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A Christian Voice in East European Mainstream Media

An Interview with Juraj Kusnierek

Editor's note: Juraj Kusnierek is a journalist; music, drama, and film critic; co-founder of Artforum Bookshop; co-host of a weekly television talk show; and deputy editor-in-chief of the influential Slovak weekly, Týždeň [Week].

Editor: Can you share some about your background?

I was born in Banska Bystrica, a city in central Slovakia, to a very religious family. My mother was an accountant. My father was a technician. Both were very active in a local evangelical church.

Editor: Where did you receive your schooling?

Because of the "political profile" of our family I could not study liberal arts, which was my natural interest. So I studied computer science at the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava. I graduated successfully in spite of the fact that to this day I do not understand how computers work!

Editor: How did you become a Christian?

I was raised in a very pious, even pietistic environment. This gave me a strong faith in the existence of God and an equally strong suspicion of the church. When I came to Bratislava for my university studies, I tried to avoid church, but somehow I could not avoid God—I was afraid of Him. When I was about 20 years old I met a group of artists, most of them from a non-church environment, who were Christians. They were strongly influenced by The Navigators. At that time I was basically a bohemian hippie. When I first saw the bridge illustration, it was the first time in my life that I saw God as loving, God offering salvation to our broken lives, and not us trying to behave so well that we somehow reach God. (*Editor's note: See http://www.navigatorsorg/us/resources/illustrations/items/bridge.)* It dawned on me a few days later—I was in a bus (I can show you the exact place in Bratislava)—that to my surprise I discovered that I was not afraid of death and God's judgment. Jesus brought the sufficient sacrifice for my past and future sins. I was actually thinking that it would be good to die at that very moment to be with God, and be in his perfect love for ever. Although I am still alive, this basic attitude has never left me. I live my very imperfect and broken life in hope.

Editor: Can you comment on your thoughts during the overthrow of the Czechoslovak Marxist regime?

That was a miracle. The regime which was supposed to be here "forever," all of a sudden collapsed. It was unbelievable and it was like a dream. I still consider it as a miracle and I feel a tremendous privilege to have seen it in my own lifetime. I love freedom!

Editor: Please describe your work with Marsh Moyle and his Christian consulting and publishing agency, Central European Foundation (SEN).

It started as a misunderstanding: Marsh hired me as a computer programmer, but he soon found out that I could not do much programming. Marsh and I nevertheless became good friends, and we saw that what the church in Central and Eastern Europe actually needs is a certain self-understanding and a comprehension of the new challenges of the post-Communist world. So we set up a study center, we wrote several research papers, we organized conferences and workshops, we spoke with pastors and priests, and we helped to publish good books. I was responsible for research and publishing at SEN.

Editor: Can you reflect on your decision to shift from full-time church and mission work to work in public media (journalism and television)?

I was with SEN for eight years and toward the end of this period I felt more and more uneasy spending most of my time in a "churchy" environment. I was always very much connected with the "secular" culture scene in Slovakia. In 1990 I co-founded the first independent bookstore in Slovakia, and I was involved in setting up an independent music radio station. So I thought that I needed to live and work in my natural environment. That was why I left SEN and started working in the bookstore I had started several years before. As a bookseller I started to write about books and music; I started to work in TV; and then I was invited to become deputy editor-in-chief of a new weekly magazine. When I was offered the magazine position, I hesitated for about two minutes and then I agreed. I still think that this is my proper life. This is my journey. If I am a fish, this is for me water. I love alternative rock and jazz music. I love books. I like meeting people, talking, listening, reading, and writing. Although many people know that I am a Christian—I became a sort of "public personality"—I do not speak or write about religion very often.

Editor: What two or three books have been most influential in your spiritual growth?

First and foremost C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, and also *The Confessions of St Augustine* and *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer.

Editor: Which writers would be especially helpful for Western readers seeking to understand Central and East European culture and psyche?

I would suggest several books by Milan Kundera (*The Joke, The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* and *Immortality).* They might help to understand the existential cynicism which is so deeply rooted in us. Also, poems and essays by Polish Nobel Prize laureate Czesław Miłosz. He is deeply religious, but sometimes

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in an unorthodox way. Any book by the great Hungarian writer Peter Esterhazy, especially *Celestial Harmonies* (2001). I think he is one of the best living writers in the world. He is a master in connecting deep faith in God with the vulgarity and hopelessness of our daily lives. And *Kaddish for the Unborn Child* by the brilliant and thoughtful Hungarian-Jewish writer Imre Kertesz.

Editor: How do you account for the relatively strong economy and greater religious tolerance in Slovakia compared to some other post-Soviet states?
Slovakia is a lucky winner of the twentieth century. In the year 1900 an independent Slovak nation did not exist. In 1918 Slovakia was happily "pulled into" the Czechoslovak Republic and experienced 20 years of freedom, democracy, and prosperity. During World War II Slovakia was Hitler's ally, but at just about the right time (August 1944) the antifascist Slovak National Uprising put us among the winners. Then we had 40 years of Communism, which in Slovakia was never so cruel as in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia. Slovak dissidents had to work in libraries while Czech dissidents had to work in factories or were forced to emigrate, not to mention [fear of banishment to] the Soviet Union. And then in 1989 we again joined our Czech brothers in the Velvet Revolution and have experienced freedom and relative prosperity ever since. Slovaks have never been great visionaries, but somehow—often in the last possible moment—we join the right side and "win." Now we are part of the European Union; we use the Euro as our national currency; and since 1992 we are a sovereign country and are doing quite well. We are lucky winners.

Editor: How serious a threat to spiritual vitality is the current quest for material comfort and security in Central and Eastern Europe?
I recently wrote and published an article stating that the idea that "Slovakia is a Christian country" is a myth. Although about 80 percent of Slovak citizens consider themselves Christians, it means next to nothing. They do not love righteousness and freedom; and they do not show love and mercy to the poor and oppressed. What they want is enough money to be able to live in relative peace and prosperity. But they—or I should rather say we—would like to believe in a good and merciful God. The God we come to know in church is a powerful and judging king, but somehow out of touch with our reality.

I find desire for God in rock clubs. I know techno DJs who try to believe in God. Rytmus, the most famous Slovak hip-hopper, or rather a gangsta rapper, has the face of Jesus with a crown of thorns tattooed on his arm. When I asked him why, he said because Jesus is his hero. Everybody is afraid of a vacuum. Many in Slovakia are afraid of a spiritual vacuum.

Editor: What are Slovak churches doing well today? And what do Slovak churches need to do differently to be salt and light in Slovak society?
Some churches, especially the Roman Catholic and Adventist Churches are doing excellent charity work. They genuinely care for homeless people, for the elderly and the poor. And during the last 20 years they learned how to do charitable work very well. Some churches are also trying not to preach, but to listen and help. According to my very humble opinion, churches need to be more open. They should try to lower the cultural barriers and offer spiritual advice, help, and support for those who come to them.

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The spiritual hunger is great. Let me give one example. The biggest open-air rock music festival in Slovakia is called *Pohoda* and I belong to the team of organizers. It is not a Christian festival, and it was not my idea to finish this year's festival in July 2010 with ecumenical worship on Sunday morning. (The festival starts on Thursday night and ends very late on Saturday.) My friend Michal Peter Balzary, who is the founder of the festival and a well-known rock musician, came to me with the idea. And so it was. Leaders in worship included a Hasidic rabbi singing a beautiful blessing, an 82-year-old Catholic priest who had spent 10 years in uranium mines in the 1950s as a political prisoner, an evangelical pastor, and a female Lutheran priest. About 2,000 people attended this service in incredible, almost unsustainable sunshine. All the media reported the next day that it was the grand finale of the festival.

Editor: Can you give examples of your television programs that have caused your audience to wrestle with important ethical and spiritual issues?
We had a program with mentally handicapped people, talking with them for two hours about how they feel and how they see the world. We had a discussion about death and dying, abortion, and marriage. We had a discussion about "alternative lifestyles" with punks, ravers, and rastas. Mostly, however, we speak about politics, which is the reason our program is loved and hated at the same time.

Editor: Could you give our readers a sampling of the types of articles you write for the press to illustrate your engagement with culture?
Let me just mention articles I wrote in the last few weeks: "The World on An Island" – about the film festival on the Italian island of Ischia with Peter Fonda, Heather Graham, Ornella Muti, etc; "They Did Not Come from Mars" – about Slovak Gypsy music; "The End of Love Parade" – about the tragic end of the Love Parade in Duisburg, Germany, where 21 people died; and "The Man in Black" – an extensive profile of Johnny Cash.

I also regularly review albums of alternative rock bands: Sigur Rós, The National, Caribou, Bob Dylan, Depeche Mode, etc. I also conduct interviews with Slovak and international musicians and authors (Nick Cave, Patti Smith, Lou Rhodes, José González, Emiliana Torrini, the band Animal Collective, The Prodigy, The Stranglers, etc.)

I try to write a review about every new book of Slovak fiction that deserves attention. Now I am preparing a series of articles about important religious words, such as hell, sin, heaven, salvation, church, holiness, and the Trinity. I will go to pastors, priests, and theologians and ask them very simple questions about the meaning of these words.✦

Editor's note: For earlier contributions of Juraj Kusnierek to the East-West Church and Ministry Report *see "Post-Modern Culture in Post-Soviet Countries" 2 (Winter 1994), 1-2; and "Taboos in the Central European Church" 8 (Winter 2000), 12-13.*

The Spiritual Dimension in East European Culture

Bruce R. Berglund

A well-established body of Western academic work exists that perceives Eastern Europe as backward and primitive.[1] Surprisingly, however, these studies have overlooked religion. The oversight is odd, as Western popular views of East European religiosity and spirituality are a key pigment in coloring the region as backward. Journalists and travelers have seen the religious devotion of Poles, Slovaks, Romanians, and other peoples of the region as setting them apart from the rest of Europe.[2] In his widely read Balkan travelogue Robert Kaplan recounts a visit with the Orthodox nun, Mother Tatiana, who pauses in their tour of Gračanica Monastery to declare: "I am a good Christian, but I'll not turn the other cheek if some Albanian plucks out the eyes of a fellow Serb."[3] The scene leaves a potent image of East European (or, as Kaplan intends, specifically Balkan) Christianity: an oath to vengeance sworn before the icons and domes of an ancient church.

