EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT

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# Tithes, Offerings, and Stewardship in Russian Evangelical Churches

Sergey Chervonenko with Mark R. Elliott

*Editor's Note: The present article consists of excerpts from the author's 2017 Asbury Theological Seminary doctor of ministry dissertation. In addition to published literature, it is based on findings drawn from 32 participant interviews and surveys: 74 percent pastors and ministers, 11 percent bishops, 11 percent Christians in business, and 4 percent deacons, primarily from central regions of Russia (65-70 percent) and the remainder from southern, western, and Far East regions. The author drew additional findings from approximately 27 pastors in a group meeting.*

## Russian Church Dependence versus Chinese Church Self-Reliance

After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of Communist Party rule, Russia experienced better than a decade of unprecedented freedom of religious expression. In this new environment Russia's Evangelical churches faced altogether new challenges. One of the pitfalls posed by new freedoms may be illustrated by the experience of one Evangelical church in Russia that had about 100 members. A large church from overseas gave this congregation a sizeable donation. The pastor and church leaders thought, "How should we use this donation?" They made the decision to build a new church with seating for 300 people. They hoped someday to have this number of people. The donation covered about 50 percent of their building plan; and for the next couple of years the whole church budget was spent for one purpose—to finish the building. Nothing was spent on evangelism, Sunday school, or other ministries. Finally, after about three years, the new church building was ready. By that time, only about 50 members were still in the church; all the other people had left. The remaining 50 people were not able to cover all the expenses of running this new building. They suddenly realized the number of mandatory payments for electricity, water, taxes, heating, land, and so on, that they could not afford. After a few months, they sold the building.

In contrast, in China churches have stressed three basic principles: self-government, self-propagation, and self-support. Because of Communist government control after 1949, churches could not expect financial or other kinds of help from overseas. I believe the forced necessity of self-reliance helped the Church in China become viable. In some ways, the government's pressure helped the Church become stronger. As a result, the Chinese Evangelical Church, despite government restrictions, is growing more than the Russian Evangelical Church in freedom. Why is this happening? The Chinese approach has been, "We have everything we need to build our Church." The Russian approach since 1991 has been, "We don't have anything; please help us." Why did this helpless attitude become so prominent in Russia, but not in China? Differing attitudes about stewardship may explain the difference.

## Was the Tithe Canceled in the New Testament?

A host of factors help explain Russian Evangelical churches' lack of self-sufficiency. A questionable interpretation of biblical teaching on tithes and offerings appears to be partly to blame. The theological perspective that Jesus canceled the tithe is widespread in Russia in both Orthodox and Evangelical churches. According to Russian Orthodox Church theologian Dionisiy Dunaev, "The Bible clearly says that Christ's sacrificial death and His glorious Resurrection put an end to the Jewish

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## A New Editor

Mark R. Elliott, founder of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* in 1993, completes 25 years as editor with the present fall 2017 issue. He is pleased to announce that Geraldine Fagan, an experienced reporter on religion in the former Soviet Union and author of *Believing in Russia—Religious Policy after Communism* (London: Routledge, 2013), has agreed to assume the helm as editor. Beginning with the winter 2018 issue, the *East-West Church Report* (new title) will be distributed as an emailed PDF. Additional information on the editorial transition will appear in the winter 2018 issue. ♦

ceremonial Law with its commandments," including the "commandment of tithing." Usually people associate the tithe with the Old Testament period and offerings with the New Testament period. The problem with this belief is that tithes and offerings are both in the Old Testament. It is not a case of Jesus canceling the tithe and introducing offerings. He clearly affirmed the tithe in Matthew 23:23: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." Here, Jesus approved both giving the tithe and justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

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A pastor's meeting in Moscow provided contrasting views on the subject of tithing. According to one pastor, "The tithe isn't a commandment for us, but an example." When I asked how and when this commandment was transformed into an example, he could not give an answer. Another pastor answered with these words: "Less than ten percent is lawless, ten percent is the Law, and more than ten percent is grace. We live by the grace of God." This is a great approach. I asked, "How many of us are teaching this approach in our churches?" I received the answer—mostly faces of shame.

