is in part due to a growing understanding on the part of the church leadership in the former Soviet

Union in obtaining funds from Western sources. Internet websites and personal visits from East to West have created the flow of finances. Also, the tremendous number of emigrants from the former Soviet Union adds to funds going back to family and church.

*Anonymous missionary serving in Russia*

# Christians in the Czech Republic: Overcoming the Legacy of Oppression

Stephen Edward Olsen

## An End to Captivity

As the Czech Republic continues its transition from its Communist past to its post-Communist future, changes are taking place at an incredible rate. Thankful for the removal of fear and the entrance of freedom, many, especially the elderly, are struggling to find their place in the emerging nation. As a tiger born into captivity, Czechs had adapted to life in a Communist cage. They lacked freedom, but they could count on basic sustenance. The caretaker (the state) fed them and their lives were ordered and predictable. One day the Czechs' cage door was broken down and they ran out into the jungle, only to find they did not know how to live in freedom. Some desired to return to the familiarity of the cage - but the caretaker was gone. They had to learn to live in the jungle. New fears replaced old ones. Nevertheless, amidst dramatic changes, the Czechs' indomitable character and the constancy of their social organization remained largely intact.

## Surviving Oppression

Surviving an eleven-hundred-year history of oppression and servitude testifies to Czech endurance and adaptability. The combined effect of repeated regeneration and long-term perseverance has produced in Czechs a sense of self-reliance and an instinct for survival. However, such protest and regeneration comes with a price: exhaustion and resentment. The birth and re-birth of the nation has been hard on everyone. Not only must oppressors be overcome, but a new way of living must be built. Change is taxing. When it occurs on a national scale in political, economic, religious, and social spheres, as is the case today, exhaustion becomes the norm. Resentment against both oppressors and change easily follows. Pain and resentment run deep in the Czech experience, complicated by the fact that in order to survive, Czechs often have resorted to burying their pain.

## How Czechs Have Coped

Czechs have the ability to detect error and "examine everything carefully" (I Thessalonians 5:21). Unfortunately, many Czechs have an inclination to remain at this point, dwelling on the negatives and not moving beyond them. Fatalism is prevalent. The attitude is "Yes, it's bad; but what can I do about it?" As a result, many Czechs resign themselves to sarcasm, irony, and criticism.

Czechs divide social space between a private sphere (inside the house, inside the fence, inside the car) and a public sphere. This dualism of space has led Czechs to give great care to their personal possessions. This mentality encourages thrift. As a corollary, Czechs carefully guard their personal space and personal belongings, giving them a strong sense of security on the inside.

Unfortunately, these values of care, thrift, and security often transmute into neglect, parsimony, and suspicion outside the private domain. Among Christians, this may be seen in the neglect of church

property, which leads non-Christians to conclude that Christians are no different from non-Christians. If, however, church property is well cared for, non-believers will know something is positively different about Christians. It will reflect well upon Christ and His church. Secondly, tithing generally is not practiced, or even discussed, which limits mission efforts as well as church upkeep. Furthermore, suspicion often causes strangers to feel unwelcome in church. After an initial socially polite greeting, visitors often feel neglected.

## Taking Responsibility and Taking the Initiative in Witness

A healthy commitment to stewardship can transform the Czechs' truncated understanding of responsibility. Christian modeling of stewardship includes efforts to improve church facilities, both financially and physically, and to welcome non-Christians (usually considered outsiders) into home and church fellowship. It also entails using one's money for others; willingness to risk loaning property; and taking the risk of welcoming so-called undesirable children into home and church. Czech believers need to see that everything in their possession belongs to God and can be generously used for His purposes.

The researcher's home has been opened to non-Christian babysitters, housekeepers, and party guests. In each instance, Czechs have shared verbal cautions about such behavior. However, after a period of time, the warnings have ceased. Instead, strangers have actually been accepted among Christians, even to the point that non-Christians, once thought untrustworthy, have been welcomed into Christians' homes. Negative Czech attitudes towards non-Christian visitors can even change to the point that outsiders may be invited into homes for evangelistic purposes.