This theme of East Europeans' primitive religiosity was also evident in criticisms of John Paul II by West European and North American Catholics. Progressive Western Catholics saw John Paul as "a culture-bound peasant from behind the Iron Curtain," a man out of touch with changes in modern society.[4] However, contrasting opinions of John Paul II reveal a different facet of Western perceptions of East European religion and spirituality. While some in Western Europe and North America saw John Paul II's Polishness as the root of an anti-modern conservatism, others saw this same Polishness as the root of his spiritual strength and authority. For instance, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan declared his loyalty to the new pope immediately after the papal election of October 1978, stating that John Paul II was the first major figure in the Church to have "grappled with, [and] possibly mastered, the principal philosophical question of our time, which is the question of totalitarianism."[5]

This respect for the spiritual strength of East Europeans, gained from the struggles of their history, has not been limited to John Paul. Over the last quarter-century, a number of East European cultural and intellectual figures have gained wide audiences and acclaim in the West in part for the perceived spiritual content and moral message of their work. The compositions of Arvo Pärt and Henryk Górecki, with their spare movements and settings of sacred texts, have become favorites among concertgoers and CD-buyers in Britain and North America. Passages of Górecki's phenomenally popular Third Symphony have been used in theatrical films at moments of tragedy or revelation, and the symphony has accompanied performances and exhibitions inspired by the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, the AIDS plague, and the Holocaust.[6] The mournful strings and haunting soprano of Górecki's composition have become, to Western listeners, a soundtrack for pathos and epiphany. As conductor David Zinman remarked, "It is like listening to the angels."[7]

Similarly, the films of Krzysztof Kieslowski are acclaimed for their spiritual depth. The *Dekalog* series, in particular, has been ranked among the greatest religious films ever, even though Kieslowski himself disclaimed any religious affiliation.[8] Poet Czesław Miłosz and theologian Miroslav Volf have been hailed for a depth of insight gained from their life experiences as East Europeans, even though their years of mature productivity came after their moves to the West. Even writers and thinkers who have disclaimed religious affiliation, such as Václav Havel, Adam Michnik, Leszek Kolakowski, Michael Polanyi, and Slavoj Žižek, have been recognized for their attention to matters spiritual and for their deep respect for Europe's Christian heritage.[9] For West European and North American audiences, life in Eastern Europe, with its history of Communism and genocide and its supposedly deeper religious traditions, has earned these figures a solemnity inaccessible to writers and artists from the democratic, prosperous, and secular West.

East European cultural figures posit that, owing to a trying history, the region possesses greater spiritual and cultural resources than the West. In the mid-1980s, two of the most renowned intellectuals to emerge from Eastern Europe published essays trumpeting the region's contributions to European history and culture: Milan Kundera in "The Tragedy of Central Europe" and John Paul II in his encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* (Apostles to the Slavs).[10] Setting aside their differing philosophies, the essays share a fundamental assumption: Both the Polish pope and the Czech novelist believed their home region to be the wellspring of Europe, the source of the values and ideas that made Europe a great civilization.

According to Kundera, the Central Europe of the Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, and Austrians was, in the early twentieth century, "a great cultural center, perhaps the greatest."[11] John Paul declared that all of Slavic Europe, from the Alps and Adriatic to Russia, was the repository of the heritage of Cyril and Methodius, a legacy of Christian unity despite the divisions between Catholics and Orthodox.[12] Both John Paul and Kundera urged, moreover, that a Western Europe mired in base consumption and neglect for higher ideals (whether cultural or religious) would be saved only in rediscovering the contributions of their home region. Kundera claimed that Central Europe's cultural accomplishments and political fate were a warning to Europe as a whole. "All of this century's great Central European works of art, even up to our own day," he stated, "can be understood as long meditations on the possible end of European humanity."[13] The novelist offered no prescription for how that fate might be averted. John Paul, of course, had no such hesitation. The legacies of Slavic Christianity, he insisted, would "enrich the culture of Europe and its religious tradition" and provide the "foundation for its hoped-for spiritual renewal."[14]

Other cultural figures have echoed this claim of Eastern Europe as a source of moral bearing, or claimed for themselves the authority to dispense lessons to the West based on their first-hand experience of the region's tumultuous past. In his acceptance of the 2001 Erasmus Prize in Amsterdam, Adam Michnik spoke of "the wisdom of the people who erred and are marked by original sin." He contrasted these people to a generation that sings of its own freedom but lacks the "memory and consciousness of moral conflict," who live untouched by bounds of good and bad, sin and happiness. Drawing on the words of Erasmus, Michnik compared those without the marks of sin to the Pharisee whose self-assurance earned the anger of Christ. Although not explicit, the association was clear: West Europeans, in their prosperity and security, had lost sight of moral bearings; they had to be challenged by the wisdom of those with original sin. And this wisdom was, in the words of Michnik, "what we will bring into Europe."[15]

In claiming a moral authority granted by their experience of the region's history, East European intellectuals repeated themes of their anti-communist writings: the principles of culture over politics, individual ethics over power, and truth over deception. In the post-1989 period, as the former Communist states have undergone political and economic transformation and joined (or queued to join) West European institutions, the former dissidents have retained their basic message: an attention to what

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is called the "spiritual." According to East European intellectuals, the driving forces of European integration are bureaucratic dictates, consumerist motives, and pragmatic liberal policies. As an institution, the European Union (EU) claims to promote and protect the material wealth of its citizenry with the idea that greater wealth will bring better health care and education, more money for culture, more free time. Yet, the critics insist, prosperity and liberal rights are not enough. With varying degrees of moralizing, writers from Eastern Europe who publish in Western journals and speak in Western venues make the same charge: The European Union requires a spiritual foundation, yet this is something its leaders have refused to allow.[16]

President Václav Havel expressed this view consistently in his statements on EU expansion. In a 1994 speech to the European Parliament, he stated that reading the documents of integration was like "looking into the inner workings of an absolutely perfect and immensely ingenious modern machine," a creation that, while satisfying to the brain, did not address matters of the heart. These matters of the heart, the values of Europe, "with roots in antiquity and in Christianity," had been hidden within this machine. The result, he charged, was that many people would come to the view that the EU was "no more than endless arguments over how many carrots can be exported from somewhere, who sets the amount, who checks it, and who will eventually punish delinquents who contravene the regulations." Havel urged that the EU had to be more than that. If it is to last, he concluded, then it must be more than the sum of its regulations.[17] In this emphasis on the spiritual over the technocratic, on values and mission over market forces, the appeal of the Czech intellectual-turned-president echoed the message of Slovak bishops to their flock, to the "European souls" under their care: "Market and economic liberties alone cannot keep unity. Europe needs the soul from which spiritual unity could grow and bear fruit. This will be the guarantee of its economic and political unity. Europe needs to draw strength from its spiritual roots. Only a tree with strong and deep roots will bear fruit, the wind will not break it, and the sun will not burn it."[18]

Eastern Europe is not simply the bulwark against false religions, nor a wellspring of neglected beliefs or values. It has become the repository of truths that Western Europe has rejected. It is the center. It is Europe.

Certainly, there are fundamental differences in the moral visions of Václav Havel and the Catholic bishops of Slovakia, but, as with Milan Kundera and John Paul II, a common premise may be discerned: Eastern Europe is the place where truth and principle are defended. The idea is not new, for medieval kings and princes, both Catholic and Orthodox, saw themselves as standing alone in defense of Christendom against the false religions of pagans and Muslims.[19] Their declarations, like the addresses of contemporary intellectuals, indicate more than an identification with Europe, or a longing for the appreciation of those at the center. For Christian princes of the past, as for intellectuals of today, the margins are essential. The fortunes of Europe, its wealth and power, its identity and existence, depend upon those at its frontiers.

Eastern Europe is not simply the bulwark against false religions, as medieval kings had believed, nor a wellspring of neglected beliefs or values, as Kundera and John Paul maintained. It has become the repository of truths that Western Europe has rejected. It is the center. It is Europe.

But what of the spiritual understanding of ordinary East Europeans? According to one 2004 poll, few citizens of the then-new EU member states saw themselves as defending spiritual values. Their greatest contribution to Europe, according to most respondents to the survey? Cheap labor.[20] The hundreds of thousands of East Europeans, particularly Poles, working in Western Europe indicate that the economic lure of acquisition is strong—much stronger than a defense of the traditional values of Europe.[21] As these people are moved—literally—by a yearning for prosperity, one can ask whether the criticisms of an amoral, materialist EU made by church leaders, Christian politicians, and secular intellectuals are directed not toward West European politicos but toward the Polish plumber and the Slovak nurse.

Still, the poetics of a spiritual Eastern Europe do have a Western audience—and Western patrons. Intellectuals and writers from the region receive awards in Amsterdam, speak at symposia in Dublin, and contribute articles to English-language periodicals. Clearly, the editors and academics who offer the invitations find some resonance in the censures offered by their East European colleagues. But why? What is their investment in a conceptual geography that distinguishes Europe's materialist West from spiritual East? In a Europe undergoing administrative and economic unification, perhaps the projection of some deeper spirituality on the new member nations is an effort to revive cosmic-sacred character. ✦

Notes:

[1] Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Milica Backić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54 (Winter 1995): 917-31; Dickie Wallace, "Hyperrealizing 'Borat' with the Map of the European 'Other'," *Slavic Review* 67 (Spring 2008): 35-49.