## Holy Poverty

Historically both Russian Orthodox and Russian Evangelicals have viewed wealth negatively and holy poverty as the Christian ideal. Russian Orthodox saints, such as Sergius of Radonezh and Seraphim of Sarov are highly respected, even among nonbelievers. They were monks who lived in poverty in nature or in a monastery. Therefore, for Russian people the traditional belief is that holiness equals poverty. A struggle exists between holy poverty on the one side and the wish to know personally that "money can't make me happier." Christians want to be holy, but they do not want to be poor. So people prefer not to talk about money in church. If Russians do discuss biblical teaching on wealth and poverty, nine out of ten will remember Luke 16:13: "You cannot serve God and money." They are believers in holy poverty.

The common theological belief is that Jesus was poor, and that He chose to live that way. He had no money and taught others, "Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts" (Matthew 10:9). Therefore, pastors and people in churches believe that ministers must live in poverty because only in this way can they truly follow the lifestyle of Jesus. The majority of people who believe in this kind of theology apply this approach to pastors and ministers, but not to themselves.

The most popular Bible verse on this subject is 1 Timothy 6:10: "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith." Another popular verse is Luke 16:13: "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." In pastors' minds, and therefore in churches, this is the biblical view on stewardship—money is some kind of necessary evil.

Another popular verse is the story of the poor widow who put everything she had in the treasury. Her gift was the smallest, but for her it was not part, but all of her money (Mark 12: 41-44). Usually, people in Russian churches have a different understanding of this text: God does not really need our money; it does not matter how much we bring to the Lord; therefore, a tithe can be any amount, even a "couple of coins." This is an example of faulty exegetical reasoning. Christians with a better understanding of biblical texts on wealth and poverty believe that not money itself, but the love of money is the evil. Money is needed for one's livelihood.

## Avoiding the Topic of Money

Since conflicting views can lead to controversy, many pastors prefer to avoid the topic of tithes and offerings. Some pastors think about their ministry as something shameful, especially when they talk about tithes and offerings. They are ashamed to challenge people to bring their tithes to the church. In some churches money is actually a prohibited topic; they avoid using this word. If someone were to try to find contemporary writing in Russian on the topic of tithing, this search probably would uncover only one book, written by an American pastor who has lived in Russia many years (Rick Renner, *Desyatina i pozhertvovaniya* [*Tithes and Offerings*]). Russian pastors and theologians prefer to stay away from the topic. They do not want to preach about tithing. In churches during a worship service, some ministers (usually deacons) walk through the pews with offering baskets. People are singing a hymn and pretend not to see these baskets. When someone puts an offering into the basket, this person looks like they are doing something shameful. Thus, many pastors and their congregations still have an inner belief in holy poverty. This is the only theology they really know.

## Soviet Confiscation of Church Donations

Other factors contributing to the longstanding poverty of Russian Evangelical churches stem from restrictions placed upon them by an atheist state. In the Soviet era the Communist Party prohibited Christians from getting a higher education, which restricted most believers to menial jobs, with little income for church donations.

According to testimonies of ministers who were pastors in the Central Baptist Church in Moscow, the government made it mandatory to give approximately 80 percent of all offerings to the Soviet Peace Foundation, whose goal was to spread Communism in other countries. As a result, this "charity" had a huge amount of money derived from involuntary church donations. The former president of the foundation, chess master Anatoly Karpov, said that in 1989 this "peace" fund had the equivalent of seven billion dollars. Church members knew about this, so they did not want to give offerings in church. People looked for other possibilities to give to God—through personal help to people, using their money for ministry needs, etc. Of course, church people did

not talk about their efforts to avoid contributing to the Soviet Peace Foundation. While Christians did not give because they thought they had good reasons, the next generation of Christians did not give because they saw this example from the previous generation. The younger believers did not understand the meaning of withholding donations, just the behavior. In addition, in recent years in Russia the directors of several charity funds stole all the money and fled abroad. These scandals have greatly decreased the level of trust in any fundraising.