Typical patterns in Czech social relationships perpetuate mistrust and control. Concerted efforts are needed to overcome these barriers. Change agents must model trusting relationships over time, with frequent interaction, and a willingness to take risks. By building trusting relationships within a system that works against it, Christian change agents will do much to equip Czechs with the necessary skills and experience to do the same. This researcher has seen that this transformation can take place. Sometimes individuals within a small group may be asked to introduce themselves; the next week they are asked to bring a picture of themselves when they were young; the next week they are asked to talk about their favorite hobby. Progressively, on the basis of graduated risk, time, and an increasing level of comfort with the group, people take courage to share at a deeper level and begin to build trusting relationships. ♦

*Edited excerpt published with permission from Stephen Edward Olsen, "Czech Social Relations and Czech Academic Mentoring with Implications for Christian Mentoring," Doctor of Education thesis, Biola University, 1996.*

*Surviving an eleven-hundred-year history of oppression and servitude testifies to Czech endurance and adaptability.*

*Tithing generally is not practiced, or even discussed, which limits mission efforts as well as church upkeep.*

## Reaching Irreligious Czechs (continued from page 16)

### On a More Positive Note

Other models of churching besides the traditional churches include house churches and cell churches. These relational models of church growth have been successfully implemented all over the world. Within the Czech context, the bar or pub has taken the place of church for the unchurched. It is where Czechs naturally look for community, where they go when life treats them miserably or gives them reason to celebrate. A centrifugal approach to missions would be Czech theologian Jan Lochman's model of churching, in which Christians appear in unexpected places. A pub is a place where the Christian is not expected, but can meet people where they are. A ministry of love in a pub over time would be welcomed. The concept is derived from the Bible, where God desired to meet His people where they were (Exodus 25:8). A centripetal approach would be to build or rent a pub for the need of a newly planted community of believers. Such a place can serve as a sanctuary where people come to worship God. Also, during the week it could serve as a non-alcoholic bar and simulate the function of a pub. To go to the pub is natural for Czech people; to go to church is not. The example of the pub is only one possibility. The concept can be applied in different ways, according to the needs of a given situation.

### The Alpha Course and Prison Ministry

Befriending people and communicating with them occurs best in informal settings and on a one-to-one basis. Teaching the Word may occur in a family setting, in small groups, or with a cluster of small groups. A good example is the Alpha Course, which is designed to familiarize atheists with the basics of Christianity.<sup>18</sup> Before each simple Bible presentation, people interact together while eating, each small group at one table.

The public is also receptive to the Church's involvement in social and charitable ministries. The change towards a more positive view of the church is in place, says prison chaplain Renáta Balcarová, because "the churches in the Czech Republic have done a lot of good in the last 11 years."<sup>19</sup> By that she refers specifically to prison ministries carried out by the churches. While prison ministries are not as appreciated by the public as is help for needy children or other charitable activities, they present a unique example of ecumenical cooperation. It certainly has been a good starting point for greater cooperation among various churches. As a matter of fact, cooperation of Czech churches in prison ministries is considered a rarity in Europe.

### In Conclusion

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the Czech population has deep-seated suspicions towards

Christian witness and its perception of church coercion. At the same time, Czechs are not uniformly irreligious and are appreciative of such Christian expressions as the house church, the Alpha Course, and social ministries. ♦

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Johanna Grohová, "Bibli cituji všichni, málokdo ji však zná" [Many People Cite the Bible; Only a Few Know It], *MF Dnes*, 6 January 2000, <http://zpravy/idness.cz/>.

<sup>2</sup> Respondent 7, churching believer, interview by author, 5 April 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Respondent 20, Christian church leader, interview by author, 13 July 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Respondent 22, unchurched unbeliever, interview by author, 1 August 2001.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Respondent 2, unchurched unbeliever, interview by author, 24 January 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Respondent 6, unchurched unbeliever, interview by author, 27 February 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Respondent 18, unchurched unbeliever, interview by author, 9 July 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Respondent 13, follower of alternative religion, interview by author, 19 April 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Respondent 18, 9 July 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Respondent 22, 1 August 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Respondent 18, 9 July 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Komárek, "Paragrafy proti tmárùm [Paragraphs Against Obscurantists]," *MF Dnes [Daily News]*, 3 February 1999, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Hamplová, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Respondent 13, 19 April 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Jolanta Babiuch, "Church and Society in Post-Communist Eastern Europe," *The World Today* 50 (November 1994), 211.

<sup>17</sup> Respondent 15, 15 May 2001.

<sup>18</sup> For more about the Alpha Course, see [www.alpha.org.uk](http://www.alpha.org.uk). In the Czech Republic, this course is organized by KMS (Christian Mission Society), Prague, Nám. Dr. V. Holého 3, 180 00 Praha 8; tel: 02-683-3505.