[2] Patrick Leigh Fermor, *Between the Woods and the Water: On Foot to Constantinople from the Hook of Holland: The Middle Danube to the Iron Gates* (New York: Penguin, 1988); Jason Goodwin, *On Foot to the Golden Horn: A Walk to Istanbul* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993).

[3] Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 33.

[4] The line about a "culture-bound peasant" comes from one of John Paul's defenders: James V. Schall, "Of Inquisitors and Pontiffs: Criticizing John Paul II," *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* 81 (June 1981), 19. Another admirer, George Weigel, also recognizes the Western prejudice against a pope from Poland at the start of his biography, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

[5] *The Washington Post*, 7 October 1979, quoted in Schall, "Of Inquisitors and Pontiffs," 23.

[6] The various appropriations of Górecki's symphony and its popularity are discussed in Luke B. Howard, "Motherhood, *Billboard*, and the Holocaust: Perceptions and Receptions of Górecki's Symphony No. 3," *Musical Quarterly* 82 (Spring 1998), 131-59.

[7] *Ibid.,* 150. As I learned from the excellent BA thesis of my student Esther Miller, American audiences

and CD-buyers are likewise drawn to East European folk and choral performers for the perceived "spiritual" and "timeless" qualities of their music. Record companies, tour organizers, and music writers highlight these elements in their promotion of such performers, as Donna Buchanan explains in the case of the popular Bulgarian women's choirs: "Bulgaria's Magical, *Mystère* Tour: Postmodernism, World Music Marketing, and Political Change in Eastern Europe," *Ethnomusicology* 41 (Winter 1997), 131-57, http://www.jstor.org/stable/852589.

[8] "Arts and Faith Top 100 Spiritually Significant Films," 2006, http://www.artsandfaith.com/t1000/; and Joseph Cunneen, "Kieslowski on the Mountaintop: Ten Commandments from the Late Polish Director," *Commonweal,* 15 August 1997, 11-15. One scholar of Kieslowski describes the director as a "hopeful agnostic." Joseph G. Kickasola, *The Films of Krzysztof Kieslowski: The Liminal Image* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 34.

[9] A useful introduction of Slavoj Žižek, which discusses the philosopher in his Slovene context, is Rebecca Mead, "The Marx Brother: How a Philosopher from Slovenia Became an International Star," *The New Yorker*, 5 May 2003. For sympathetic readings of Žižek by American Catholic and evangelical academics see Paul J. Griffiths, "Christ and Critical Theory," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 145 (August-September 2004), 46-56; and Ashley Woodiwiss, "Philosophy at the End of the World," *Books & Culture* 12 (November-December 2006), 30-33. Havel's books have received praise in *Commonweal, First Things,* and *Books & Culture*, and he was the subject of an admiring survey by James W. Sire, editor of InterVarsity Christian Press: *Václav Havel: The Intellectual Conscience of International Politics: An Introduction, Appreciation & Critique* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001). For the take of the Catholic journal *First Things* on Polanyi and Kolakowski, see John Rose, "The Feeling Intellect," *First Things* (March 2007), http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=5450&varrecherche=polanyi; and Zbigniew Janowski, "Main Currents of Kolakowski," *First Things* (October 2006), http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=5361&var_recherche=kolakowski.

[10] Vjekolav Perica, "Churches and the Twilight of the Slavic Myth," paper presented at the conference "Religion and the Challenges of Modernity: Christian Churches in 19th and 20th Century Eastern Europe," German Historical Institute, Warsaw, June 2006.

[11] Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," *New York Review of Books*, 26 April 1984, 34.

[12] John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli*, encyclical epistle given in Rome, 2 June 1985, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals;documents/hf_jp_ii_enc_19850602_slavorum-apostoli_en.html.

[13] Kundera, "Tragedy," 36.

[14] John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli.*

[15] Adam Michnik, "Confessions of a Converted Dissident: Essay for the 2001 Erasmus Prize," *eurozine,* http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2001-12-28-michnik-en.html.

[16] Stefan Auer, "The Revolutions of 1989 Revisited," *eurozine,* 14 June 2004, http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2004-06-14-auer-en.html.

[17] Václav Havel, "Address to the European Parliament," Strasbourg, 8 March 1994, http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/1994/0803_uk.html.

[18] Pastoral Letter of Slovak Bishops on European Integration, 15 May 2002, http://www.kbs.sk/?cid=1117564487.

[19] Ignác Romsics, "From Christian Shield to EU Member," *Hungarian Quarterly* 48 (Winter 2007), http://www.hungarianquarterly.com/no188/2.html.

[20] One-third of Poles saw their religious and moral contribution as most important, as opposed to 13 percent of Hungarians, 18 percent of Slovaks, and 7 percent of Czechs. By contrast, 55 percent of Poles, 55 percent of Hungarians, 50 percent of Czechs, and 46 percent of Slovaks saw "cheap labor force" as their contribution to united Europe. "Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia: What Will They Bring to the European Union?," results of survey conducted by the Central European Opinion Research Group Foundation, April 2004, http://www.ceorg-europe.org/research/2004_04.pdf.

[21] Indeed, as one Anglo-Polish commentator suggests, perhaps the illiberal environment of Catholic Poland has been one factor in pushing young Poles to seek work in Western Europe. Irena Maryniak, "The Polish Plumber and the Image Game," *eurozine,* 15 November 2006, http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-11-15-maryniak-3n.html.

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Book Review

Daniel, Wallace L., Peter L. Berger, and Christopher Marsh, eds. *Perspectives on Church-State Relations in Russia.* Waco, TX: The J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies, 2008. Reviewed by Erich Lippman.

The all-encompassing appellation *Perspectives on Church-State Relations in Russia* might suggest that the book in question could seemingly incorporate any perspective available. However, in the case of this compilation of articles by many of the greatest contemporary luminaries on this topic, the title could hardly be more specific. Browsing through the table of contents could lead one to question if the title is even too specific, as discussion of Islamic difficulties in Central Asian republics does not really fall into the category of church-state relations in Russia. In the introduction, the authors point out that their goal was to amass "some of the best research on the topic," even if those voices are "often contradictory" (p. 3). Certainly both quality and contradiction abound.

The editors recognize the problem of unifying these diverse strands, and the task of creating a thematic bond falls to the first two contributors. Eminent sociologist of religion Peter Berger introduces the volume with a short article entitled "Orthodoxy and Global Pluralism," in which he sets the sociological stage for the rest of the volume—the problem that modernity poses to traditional religion. According to Berger, the assumption that modernity necessarily brings secularization has been "effectively falsified" (p. 8). However, the pluralism that accompanies modernity does challenge the dynamics of religious belief and practice (p. 10). The difficulty presented by this peaceful coexistence of diverse perspectives is a central pillar of this book. The task of introducing the second issue—the relationship of Orthodoxy to liberal democracy—belongs to James Billington, Librarian of Congress and one of the most respected Russian cultural historians. His sympathetic discussion of the centrality of Russia's Orthodox heritage concludes with the division of Orthodox perspectives into four groups—ultranationalists, reformists, institutionalists, and pastoralists (pp. 23-24). Ultimately Billington refuses to predict the direction Russia will go in the future but is sure that Orthodoxy will play a central role in guiding it.

The subsequent articles, which form the bulk of the book, discuss more specific topics. Eminent historians and sociologists of religion address issues from the effect of laws on religious diversity to popular attitudes toward church-state relations and political parties, as well as the all-important issue of religious education in public schools. Methodologies and conclusions vary widely and occasionally contradict each other, but the tension between these interpretations only adds to the singular impression of the extreme complexity of contemporary Russian society and perhaps serves to allay fears that Russia is moving away from a civil society. After

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Selected East European Cultural Figures

Name	Nationality and Occupation	Selected Major Works
Henryk Górecki (1933 -)	Polish composer	"The Third Symphony: Symphony of Sorrowful Songs" (1976)
Václav Havel (1936 -)	Czech writer, dramatist, and president	*Power of the Powerless* (1978; 1985); *Living in Truth* (1986); *Disturbing the Peace* (1990); *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965-1990* (1991); *The Art of the Impossible* (1998)
John Paul II [Karol Jozef Wojtyla] (1920-2005)	Polish pope	"Laborem Exercens [On Human Work]" (1981); "Slavorum Apostoli [The Apostles of the Slavs]" (1985); "Solicitudo Rei Socialis [The Social Concern of the Church]" (1987); *Crossing the Threshold of Faith* (1994)
Krzysztof Kieslowski (1941-1996)	Polish filmmaker	"The Decalogue" (1988-1989)
Leszek Kolakowski (1927 - 2009)	Polish philosopher and historian of ideas	*Main Currents of Marxism* (1976); *God Owes Us Nothing; A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism* (1995)
Milan Kundera (1929 -)	Czech novelist; now living in France	*The Joke* (1965); *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1982); *Immortality* (1998)
Adam Michnik (1946 -)	Polish historian and journalist	*Letters from Prison and Other Essays* (1986)
Czesław Miłosz (1911 - 2004)	Polish poet and novelist	*The Captive Mind* (1953); *Native Realm: A Search for Self Definition* (1959); *New and Collected Poems, 1931-2001* (2003)
Arvo Pärt (1935 -)	Estonian composer; now living in Germany	"Credo" (1986); "Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten" (1977); "St. John Passion" (1989); *Litany* (1994); *Kanon Pokajanen* (1997)
Michael Polanyi (1891 - 1976)	Hungarian-British scientist and philosopher	*Science, Faith, and Society* (1946)
Miroslav Volf (1956 -)	Theologian; born in Croatia of German-Czech parents; now living in the U.S.	*Exclusion and Embrace; A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (1996)
Slavoj Žižek (1949 -)	Slovenian political philosopher and cultural critic	*The Fragile Absolute or Why the Christian Legacy Is Worth Fighting For* (2000)

Cross-Cultural Issues Facing American Evangelical Missionaries in Romania

Andrew LaBreche

Editor's note:

Andrew LaBreche has served as an American missionary in Romania since 1997. Former field director for Greater Europe Mission in Romania and Moldova, he works with a team of 15 fulltime workers and scores of short-term missionaries each summer. He describes his theological orientation as "low-key dispensational."