## Prosperity Theology Ascendant

Another factor that undermined responsible, biblical stewardship in Russia was the rise of prosperity theology. Especially in the early 1990s many missionaries from the West and the East (South Korea) taught a theology of prosperity. They told people that the true Christian would be "healthy and wealthy." It was very attractive for people who had lived behind the Iron Curtain in poverty. Especially in newly established churches this prosperity gospel became very popular among Evangelicals as an alternative to the ideology of "being poor is good." People in their minds connected the prosperity gospel and a wealthy lifestyle, especially because its missionary advocates were from wealthy countries. This theology raised questions in some Christians' minds: "Is it right that 'be holy' means 'live in poverty'?" Needless to say, people came to church with wrong ideas of becoming successful, healthy, and wealthy. Investment became the byword: "Invest your money in God, and he will give back to you with a percentage more." Such an idea corrupted tithes and offerings, transforming them into an instrument to gain profit.

People in Russia received this theology of prosperity joyfully. They were happy to hear that God wanted to make everyone wealthy and healthy. People also saw the Russian Orthodox Church, which proclaimed poverty for Christians, but had golden temples. This discrepancy between proclamation and reality could not be hidden. So many people accepted the richness of the Orthodox Church as a result of its ministry to God. As an aside, poverty is a greater threat to the Russian Evangelical Church than the Russian Orthodox Church because the latter has a very close relationship with the government, it owns land and tax-free businesses, and it receives other support from the government.

## Prosperity Theology Found Wanting

Many believers came to recognize that the teaching that "God wants to make every church member wealthy," was far removed from biblical examples and real life. At first, many churches grew very fast with the proclamation of the prosperity gospel. After a short time, however, more and more people became disappointed—nothing changed in their lives. So they left the church and blamed ministers and God for lying. Many people who were captured by the prosperity gospel and who were disappointed in church and God because they never became wealthy, left the church because of unfulfilled expectations. Furthermore, Christians witnessed large financial scandals in big prosperity gospel churches in the former U.S.S.R. Such fraud by church leaders strengthened the holy poverty believers' conviction that "money is evil."

## Western Donations Fostering Dependency

The growth of independent, self-reliant Evangelical churches in Russia has been undermined not only by longstanding idealization of "holy poverty" and the contrasting post-Soviet rise of the "health and wealth" gospel and disillusionment with it. Paradoxically, healthy, growing churches have also been weakened by Christians from abroad seeking to strengthen them. Following the demise of Communism in Soviet Bloc states and the sudden lifting of restrictions on freedom of religion, vast Evangelical resources poured into the region. Unfortunately, too often the giving was more generous than discerning, especially as it enfeebled churches by sapping their initiative and compromising their independence. Freedom from the Communists did not necessarily mean real freedom for the Church.

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Between 1990 and 2000 many different organizations, missions, and missionaries came to the ex-U.S.S.R. They brought their programs, plans, money, employees, and volunteers; but very often, local churches were not involved in the mission activity. Many older churches were not familiar with this kind of active evangelism, so most of them rejected it. Other churches accepted this activity and donations from overseas; that is what made them dependent on support from outside the church. Most Evangelical believers were happy to see the influx of missionaries and outside funding for a vast array of ministry projects. It was a blessed time for the churches, but it raised an old problem—people got used to it. The dependent mentality was actually inherited from the Soviet period. In the U.S.S.R., people thought that somebody else should solve every problem. After the U.S.S.R. ended, they had the same belief in the Church. Previously, the Communist Party solved all problems; now, missionaries and their money were to solve their problems. Total government control of the population had bred a mentality of helplessness, had stifled initiative, and had fostered an expectation that others would need to solve their problems. Someone else should take care of their needs—the government, later missionaries or an overseas church.