<sup>19</sup> Renáta Balcarová, President of Prison Chaplains for the Czech Republic, e-mail interview by author, 26 April 2002. Ministry to society through ADRA Czech Republic and the involvement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in prison ministries through prison chaplains has helped the SDA Church in particular to be recognized as a Christian church, both by the government and by other Christian churches.

*Edited excerpt published with permission from Petr Cincala "A Theoretical Proposal for Reaching Irreligious Czech People Through a Mission Revitalization Movement," Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2002.*

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*The public is receptive to the Church's involvement in social and charitable ministries.*

# Reaching Irreligious Czechs

Petr Cincala

## Suspicion of Religion

According to an article written in a Czech publication in 2000, principals of schools who think children should learn something about the Bible in class “are under pressure from parents who remain repulsed by religion.”<sup>1</sup> Parents in the Czech communities of Jablonec and Nisou wrote a petition against religious education classes in a private Catholic school.<sup>2</sup> In another instance, in which the British wife of a Czech pastor offered English language classes, parents enrolled their children because the instruction was free and the teacher was a native English speaker. However, as soon as they discovered that the content had something to do with the Bible and religion, parents immediately withdrew their children. When approached later by the pastor, they said the reason for withdrawal was that they did not want their kids’ “minds to be fooled by God.”<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the widespread, popular bias against religion, other reasons help account for the church’s loss of credibility in the post-Communist period. The Catholic Church’s ambiguous involvement in politics is seen as a problem. Also, church demands for the restitution of property raise suspicions that the church is still motivated by greed and power. Finally, the tension between leaders of the main Protestant churches and the Catholic Church is seen as a replay of past hostilities. Czechs disappointed with Christianity cite three reasons:<sup>4</sup> 1) Christians are said to believe something but do not act accordingly.<sup>5</sup> Some think, “If you go to church, that is enough.”<sup>6</sup> Also, they see no difference between Christians and non-Christians.<sup>7</sup> “Virtuous character has nothing to do with church affiliation.”<sup>8</sup> People feel “The church has nothing to offer; practical religiosity is missing.”<sup>9</sup> 2) Many Czechs believe

the church surrounds faith with elements that do not belong there. It is connected with politics (Christian Party). It is argued that churches use too much money without helping people.<sup>10</sup> 3) Finally, churches are said to use faith to control and manipulate people.<sup>11</sup> “I cannot believe the hierarchy they have. You don’t need a hierarchy for your faith.”<sup>12</sup> Former Prime Minister Klaus revealed his view of the church by saying that he did not see much difference between a church and an association of gardeners.<sup>13</sup>

## The Lure of the Occult

Symptomatic of the low standing of traditional Christian faith among Czechs are the findings of the 1998 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). Of those surveyed 66 percent thought that some fortune tellers are able to predict the future, 45 percent believed in amulets, and 45 percent believed in horoscopes.<sup>14</sup> It is not uncommon for Czechs to pay a healer or “diagnostician” for counsel or medical advice.<sup>15</sup> Occult religiosity is widespread among young people, as the vast number of horoscope magazines indicates.

## Strangers Not Made Welcome in Church

Despite the common Czech distrust of institutional religion, the church had an unusual opportunity to regain the hearts of the people during a post-Communist wave of receptivity. Unchurched people were glad to come to church. However, a group of strangers was something the church was not used to, and strangers soon became a threat to them. The unchurched needed a place of acceptance, a place to belong. Instead, the church often became an institution generating intolerance and servitude, “characterized more by summary refusals than by positive proposals.”<sup>16</sup> One unchurched interviewee pointed out that many churches have a “vacuum cleaner” syndrome. If someone new comes to church one or more times, the script often runs as follows: “Either you become as we are, or you go away from us.”<sup>17</sup> Intolerance and judgmental attitudes on the part of church people present a major barrier for unbelievers. I have heard repeatedly from the unchurched that they do not appreciate the pressure they encounter in church.

The often hostile attitude of the unchurched towards the church obviously wounds believers who then, naturally, tend to use defense mechanisms to protect themselves from being hurt. And since Czechs use many defense mechanisms, the church do well at defending themselves. The church are unbelievably intolerant towards the unchurched. And since church people have a rather passive view of mission, the gap between the church and the unchurched is not surprising.

*Former Prime Minister Klaus revealed his view of the church by saying that he did not see much difference between a church and an association of gardeners.*

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