In addition to published missiological and anthropological literature, Labreche based his investigation of cross-cultural issues affecting American missionaries serving in Romania upon the survey findings of the third European Values Study (1990 and 1999-2000), the World Values Survey (2003-), and his own firsthand surveys. The author administered questionnaires to 66 American evangelical missionaries and 43 Romanian Evangelicals in 2004-05. For background on the European and World Values Studies see Wil Arts, Jacques Hagenaars, and Loek Halman, eds., The Cultural Diversity of European Unity: Findings, Explanations and Reflections from the European Values Study *(Leiden: Brill, 2003); www.europeanvalues.nl; and www.worldvaluessurvey.org or www.wvs.ir.umich.edu.*

The greatest problem in missions is often not the message, but the messenger.

In the mid-twentieth century Bible translator Eugene Nida pointed out that the greatest problem in missions is often not the message, but the messenger.[1] For this reason the problems messengers face – or cause – on the field deserve serious attention. One particular challenge American evangelical missionaries face is their ethnocentrism.

Missiologist Miriam Adeney relates the story of a Mali Christian named Daniel Coulibaly describing how Mali believers sometimes feel working with American missionaries:

> Elephant and Mouse were best friends. One day Elephant said, "Mouse, let's have a party!" So they did. Animals came from near and far. They ate and drank and sang and danced. And no one partied more exuberantly than Elephant.
>
> When it was over, Elephant exclaimed, "What a party, Mouse! Did you ever see a more wonderful celebration?" But there was silence. "Mouse?" Elephant called. "Where are you, Mouse?" Then to his horror Elephant discovered Mouse – crushed on

the floor, stomped into the dirt, trampled to death by the enthusiasm of his friend Elephant. "Sometimes that is what it is like to work with you Americans," said Daniel. "It is like dancing with an elephant."[2]

One significant problem that seems to arise among American evangelical missionaries working in Romania is their assumption that Romanian Evangelicals are not really that much different from themselves. Even if one concludes that the differences are relatively small, compared to American-Asian cultural contrasts, for example, one can still profitably argue that "cultures somewhat different from one's own may in fact pose more problems for the culture crosser than those that are wholly different."[3]

Almost any honest discussion with Romanians will lead to the oft-heard complaint of an American superiority complex: they think they have "all the answers," "come with their own agenda," and are "proud and arrogant." Subtly and almost unknowingly, through both secular and religious culture, many American missionaries are imbued with a sense of triumphalism. Americans are eager for results that can be reported back home. They are captured by a "closure theology" that drives them to finish the job quickly. Missionaries, then, become teachers before learning the observational skills of good listeners. Too quickly they become the center of ministry activity rather than empowering those they have come to serve. As a corrective, my goal is to help American evangelical missionaries better understand themselves, know how they are perceived by Romanian Evangelicals, and ultimately learn how to better navigate Romanian culture for the sake of the gospel.

Many American evangelical missionaries working in Romania do not understand that they hold cultural values significantly at odds with those of Romanian Evangelicals. One significant reason for this ignorance is the missionary assumption that American values are the norm and universal to all cultures. Naïve ethnocentrism, which this sentiment reflects, amounts to "thinking one's own group's ways are superior to those of others."[4] Generally, people do not think about their value systems. They simply take for granted that their values are right. In fact, if they did not think they were right, they would not be held as values in the first place.

A Superiority Complex

The problem is not simply ignorance—assuming one's own culture is the only culture. Nor is the problem belief in the good qualities of one's own culture—all cultures have both good and bad elements, as Richard Tiplady has pointed out.[5] The problem arises when people become aware of others' values and reject them out of hand. This is true ethnocentrism.

At least since the 15th century the West's technical, economic, and military advantages have resulted in such overweening pride and arrogance that the West came to assume it possessed a superior culture as well. Americans, for example, are beset today by feelings of superiority which constitute one of the greatest barriers to American missionary participation in the spread of the gospel.[6] Thus, if an American missionary refuses to discuss, does not appear to know, or is not interested in the Orthodox contribution to Romanian culture, then this narrowness amounts to another instance of Western arrogance and ethnocentrism. Sadly, it is true that while many missionaries would agree with the need to understand the historic faith of Romania, in practice very few make any effort to take either formal or folk Romanian Orthodoxy seriously.

American missionaries should first of all be learners. Unfortunately, this is a maxim rarely followed. Because of ethnocentrism and the strong culturally derived passion to "fix things," too many American evangelical missionaries come to Romania with "all the answers" before they even have any idea of what questions should be asked.

Because of ethnocentrism, American Evangelicals often mistakenly equate their cultural values with biblical values, not seeing any difference between their understanding of a biblical world view and their own American evangelical world view.

Problems arise not when other cultures and their values seem strange, or perhaps even irrational; rather, problems emerge when missionaries judge values different from their own to be fundamentally wrong and biblically deficient. The result has been that "missionaries have succeeded in bringing a biblically informed world view, but one that is thoroughly contaminated by their culture."[7]

Both for Westerners in general and for Americans in particular, it is very easy to confuse what is biblical with what is cultural. Punctuality, for instance, which Americans treasure, does not seem to be addressed in Scripture. American missionaries should also remember that although the gospel is meant to bring change, this change must not be equated with adoption of Western or American values.

To an American missionary the message of the Bible may be clear. At least an American understanding of it may be clear. "Missionaries are often unaware of the cultural biases of their own Western ways of doing theology, which have been influenced by a Greek world view that stresses highly rational systems of thought. But this emphasis on detailed systematic theologies is foreign to many societies."[8]

This emphasis upon detailed theology at times is more than just foreign; American insistence upon definite and precise formulations of faith can be a source of cross-cultural conflict, especially in contexts or cultures that do not value precise formulations.[9] Romania is a case in point, where Orthodox Romanians stress an apophatic theology (defining what God is not), rather than the precision and rationality of Western and especially Protestant theology.[10]

This Western desire for a precise, logical understanding of faith also derives from the 18th century European Enlightenment which stressed strictly empirical reasoning and logic. With this outlook came the conclusion that more intuitive, less systematic thinking patterns in non-Western cultures were not only illogical but inferior.[11] Rather than interpreting Scripture from a single cultural, and thus limited, perspective, a biblical hermeneutic must begin with the Scriptures, which stand in judgment of all cultures, affirming that which is good and condemning that which is evil. Such a hermeneutic must proceed with a well-informed knowledge of both one's own and others' cultures.[12]

Enormous potential for cross-cultural conflict exists at this point. American evangelical missionaries passionately cherish the Bible, and second, their interpretation of it. At the same time, Romanian Evangelicals do not always read the Bible in a

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manner identical to the typical American evangelical missionary working in Romania. For instance, in many Romanian churches—unlike American evangelical churches—women keep their heads covered, remain silent in church, and do not wear jewelry, all with biblical precedents. Equating Western cultural behavior as automatically "Christian" behavior seriously undermines the witness of Western missionaries.[13]

An ethnocentric attitude of cultural superiority among American missionaries also emanates from the supposed experience and age of the evangelical churches in America compared to, for example, the relative youth of the evangelical church in Romania (Baptists since the mid-nineteenth century, Pentecostals since the 1920s) completely disregarding the fact that Christian churches existed in Romania more than 1,000 years before Europeans set foot on the North American continent. Related to this attitude is the paternalistic idea that in some sense the American evangelical church is the "mother" or sending church. Apart from the fact that even the evangelical church of Romania for the most part did not have historical ties to the American church, the Bible makes no distinction between "old" and "young" churches. Romania's Baptist churches are the descendents of German, not American, missionaries. Likewise, its early Pentecostal churches are the result of other non-American missionaries. Nowhere in the New Testament are the churches of Palestine treated as separate entities, distinct from those of Asia Minor and Greece. "Nowhere is there any question of any authority which the older churches exercise over the younger. Throughout the entire New Testament the church is referred to as a living whole, a unity growing out of a single root, and built upon a single foundation."[14]

Equating Western cultural behavior as automatically "Christian" behavior seriously undermines the witness of Western missionaries.

The danger of this overly "protective" attitude of missionaries is well known. J. H. Bavinck gives common yet unfortunate results of this attitude of superiority. First, "the young church is kept artificially immature." Second, "the missionary himself begins to consider himself indispensable to the work."[15] As missiologist Sherwood Lingenfelter aptly notes, "Missionaries all too often appear as benefactors rather than as servants. This attitude grows not from an inherent carnality but rather is derived from the position of economic power that they so often have in relation to their national co-workers."[16]

Western paternalism often is reinforced by the sometimes intense desire of Romanian Evangelicals to adopt Western church practices. Although other factors such as financial gain can come into play, uncritical acceptance of all things Western can also be seen in the tendency of some younger Romanian churches to adopt all things that might be considered characteristically American: its evangelical music and choruses, printed church bulletins, use of overhead projectors, sermon summaries, and the promotion of small group fellowships. As far as these cultural practices are helpful and meaningful in Romanian churches, they are fine. But are they always helpful?[17] Should churches, instead, be planted that look and feel more Orthodox and less American? Or something different? These are questions for Romanian believers themselves to answer.