## Recognizing Wrong Thinking on Tithes and Offerings

Some Russian pastors came to recognize the danger of accepting any and all aid from outside. They often agreed that missionaries did many good things in the early 1990s, but, as one pastor said,

> We were like agents of a mission in our church. We got money from the mission, sometimes good money, and we used it for a mission trip, evangelization, etc. But we missed a very important part—our church wasn't involved in the process. By this I mean our people saw fruits of evangelization and mission trips, but all that was the result of the money and the work of someone else.

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Many people who were captured by the prosperity gospel left the church because of unfulfilled expectations.

## Tithes, Offerings, and Stewardship *(continued from page 3)*

As a corrective, another pastor came to realize, "People must be involved with their money. Donations coming in from outside had a bad influence on us." Pastors must stop being an agent of a mission. This does not mean that they must cancel all contacts and ministry with a mission. Rather, missions should work through and with the church. Church members must be involved in every activity with their own resources.

### A Biblical Theology of Stewardship

Today most Russian Evangelical leaders recognize that neither "holy poverty," nor "health and wealth" theology, nor dependence upon outside funding provide a way forward.

Today most Russian Evangelical leaders recognize that neither "holy poverty," nor "health and wealth" theology, nor dependence upon outside funding provide a way forward for their churches. These beliefs stand on the margins of Christian life. Some very conservative churches still believe in holy poverty; a few charismatic churches still preach the prosperity gospel. However, most believers have moved from those extreme beliefs, trying to find a more balanced approach. They continue to search for a biblical theology of stewardship, especially given the fact that the Russian language has no equivalent for the concept of stewardship. According to John Westerhoff, stewardship is "nothing less than a complete life-style—a total accountability before God. Stewardship is what we do after we say we believe." Communicating this approach to giving to Christians in Russia will require training in correct biblical stewardship that will include:

- biblical foundations for stewardship principles;
- good examples of stewardship, which people will want to follow; and
- the ability to teach stewardship to others and how to make it a personal lifestyle.

Teaching by example means pastors must be the first to practice stewardship. They should teach about it and show the congregation how to be stewards of God's gifts.

In addition, churches in Russia need to develop transparency regarding their finances in order to protect their reputation. Many church leaders ignore this important activity of communication with their donors. The usual financial feedback is just a notice of how much is spent on which needs. An example of bad stewardship comes from a businessman who gave a church 200,000 rubles ($3,000) every month to run a rehab center: "I don't know where my money goes or how they spend it." He received no reports from the pastor of that church.

One encouraging finding from a recent survey of Russian Evangelical pastors noted that the majority affirmed that churches need a biblical theology of stewardship (31 percent) or affirmed that pastors need training in stewardship (36 percent). Equally encouraging was the fact that, unlike in the 1990s, none believed that fundraising in the United States or Europe was the way forward.

The next step that is needed is to prepare resources on biblical stewardship for teaching pastors, lay leaders, and church members. One possible way to do this is to have seminary professors prepare and teach courses on stewardship. Also advisable would be short-term seminars and books on stewardship produced by Russian Evangelicals who know the cultural context better than Western Christian business speakers. ♦

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*Editor's postscript: See also Hans Vaxby, "Striving for Congregational Self-Sufficiency in Eurasia: A United Methodist Case Study,"* East-West Church and Ministry Report *19 (Summer 2011): 1-3; Anonymous, "Kazakh Church Dependence upon Foreign Support and Ways to Overcome It,"* East-West Church and Ministry Report *20 (Fall 2012): 1-5; Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert,* When Helping Hurts; How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor…and Yourself *(Chicago: Moody Press, 2012); and Robert D. Lupton,* Toxic Charity; How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It) *(New York: HarperCollins, 2011).*

# Campaigning for the Release of Irina Ratushinskaya: Personal Reminiscences

Dick Rodgers

Following the death of poetess Irina Ratushinskaya from cancer in July 2017 some excellent obituaries appeared. *East-West Church and Ministry Report* has kindly asked me to write something that is more of a personal reminiscence of campaigning for her release from prison.

I spent the 46 days of Lent 1986 in Birmingham, England, in a replica of Irina's punishment cell in a labor camp in the Perm Region of Russia. The purpose was to draw attention to her plight and her courage and to plead for her release from a 12-year sentence. Much of her time in Perm was spent in a punishment isolator cell defending her fellow prisoners, with her own health failing fast.

### My Interest in Russia

I had been interested in Russia and Eastern Europe since childhood, having a godmother who was the daughter of a Scottish cloth merchant in Moscow. Following the 1917 Revolution, she escaped overland around the northern shore of the Baltic Sea. After medical training and a curacy in the Church of England I was asked to make visits to Moscow and Leningrad to families of Christian

prisoners of conscience in labor camps, prisons, and psychiatric hospitals across the Soviet Union. Meeting these courageous people was a powerful, formative experience for me. It led me to set aside my surgical career to seek to change the situation. I felt, "Visiting the families of these courageous people isn't enough. These people shouldn't be in prison in the first place!"

## Launching the Campaign

I found a worthy case to champion in Irina Ratushinskaya. Keston College, the study center in suburban London, knew quite a lot about her. There was a photo and biographical detail and a husband (Igor) who was carefully keeping in touch with people in the West. Irina seemed to be a feisty woman of great talent and self-discipline amongst a group of women who were sticking together in prison and defending each other. Her health was failing in the arduous conditions of the punishment isolator cell. The more we learned of her, the more we admired her, and the more we realized she should be the focus for my campaign, thence to highlight the whole tyranny of the GULAG system.

After some months looking for a suitable place to make a public demonstration on Irina's behalf, the rector of St Martin's in the Bull Ring in Birmingham's city center allowed me to erect a replica of her cell in the back of the church. In solidarity with Irina I shaved off my hair, lived in my cell on a punishment cell diet of bread and water, and dressed in prison type clothes, for the whole of Lent, day and night.

Dissident Anatoli Shcharansky had been released the day before I started my vigil. BBC TV national news covered the start of my "imprisonment," which included shaving my hair in the presence of the local rabbi. People rallied round and kept me company. British Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Communists – they all helped in one way or another. It became a heartfelt team effort. People remember it. At various stages I had lots of kind support from celebrities, including Frankie Howerd, Richard Briers, Susannah York, Dennis Waterman, and Jeremy Irons. Many people wrote to the Soviet Embassy urging Irina's release.

When Easter came the vigil was over, and it appeared to have done no good. Irina was still in the labor camp. I developed contacts with others who were campaigning for her release, including the PEN club of international writers who were quite clever generating publicity for Irina's case. People in the U.S., Canada, and continental Europe, as well as Australia and New Zealand, all worked together in support.

## Lavrov and Shevardnadze

I took a petition for Irina's release to the Soviet Embassy in London where I met with a junior diplomat, Second Secretary Sergei Lavrov. We talked for 40 minutes. "Priests shouldn't get involved in politics – haven't you got sick people in your own prisons in Britain etc., etc." Still, it was a good conversation with Russia's future foreign minister! Round at the Foreign Office, Minister of State Tim Renton MP also received me warmly.

Back in Birmingham we heard that the then Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze was coming to London. A group of us went looking for him and happened to be outside the Soviet Embassy Residence in Kensington Palace Gardens as he emerged. I couldn't approach, but from some ten meters away I chanted loudly and clearly, "Osvoboditye Irinu Ratushinskuyu!" "Release Irina Ratushinskaya!" I continued loudly, clearly, and melodiously on and on, like an Orthodox priest chanting the liturgy. It reverberated around the big embassy buildings, not aggressively, but insistently. Just what I wanted. I am sure Shevardnadze heard me very well. The diplomatic police had to march me off, but ten yards down the road an officer muttered, "Brilliant! That was great!" I wasn't arrested—just shooed off.

Then news came from Keston College. Irina had been moved from her labor camp to a prison in Kiev. She was being offered her freedom as long as she would sign an agreement to behave better and curb the content of her poetry. Of course, she would not sign. It looked as if she might be returned to her remote labor camp.