Of course, Romanians, as well as Americans, suffer from bouts of ethnocentrism. Romanian Evangelicals generally are unaware of the broader historical and cultural influences upon them. They tend to view their total way of life as biblical and also indigenously Romanian rather than as indebted to any foreign influence. Years ago a fellow missionary related to me a conversation he had had with a Romanian believer about the hymns sung in church. My colleague asked if the translations of the hymns they sang "sounded Romanian." The Romanian stated that of course they did. They were all Romanian melodies, including that famous Romanian hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," written by that famous Romanian song writer, Martin Luther.

Overcoming Ethnocentrism

An objective study of culture can at least raise one's awareness of one's own cultural traits and distinctives. Besides the limited gains from a textbook study of anthropology, the process of actual cross-cultural living itself can often assist in helping one to develop a better understanding of another culture.[18] As for cross-cultural conflicts, understanding the other person allows one to recognize, for example, that what appears to be offensive behavior by a person from the "other side" may not be intended to offend, nor considered offensive in that person's culture. Once the parties in a cross-cultural "incident" understand that no one meant to offend, misunderstanding can be avoided. Particular behaviors may still strike one side as wrong, rude, or unnatural, but chances are they will no longer judge the other culture quite so harshly.[19]

Some very simple and practical advice for gaining a better understanding of other cultures was given in the 1950s by Coptic Bishop Antonios Marcos regarding his church's mission in sub-Saharan Africa. The cross-cultural principles he taught follow:

- Listen well and observe carefully before drawing any conclusions.
- Understand the mind of the people and their way of thinking before doing anything that may conflict with their customs and belief. This will avoid initial rejection.
- Learn their language. You will thus win hearts because people's tongues are very dear to them.[20]

One's Own Culture

One reason for the importance of knowing one's own cultural assumptions is the fact that culture creates unconscious blinders that hinder one's ability to understand another culture and value system objectively. The simple fact is that people do not act "naturally," that is, in accordance with a universal value system, but in accordance with the cultural assumptions they have learned since childhood.[21]

That is not to say that one must abandon biblical principles or absolutes in the name of cultural relativity. But it is necessary to learn to adapt to new and different ways of perceiving reality and to realize one's own cultural biases.[22] These two abilities are very difficult to learn without understanding one's own culture. "Once we have an understanding of who we are," then it is possible to "investigate the values of others."[23] Nothing is wrong with having been brought up in a particular Christian context, whether American or otherwise. What is important is to realize and remember that context is local and not universal.[24] ✦

Notes:

[1] *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 251.
[2] "Telling Stories: Contextualization and American

Missiology" in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue,* ed. by William D. Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 377.
[3] Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1995), 14.
[4] For a website devoted exclusively to ethnocentrism see: www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/html. [5] "Let X=X: Generation X and World Missions" in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue,* ed. by William D. Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000). Richard Tiplady is president of International Christian College, Glasgow, Scotland.
[6] J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterean & Reformed, 1960), 133.
[7] Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 12.
[8] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 214.
[9] *Ibid*.
[10] Particularly helpful in understanding the concept of apophatic theology are Vladimir Lossky, "The Divine Darkness," Chapter 2 in *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976); Vladimir Lossky, "The Negative and the Positive Way," Chapter 1, Section 2 in *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994); Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994); and Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 56.
[11] Nida, *Customs and Cultures,* 6.
[12] An excellent critique of Western theology and its deficiencies is found in Reginald Bibby, *Fragmented Gods* (Toronto: Irwin, 1987).
[13] S. A. Grunlan and M. K. Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 56.
[14] Bavinck, *Introduction to the Science of Missions,* 192.
[15] *Ibid.,* 197.
[16] Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture,* 144.
[17] Bavinck, *Introduction to the Science of Missions,* 105, 188, and 178.
[18] Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 445-46.
[19] Craig Storti, *Americans at Work: A Guide to the Can-Do People* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 2004), 3-4.
[20] Francis Omondi, "Coptic Community, Spirituality, and Mission" in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue,* ed. by William D. Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 512.
[21] C. M. Arensberg and A. H. Niehoff, eds., *Introducing Social Change: A Manual for Community Development,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Aldine, 1971), 208; Serena Nanda, *Cultural Anthropology* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 27-28.
[22] Marvin K. Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture: A Strategy for Cross-Cultural Evangelism,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 241; David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 34.
[23] Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin Keene Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986), 119.
[24] Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 235.

Edited excerpts published with permission from Andrew LaBreche, "Ethnocentrism. U.S.-American Evangelical Missionaries in Romania: Qualitative Missiological Research into Representative Cross-Cultural Value Based Conflicts," Ph.D. dissertation, Evangelical Theological Faculty of Leuven, Belgium, 2007. Additional excerpts from this dissertation will be published in future issues of the East West Church and Ministry Report.

Conversion and Defection among Roma (Gypsies) in Bulgaria

Richard Y. Hibbert

Editor's note: The first portion of this article was published in the previous issue of the East-West Church and Ministry Report *18 (Summer 2010): 8-11.*

Leader Suggestions for Reducing Defections

Surveyed leaders made recommendations for helping people grow in their faith, helping them continue coming to church, and helping those who had left the church to return. Leaders recommended visiting people in their homes, teaching (especially young people), and gathering Millet believers together for meetings when abroad.

Visiting people in their homes was the most frequent suggestion for helping people come back to the church. One leader gave a poignant example from his own life:

> I left the church and God's way. I was in the world the whole summer. I came back to the Lord's way in late 1991. I went to the hospital and the brothers came to visit me there. They didn't forget me. I was in the hospital 47 days. I knew that this sickness was from God and that he wanted me to put things right. I understood this. I didn't expect the brothers would visit me but when they did, I completely changed. It really touched my heart deeply and I made a decision to go back to the church as soon as I left the hospital.[1]

Another leader generalized the application of this example with the following axiom: "Visiting people is the single most important thing in bringing them back to church. If you go and visit them, some come back. If you don't visit them, they don't come back."

Two leaders stated that teaching, especially young people, was the most important means of helping people grow in their faith and keeping them in the church. Both underscored the need to teach people the real meaning of the Scriptures, as well as being an example to them. One leader emphasized that normally it is years after people start coming to church that they understand the gospel. The second leader explained: "We need to put more effort into making special meetings for youth and children. At the moment, we don't have any at all." He felt this need was particularly urgent in view of the rapidly increasing number of

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Millet youth becoming addicted to drugs, a problem which began in 2003. Another leader suggested that Millet believers working abroad should gather together regularly for worship: "It's important to meet together and pray and sing hymns so that believers will be before God all the time and won't become greedy for money and won't start worshipping money."

Sustained growth of village churches in one region ran counter to expectations. The explanation may be found in a feeding program that a town church operated with West European Christian funding. This outreach provided hot lunches most days of the week in several villages. Experience in other areas of Bulgaria, including my own and that of John Taylor,[2] suggests that when food distribution stops, church attendance declines. This approach to church planting apparently bears fruit in the short term. However, it also has the inherent danger of promoting "rice Christianity" which is likely to stimulate defections once feeding programs stop.

"Visiting people is the single most important thing in bringing them back to church. If you go and visit them, some come back. If you don't visit them, they don't come back."

Reasons for Leaving Church Given by Defectors

Reasons given by defectors for leaving church corresponded closely with those given by regional coordinators and by pastors, as well as with explanations offered by others interviewed. The 20 defectors interviewed gave four main reasons for leaving: 1) Being hurt by or disillusioned with their pastor or group of pastors (11 cases); 2) other commitments which seemed to be a cover for actions they—or others—considered wrong or sinful (four cases); 3) opposition from husbands (two cases); and 4) conflict with another believer (one case).
The predominance of leader-related reasons for departures is not unexpected, given the lack of opportunities for seminary training or support available to Millet pastors. Many leaders began pastoring churches while they themselves had been believers for only a few months or a few years.

The specific behaviors of leaders that former church members found hurtful or disillusioning included leaders acting independently, making decisions about money alone, misusing money, insulting parishioners, engaging in questionable behavior, and failing to visit church members facing difficulties. An inappropriately authoritarian style of leadership seemed to be at the heart of most pastoral shortcomings. Heavy-handed leadership appears, in turn, to derive from poorly contextualized Bulgarian denominational policies requiring a single, male leader and leadership patterns which fit poorly with Millet cultural values of togetherness and inclusiveness. Some missionaries among the Millet have made the same observation that an authoritarian leadership style has contributed to the decline in the Millet church movement.[3]

Another missionary hypothesis associates the decline with the transition from female to male leadership. Women church leaders would have had much more limited opportunity than men to copy the headstrong Bulgarian church leadership style, and the role of women in Millet culture does not lend itself to authoritarian behavior. Another contributing factor may be the process of institutionalization, as described by Thomas O'Dea, with its tendency to generate mixed motivations among leaders, including self-interest and desire for prestige.[4]

One of the most striking findings of this study is that all Millet defectors (except for one who became a local Muslim *imam*) still expressed belief in Jesus and continued to pray regularly. An estimated 6,000 or more Millet who no longer attend church may still have faith in Jesus. This statistic has important implications for future church growth among the Millet, with a large pool of people who are positive toward Jesus, but who are not currently part of any church.

Deficient conversions also contributed to church defections. Utilitarian concerns that revolved around God's giving them what they asked for and his protection for them and their children were the most important features of Christianity for Millet converts, both those who have remained active in church and those who have left. Unmet needs characterize the accounts of at least three converts who left the church: They became disappointed with God when their desire to become pregnant, receive healing, or see a change in their husband did not occur. Although utilitarian concerns appeared to be the main reason behind defections, these individuals, surprisingly, still maintained that they had found deep and fulfilling meaning in being a Christian. They were continuing to experience a relationship with God characterized by prayer and the sense of His ongoing presence in their lives.

Reviving the Millet Church Movement

The unanticipated finding in this study that almost all those who left the church still believed in Jesus, prayed to Him, and viewed church meetings positively suggests that appropriate evangelism among defectors could bear fruit. At the time of the interviews most who had left the church were positive about the thought of returning, but were prevented from doing so by a sense of sin or shame. According to many of the pastors, visiting lapsed members in their homes was the most important action that could be taken to bring them back into the fold. Put succinctly, "If you go and visit them, some come back. If you don't visit them, they don't come back." The simple act of visiting defectors in their homes and asking them about their departure led many interviewees to thank me and the believer who took me to their home. Many admitted that they were longing for such visits. Therefore, if initiative is taken by other believers – both fellow church members and leaders – to visit defectors in their homes, it seems likely that the warmth expressed by this action may overcome their sense of sin and shame.

For those whose departure from church stemmed from disappointment with leaders, reconciliation with those leaders is essential if defectors are to be won back. This resolution generally will require the initiative and willingness of the leader to ask for forgiveness. Both present and former church members stressed that their first church meeting had played a major role in their faith development. This finding underscores the importance of believers' gestures of concern and friendship extended to first-time church visitors. These facts readily suggest actions that should be taken by Millet churches. First, Roma churches need to recognize the importance of newcomers' first church meeting and to realize that they often come with a strong felt need, often a need for healing. Second, Roma believers should take the opportunity to ask first-time attendees about their specific needs and to pray for them then and there. Third, it would be well if some church members intentionally build relationships

with newcomers. Preferably a small group of believers would take this initiative because interviewees in this study expressed particular appreciation for the care shown to them by groups of believers.

Home Visitation Vital

Perhaps the most important single activity for Millet church believers to stem defections is to visit the homes of people who have missed one or two meetings. Those interviewed reported that such gestures from fellow believers were the most important factor in shoring up the faith of those who were tempted to leave the church. Visits, encouragement, and prayer led many of those who had temporarily stopped coming to return. Churches that organize teams to regularly visit lapsed members and those known to be in difficulty should expect positive results. Where possible and relevant, material help from the church may be a powerful, tangible expression of care.

Believers also need support when they work abroad. According to many interviewees, the experience of being alone while away from home led people to grow cold in their faith. On the other hand, those who went abroad to work who gathered regularly with other Millet believers shared that they grew in their faith. Two strategies could be employed to prevent the loss of members working abroad. First, believers who decide to go abroad to work should be encouraged to go as a group with other believers and to find accommodations together or to join believers who are already in another country. Second, pastors could train believers who are planning to go abroad to lead worship meetings and to provide pastoral care for Millet working away from home.

An authoritarian leadership style, which characterizes many ethnic Bulgarian churches, appears to have been adopted in all of the Millet churches under study. This, in turn, has led to leaders acting in an overbearing and insulting manner toward church members. Patterns of decision-making in Millet society, in contrast, tend to be much more consultative, with a high degree of group participation. Alternative patterns of leadership in Millet churches should be explored. My observation is that plural leadership characterized the early phases of many Millet churches, whereas the emergence of a single male leader has often led to tensions and envy among other men in the church. The leadership model of the Millet extended family, which involves plural leadership combining several of the oldest members, including women, and one or two middle-aged spokespersons (men and women), should be considered.

New structures for gathering and supporting one another as believers – indeed for being church – seem to be emerging. A fruit seller shared that after 16 years of being a believer, he had discovered the true meaning of church. He and a small group of believers had been meeting in a home for more than a year and had found the support of this small house church invaluable. "We really care for each other, and are constantly on the phone to each other," he said. This small group structure may lead to greater commitment and fewer defections by increasing the intensity of social interaction and expressions of care for one another, what Rodney Stark and Roger Finke call the density of the social network.[5] A small group structure like this, whether in the form of house churches, a cell church structure, or home groups of a larger congregation have great potential.

Rigid denominational membership requirements led some regular attenders to leave churches following distributions of material aid to members only. This policy and the denominational requirement that church members tithe, tend to marginalize those who attend church regularly but who are not members. Such practices, which run counter to Millet cultural values, undermine rather than foster church loyalty.

The almost complete lack of youth and children in Millet church meetings, and the lack of separate meetings for them, suggest that youth do not find church appealing. Pastors interviewed, as well as sociologists including Rodney Stark,[6] have identified inadequate socialization of youth as a major cause of church decline. One solution would appear to be meetings for children and youth that are more inviting.

Problems with leadership were the most frequently cited explanations offered for defections. Therefore, strategies aimed at improving the quality of pastors are crucial, not only in preventing decline, but also in fostering the health of the Millet church movement. Specific steps should include improved leadership selection stressing character traits essential for successful ministry. Leadership development for Millet church leaders is extremely limited, especially for those whose first language is Turkish. Opportunities for Turkish-language pastoral training should be increased. In addition, non-residential programs will be necessary because the majority of pastors are not able to leave their homes for long periods of time. Training done in groups, with more than one pastor from each multi-congregation neighborhood, is likely to help foster positive relationships among leaders and may help overcome some of the conflicts among pastors. Trainers also need to emphasize conflict resolution, together with mentoring. Finally, ongoing support and encouragement of pastors is sorely needed because most have no access to a mentor or other trusted person with whom they can share their struggles. The development of peer mentoring may be one way to address this need.

Churches that organize teams to regularly visit lapsed members and those known to be in difficulty should expect positive results.

Implications for Other Mission Contexts

Those who leave churches, especially if they have stopped participating in church life for several years, are often assumed to be apostates who have given up both attending and believing. However, the finding of this study is that almost all Millet defectors still believe in Jesus and still hold positive views of the church Therefore, it should not be assumed that defectors are apostate; many may still believe. In turn, it may be possible to develop ways of drawing lapsed Millet believers back into fellowship with other believers in existing or in new churches. ✦

Notes:

[1] Unless otherwise noted, direct quotations are taken from Hibbert's dissertation survey research without attribution.

[2] John Taylor, interview with author, combined with Excel file of church attendance with notes on 2001 developments, 2008.

[3] David Richards, phone conversation with author, August 2006.

[4] Thomas O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas in the Institutionalization of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1 (1961), 30-39.

[5] Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

(continued on page 12)

Conversion and Defection *(continued from page 11)*

[6] Rodney Stark, "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model" in *The Future of New Religious Movements*, ed. by Rodney Stark (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987).

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Social Ministry and Missions in Ukrainian Mega Churches: Two Case Studies

Catherine Wanner

Religious Pluralism

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a commitment to religious pluralism was incorporated into the very idea of the Ukrainian nation, at a minimum to accommodate the various Orthodox churches and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, all of which claim to be indigenous national institutions. The various splits and divisions among the three competing Orthodox churches in Ukraine—the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate, and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church—mean that no single "national" church can lay claim to a state-protected, privileged status. As a result, a comparatively tolerant legal and political climate has emerged in Ukraine toward minority religious communities and foreign religious organizations, allowing them to establish a formidable presence.[1]

Government Support for Religious Values

Many mission organizations have even made Ukraine their base of operations in the former USSR. From small bureaucratic concessions, such as eliminating the need for foreigners to obtain visas, to allowing religious organizations to receive and distribute humanitarian aid directly, the Ukrainian government has consistently demonstrated an atmosphere conducive to developing and strengthening religious institutions. Legislation in 2006 paved the way for religious-based instruction in all levels of education from preschool to higher education, claiming instruction in religious values will produce "highly moral and spiritual citizens, which will further the spiritual revival of the Ukrainian nation."[2] This 2006 law is one of many initiatives that have been adopted after 74 years of state-sponsored promotion of atheism.

Since the collapse of Communism, Ukraine, unlike other former Soviet republics, has become a center of publishing, seminary training, and missionary recruiting for a mulititude of faith groups.

A Missionary Sending Nation

Since the collapse of Communism, Ukraine, unlike other former Soviet republics, has become a center of publishing, seminary training, and missionary recruiting for a multitude of faith groups.[3] Currently, hundreds of Ukrainian missionaries travel to Russia and throughout the former Soviet Union annually to evangelize.[4] Ukrainian believers possess the cultural capital to elude state policies designed to stem the flow of foreign missionaries of "non-traditional" faiths proselytizing former Soviet citizens.

Analyzing the social ministries and mission activities of two transnational mega-churches that have firmly established themselves in Ukraine will illustrate how churches are revitalizing religious life in a highly secular society. A profile of these churches and their activities also begins to suggest what it means for believers and governments in Eurasia to have Ukraine develop as a base for missionary and clerical training.[5] Both of these churches are committed to the twin goals of reversing the rampant secularism they perceive in Eurasia and alleviating social suffering, inequality, and violations of biblical understandings of justice as they understand them.

Global Networking

The international ties and activities of these two churches illustrate the interrelated dynamics of saving souls from Communist atheism in the east as well as from European secularism in the west. Most religious communities in Eurasia are barely able to sustain themselves financially, let alone finance missionaries and social ministry. Thus, Western funds underwrite most charitable activities in Eurasia. In this way, Ukraine has become a global hub for these two churches, and for a multitude of others, linking Ukraine to international networks of religious organizations, and through its churches' mission outreach, to Eurasia and beyond.

Cultural Orthodoxy

Religious identity in Orthodox countries largely hinges on who one is, more so than on what one does. That is to say, in Eastern Christianity cultural, linguistic, national, and territorial identities frequently coalesce with confessional identities, synthesizing into a single national-confessional identity. This approach creates a nominal allegiance to Orthodoxy that is more a matter of cultural identity than spiritual conviction.

Nominal allegiance is most vividly manifest in a multitude of survey and ethnographic research that illustrates the often paradoxical categories that individuals commonly have used to describe their religiosity: Orthodox non-believer, Christian pagan, and, as Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko infamously has declared himself an Orthodox Communist.[6] These categories demonstrate an allegiance to the Orthodox Church based on a recognition of and respect for its contribution to national, historic, artistic, and intellectual achievements. An embrace of Orthodoxy often does not include religion. Although allegiance to the Church is often real and heartfelt, it often has little to do with religious practice. One does not have to do anything, not even believe, to consider oneself Orthodox. In other words, the relevance of Orthodoxy over time has become gutted of its religious content without diminishing the popular reverence for the achievements of those associated with the church. Hence, much to the frustration of social scientists, survey data are routinely peppered by responses of individuals who self-identify as "Orthodox" and "non-believer" in the same breath.[7] Such respondents understand Orthodoxy to encompass culture, community, a particular sensibility, and worldview.

It was in the midst of this context of nominalism and 70 years of state hostility to faith that the two churches profiled below were founded. Following the collapse of Communism, these two churches have thus far met with remarkable success in revitalizing religious and social life.

The Embassy of God

The Blessed Kingdom of God for People of all Nations, or the Embassy of God as it is known to its followers, has 25,000 members, making it the largest evangelical mega church in all of Europe. Founded in 1994 by Sunday Adelaja, a Nigerian self-taught Pentecostal pastor, the Embassy of God now has 38 churches in Ukraine and 18 abroad, including five in the U.S., four in Russia, two each in Belarus, Germany, and Holland, as well as others in the United Arab Emirates and India. Although the church faces serious political challenges, it still is very much of a force driving social change.

Hillsong

The second church is a daughter congregation of Hillsong, the largest church in Australia with 20,000 members. After creating a base in London, Hillsong opened a church in the center of downtown Kyiv in 1992 with the hope of using it as a gateway to Eurasia and particularly to Russia. Since opening the Kyiv church, Hillsong has planted a church in Paris and on 1 March 2007, its newest European church opened in Moscow.

Shared Characteristics

The Embassy of God and Hillsong share several features. Both are charismatic Pentecostal churches that feature expressive, even ecstatic, forms of worship. Doctrinally, they advocate belief in an inerrant Bible as the literal word of God, and they adhere to basic tenets of Pentecostal theology including prophecy, faith healing, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as evidenced by speaking in tongues. Both are led by husband and wife "preaching teams." Both, as well, now have a plethora of Ukrainians, both men and women, serving in a multitude of leadership positions. In contrast to almost all Soviet-era churches, including Pentecostal and Orthodox, they support a relaxation of the general suspicion of worldliness. In particular, they do not follow the strict codes of personal morality and ascetic lifestyle that characterized believers and their religious communities in Ukraine and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. Yet, these two churches retain an overall conservative slant on a variety of social issues, especially homosexuality.

Both churches also promote a belief that financial and professional success is a sign of God's favor.[8] Indirectly, such a principle endorses the virtues of neoliberal economic values by encouraging commitments to individual responsibility, initiative, and charitable giving. Both churches masterfully exploit the media to advance and spread their visions for personal and social transformation. In sum, both churches offer much more that a set of religious beliefs. They foster self-conceptions that celebrate empowerment and fulfillment.

Race and Class Differences

Among the differences that separate these communities, however, are the important ones of race and class. Both churches display their foreign influences, associations, and connections in their names. However, when the Nigerian founder of the Embassy of God speaks of "peoples of all nations," he signifies that this church is particularly receptive to minorities, immigrants, and people of color.[9] Caribbean and African-American visiting preachers are interspersed in a steady stream of visiting white evangelical Americans. Miles Monroe from Jamaica as well as Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar from the United States, all strong proponents of prosperity theology, have been guests at anniversary celebrations. At nearly every service foreign delegations visiting the Embassy of God are presented to the congregation.

Use of Media

One of the reasons the Embassy of God is so widely known is that Sunday Adelaja is so adept in the use of media. He originally came to Soviet Belorussia in 1986 to study journalism, which convinced him of the power of modern means of communication. His church has its own publishing house where Adelaja's more than 40 books have been published (some in English), and its own television studio, which allows the church to use televangelism as a source for attracting religious seekers. He also can be seen preaching every week on TBN, the largest Christian broadcasting network in the U.S. ✦

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Notes:

[1] U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2002," www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71415.htm for Ukraine and www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71403.htm for Russia; accessed 26 March 2007. Myroslaw Tataryn, "Russia and Ukraine: Two Models of Religious Liberty and Two Models for Orthodoxy," *Religion, State and Society* 29 (September 2001), 155-72.

[2] See www.risu.org.ua, 16 February 2007; accessed 26 March 2007.

[3] Evangelical groups have become particularly prominent. For example, Kyiv alone currently has four Baptist and three Pentecostal seminaries, all of which have internet-based distance learning programs. See Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

[4] Patrick Johnson and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Publishing, 2001), 644-45.

[5] Currently, one-third of the world's Christians are either Pentecostal or Charismatics. See Martyn Percy, "The City on a Beach: Future Prospects for Charismatic Movements at the End of the Twentieth Century" in Stephen Hunt, Malcolm Hamilton, and Tony Walter, eds., *Charismatic Christianity: Sociological Perspectives* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 207.

[6] Larissa Titarenko, "On the Shifting Nature of Religion during the Ongoing Post-Communist Transformation in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine," *Social Compass* 55 (No. 2, 2008), 237-54. The charged and judgmental nature of the category "nominally Orthodox" prompts me to suggest instead use of the term "culturally Orthodox" to

(continued on page 14)

The Embassy of God has 25,000 members, making it the largest evangelical mega church in all of Europe.

Urkrainian Mega Churches *(continued from page 13)*

refer to those who have a hybrid form of allegiance to the Orthodox Church.

[7] Irena Borowik, "Between Orthodoxy and Eclecticism: On the Religious Transformation of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine," *Social Compass* 49 (No.4, 2002), 504.

[8] Some of the risks in contemporary Ukrainian economic life and how they are understood and experienced are illustrated in Catherine Wanner, "Money, Morality and New Forms of Exchange in Ukraine," *Ethnos* 71 (Winter 2005), 515-37.

[9] Although many Ukrainians continue to outmigrate in search of economic opportunities, other immigrants are settling in Kyiv, creating unprecedented levels of diversity as Ukraine emerges in the post-socialist aftermath as an immigrant sending *and* receiving country. See Blair A. Ruble, *Creating Diversity Capital: Transnational Migrants in Montreal, Washington, and Kyiv* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

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Korean Baptist Missions *(continued from page 16)*

form (*Isus Christos*). In addition, missionaries in Kazakhstan have adopted many of the Arabic names for the prophets which are common to the Bible and the Qur'an, such as *Isa* (Jesus), *Ibrahim* (Abraham), and *Musa* (Moses). To avoid ecclesiastical terminology which Muslims do not use, missionaries have translated *church* as "a congregation of believers," and *baptism* as "ritual of immersion into water."[5] To avoid offensive Russian Orthodox terminology, missionaries in Kazakhstan most often use the Persian word for God (*Kudai*), instead of the Arabic word (*Allah*) or the Russian word (*Bog*).

Kazakh Christians have also chosen not to use the cross on church buildings because non-Russians regard Christianity as a Russian religion and the cross as its symbol. For most Central Asians the Russian Orthodox cross has historically been a symbol of oppression. Through the nineteenth century the Russian Orthodox cross was often displayed on cathedrals fashioned on top of the Muslim crescent as a symbol of Orthodoxy's triumph over Islam.[6] The cover of the Kazakh Bible also uses an Islamic ornamental design in dark green, the Islamic holy color. Unfortunately,

> Not all aspects of ministry among the Kazaks [are] contextual, such as the loud, expressive manner of prayer with all participants praying out loud at the same time. Korean-led Kazak churches have adopted this form of prayer, although this does not appear to be a trait of other Kazak churches, nor of Muslim Kazaks while praying.[7]

In Kazakhstan, most churches planted by Korean missionaries have giant offices and sanctuaries, with several cell-group churches affiliated with big mother churches. In contrast, Korean missionaries currently are carefully considering adopting the Ga-Jung Church Model espoused by Young-Gi Chai, senior pastor of Seoul Baptist Church, Houston, Texas.[8] Ga-Jung churches differ from the typical cell church because they are autonomous and not dependent upon a mother church. The main purpose of a cell group is fellowship or Bible study, whereas the principal objective of a Ga-Jung church is to fulfill all the ministries of a local church.[9]

Most church planting movement (CPM) advocates argue against the building-based church, which frequently hinders rapid multiplication and can become a magnet for persecution.[10] However, most Korean Baptist missionaries do not agree. They are skeptical regarding CPM advocates' warnings about persecution, which they currently are not experiencing. Rather, Korean missionaries contend that Central Asian believers need the experience of being part of a large congregation in a large sanctuary, not just house churches. Furthermore, they point out that their church planting method is working and that persecution presently is not a problem. What can be said for certain is that divergent views on church planting are a matter of considerable controversy.

Korean missionaries have many strengths including endurance in difficult situations, a strong pioneering spirit, strong devotion to faith and missions, skill in discipleship training, and a strong vision for evangelism and church planting.

Strengths: In Summary

Korean missionaries have many strengths including endurance in difficult situations, a strong pioneering spirit which facilitates church planting, strong devotion to faith and missions, skill in discipleship training, and a strong vision for evangelism and church planting.[11] In addition, Koreans are spared the very heavy and negative historical baggage associated with Europe and America, which are burdened by the legacy of missionary expansion in tandem with colonization. Although they have not been free of their own cultural biases, Korean missionaries have been more effective than Western missionaries in penetrating Kazakh culture.

Weaknesses: In Summary

Korean missionaries suffer from a failure to compile written records, from a lack of cooperation, from a lack of cross-cultural understanding reinforced by their mono-cultural background, from a tendency to clone culturally Korean churches on the mission field, and from competition and conflicts among themselves, among their denominations, and among their mission agencies.[12] Traditionally, Korean Baptist missionaries work by means of a self-supporting system. Hence, they must raise funds for their ministry because they must satisfy the expectations of their sending churches and show visible results in a short period of time.

Rethinking Priorities

One of the most critical mistakes made by Korean Baptist missionaries has been their failure to entrust leadership to Kazakh Christians. Regardless of the assertions of Korean missionaries that they gradually relinquish their leadership role, the pace of transition is not quick enough. Andrew Byung-yoon Kim contends, "If Western missions were blamed for their paternalism, Koreans may be accused of authoritarianism in their mission deployment policies. As a result they may not treat local people as co-workers, but rather impose their own ways of doing missions."[13]

Korean Baptist missionaries must also realize that their stress upon physical buildings may have the negative consequence of making Kazakh converts dependent upon continued Korean financial support.[14]

Missionary Todd Jamison knows of "no self-financed evangelical church buildings among Muslim-background believers in former Soviet Central Asia. Foreign sources have either totally or partially financed all current structures."[15]

Korean missionaries should think of Central Asians, including Kazakhs, as a bridgehead to reach Muslim Turkic peoples. Turkic Christian converts of Muslim background are more effective than Western or Korean missionaries in evangelizing Muslims.

Lack of experience with cooperation at home and inadequate training for cross-cultural missions help account for inadequate cooperation among Korean missionaries in Central Asia.[16] Sending missionaries who lack adequate preparation commonly produces problems that ultimately affect the vitality of Central Asian churches. Paying nationals to conduct ministry, for example, in the tradition of "rice Christians," only undermines sustainable church growth. Accordingly, Korean churches must concentrate on missionary qualifications, not on the number of missionaries sent. More emphasis must be placed on quality than on quantity.[17] In addition, looming concerns that will increasingly challenge Korean Baptist missionaries in Kazakhstan include the rapidly rising cost of consumer goods and real estate, the growth of Islam, growing Kazakh nationalism, increasing legal restrictions on missionary visas and church registrations, and declining church growth.

Notes:

[1] Min-Ho Chu, interview by author, 1 June 2007, MP3 recording, Fort Worth, TX.
[2] Todd Jamison, "A Historical Study of Evangelism and Contextualization of the Gospel among the Kazak People of Central Asia," Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminarry, 1999, 182.
[3] Todd Jamison, "Reaching the Muslim Majority: The Responsibility of the Korean Church in Evangelizing the Kazakhs of Central Asia," [n.d.], unpublished paper presented to the author.
[4] Jamison, "A Historical Study," 145.
[5] The director of the Central Asian Russian Scriptures Project, e-mail message to author, 11 December 2007. For reasons of security, the director's name is not given.
[6] Jamison, "Reaching the Muslim Majority."
[7] Jamison, "A Historical Study," 174.
[8] Ga-Jung is interpreted as "home or house church." The Ga-Jung Church represents a specific type of Korean house-church model with a united corporate body for supporting several house churches. According to Young-Gi Chai, Ga-Jung Church is the gathering, location-based concept, while cell church is size-based. Young-Gi Chai, "The 43rd Ga-Jung Church Seminar," 29 January-3 February 2008. Seminar guidebook provided by Ga-Jung Church Ministry, International, 2; and "What is 'the House Church,' " accessed 31 January 2008; available from http://housechurchministries.org/about/html/about1_1_e.html.
[9] Eric Shin, "House Church Shepherds and Interns Training Manual" (Houston: New Life Fellowship, n.d.), 3. Eric Shin is a pastor of the New Life Fellowship, which is an English-speaking congregation in Seoul Baptist Church of Houston.
[10] Jamison, "Reaching the Muslim Majority."
[11] Howard Norrish, "An Evaluation of the Performance of Korean Missionaries," [n.d.], 4-5, obtained from Andrew Kim; Matthew Jeong, "Hanguk Sayeokja-ui Segyehwa-wa Hyeobryeok [Globalization and Cooperation of Korean Missionaries]," paper presented at the Annual Consultation for Korean Missionaries, Kyrgyzstan, 17 August 2006, 10.
[12] Norrish, "An Evaluation of the Performance of Korean Missionaries," 5-7; and Jeong, "Hanguk Sayeokja-ui Segyehwa-wa Hyeobryeok," 11-12.
[13] Andrew Byung-yoon Kim, "Rethinking of Korean Missions," *Journal of Asian Missions* 1 (1999), 113.
[14] Wonsuk Ma, "Mission: Nine Hurdles for Asian Churches," *Journal of Asian Missions* 2 (2000), 112.
[15] Todd Jamison, "House Churches in Central Asia: An Evaluation," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 43 (2007), 193-94.
[16] Myung Hyuk Kim, "Principles of Two-Thirds World Mission Partnership" in *Partners in the Gospel: The Strategic Role of Partnership in World Evangelization,* ed. James H. Kraakevik and Dotsey Welliver (Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, 1992), 131.
[17] J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission: A Panoramic View of Missions from Pentecost to the Present,* rev. ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 176.

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Paying nationals to conduct ministry, for example, in the tradition of "rice Christians," only undermines sustainable church growth.

Book Review Lippman *(continued from page 5)*

all, a multiplicity of public voices is a hallmark of civil society. The final articles by Paul Froese and Sebastien Peyrouse might seem out of place on the surface, given that they primarily discuss problems of Islam and state in Central Asian republics. However, the themes of pluralism and democracy, introduced by Berger and Billington, certainly play into these concerns of the post-Soviet region.

Excepting the minor typographical errors that occur all too frequently, the project is quite successful. Exceptional research by eminent scholars from a variety of fields succeeds in painting a complex but nuanced picture of Russian religion, society, and politics while simultaneously underscoring that questions of pluralism and politics are dominant throughout. It is a much-needed antidote to the fear-driven and often simplistic assumptions of many about the state of Russian religion and politics today. ✦

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Korean Baptist Missions in Kazakhstan

Weonjin Choi

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Weaknesses of the Korean Missionary Effort

Reluctance to Surrender Authority

One of the most critical issues facing Korean Baptist missionaries today is widespread reluctance to transfer leadership to indigenous peoples and churches. The causes, I would argue, relate more to cultural than to biblical principles. Some missionaries have remained for more than ten years at churches they have planted, even though these churches have grown enough to be able to send out their own missionaries. Korean missionaries still remain at the head of the largest Kazakh congregations in Kazakhstan.

Ironically, Korean churches, which came to reject the domination of Western missionaries, tend to dominate and control their church plants on the mission field.

The majority of Korean Baptist missionaries place a strong emphasis upon continuity, partly as a reaction to the discontinuity they perceive in Western church planting. According to Min-Ho Chu, the first Kazakh churches that Southern Baptist International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries from America started in Kazakhstan struggled with leadership issues caused by missionaries' frequent departures.[1] According to missionary Todd Jamison,

> Many Kazakhs feel hurt when Americans come and go. Kazakhs invest a lot to welcome foreigners, and often build significant relationships with them. We come and go, but Kazakhs remain. Careful thought as to the effect that short term relationships have on Kazakhs must be made. A concern is that many will discontinue their interest in the gospel to avoid the pain of short-term relationships.[2]

Authoritarian Leadership Style

The reluctance to "pass the baton" derives partly from the Korean style of leadership. Koreans do not completely trust the ability of Kazakh nationals. They are concerned that churches will not survive if they leave. Hence, they continually try to care for nationals, while safeguarding their authority. This idea can naturally lead to paternalism and dictatorial, egotistical leadership.

Korean missionaries have been heavily influenced by a domineering style of leadership that can be traced from Confucianism to shamanism, to the Japanese occupation (1910-1945), to the two-year military service of almost all Korean males, to the military government from 1961 to 1992. Ironically, Korean churches, which came to reject the domination of Western missionaries, tend to dominate and control their church plants on the mission field. This authoritarian Korean leadership style is one of the greatest unresolved problems in Korean Baptist missions.

The Financial Burden

Unlike IMB missionaries, all Korean Baptist missionaries must support their own financial needs. Korean missionaries have to raise funds by recruiting supporting churches, in addition to their sending church. One reason they do not leave the churches they plant is because their supporting churches might not approve of their departure for a new work and might withdraw support. Korean churches have been known to consider churches on mission fields as their church branches and sometimes use them to boast of the expansion of their ministries.

The Mega Church Syndrome

The most prevalent mistake Korean missionaries make on the field is becoming the pastor of the local church they planted. Most Korean missionaries experience the mega church syndrome: big church building, more people, and more facilities, the pattern they know from home. Korean churches typically are impressed by numbers of new believers and decide to support missionaries who have already won a great number of converts on the mission field. This mega church mania derives from the high expectations of Korean sending and supporting churches and leads to unhealthy competition among missionaries.

For more biblical and effective church planting models, nationals must assume responsibility for their churches. Thus, Korean missionaries need to carefully reconsider their church-planting timetable and should more readily transfer leadership to national leaders under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A Lack of Contextualization

Some Russian-speaking churches failed to reach out to Kazakhs until the latter part of the 1990s because they were not culturally sensitive.[3] The most difficult obstacles for Russian Christians to overcome are the entrenched opinions among most Kazakhs that Russians are usurpers and that Christianity is a Russian religion. Cultural barriers and struggles still remain between Russian Christians and Kazakhs. As a result, as Todd Jamison notes, "If the Kazak church appears too Russian or too Western or too Korean, there will eventually be a rejection by the culture at large—a rejection, not of the gospel, but of the form that the gospel has taken."[4]

In an effort to contextualize the gospel, Korean Baptist missionaries use the Kazakh term for the Holy Bible (*Kieli Kitap)* instead of the Russian word (*Biblia*). Also, they employ the Arabic form for Jesus Messiah (*Isa Maasich*) instead of the Russian

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