## The Iceland Summit, Release, and Emigration

Campaigning churned on. The art world organized a reading of her poetry in central London which included actors, poets, and a government minister. Then we heard Reagan and Gorbachev were going to meet in Iceland for an historic summit meeting. It was at this 1986 conference that Gorbachev made his momentous offer to make a major reduction in the Soviet nuclear arsenal. I had to be there. I was there—but not before telling the Americans and the Russians I was going. It was a big push. The *Church Times* kindly made me a temporary journalist. At a pre-summit press conference I asked the Soviet delegation whether Irina Ratushinskaya would be released as a gesture of goodwill during the meetings. They gathered together laughing and then replied, "Irina Ratushinskaya will not be on the agenda of the summit." It was another put down!

Early next morning I was dozing in bed at the Salvation Army hostel when the manager knocked and told me there was a call from England. It was my wife. "Michael Bourdeaux of Keston College has just rung. Irina was released last night and without signing any agreement!" Well, I was overjoyed! I even splashed out and treated myself to soused herring for breakfast.…and essentially I have never quite been the same again after that moment.

At the Kiev apartment, Irina was still being harassed by the KGB and wanted to come out to the West, which she and Igor were allowed to do. BBC TV main national news covered their arrival at Heathrow Airport. Next day was coffee with Mrs. Thatcher at 10 Downing Street, including me, which was nice! Later, we put the replica cell up again at St Martin's and Irina and Igor visited to a tumultuous welcome, with a huge crowd in Birmingham. They made a home in London for many years and returned

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The more we learned of her, the more we admired her, and the more we realized she should be the focus for my campaign.

to live in central Moscow in 1998 when they judged it safe to do so.

Thirty years later I am once again reading up on Russia. It seems there are still some matters that need attention.

### Campaigns for Other Dissidents

I am so glad to have had this contact with Irina and other dissidents of immense courage. With a team I continued to work for the release of remaining prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union, one by one. These included Alexander Ogorodnikov (for whom Aidan Hart, the icon painter, managed a prolonged caged vigil in London), Anna Chertkova (a Baptist for whom my plumber friend Ray Davies conducted a prolonged vigil at a Southampton Church), and then Vasili Shipilov. In 1988 I conducted a Lenten Vigil at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, London, managed to collect him in person from a Moscow Psychiatric Hospital, and flew him to an Orthodox community in New York State where he lived out his remaining days. Finally, our campaign helped free *samizdat* historian Deacon Vladimir Rusak, and lastly, Mikhail Kukobaka.

In fairness to Mikhail Gorbachev, they all came out some three or four months after we made it clear that each in turn was the next one on our list. Then there were just 210 people left on Keston's prisoner list, which I took round to many of the Soviet and Western government teams at the Vienna on-going "Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe." Then the list was reduced to 100 prisoners by the time of my next CSCE visit. Then there were none left. And then in 1989 the Berlin Wall came down, and I had run out of people for whom to campaign. At that point I had to go out and get a proper job!

In the meantime I had offered Ogorodnikov (who is still my friend) an offset printing machine. People contributed. I took it to Moscow on a British Airways flight as my excess baggage – it was a big machine. The baggage handlers dropped it, possibly on orders of the KGB, and customs refused it admission, at which point I had to take it back to England. Eventually we sorted it out with David Alton's help (now Lord Alton). In the end we think it was the first officially imported *samizdat* (independent) printing machine. Alexander used it to print journals, but also later, leaflets urging the tank commanders in 1991 to refrain from firing upon the Russian Parliament—and they did refrain! Thirty years later I am once again reading up on Russia. It seems there are still some matters that need attention. ♦

**Rev. Dr. Dick Rodgers** *is the author of* Irina *(Triang, Herts, England: Lion Publishing, 1987).*

## Greenhouse Gardening for the Purpose of Self-Sustaining Ministry in the Former Soviet Union

Mark R. Elliott

Financial support from overseas for the Christian cause in the former Soviet Union undermines, rather than strengthens, the church when it thwarts the prospect for self-sustaining ministry and when it stifles indigenous initiative and stewardship. Funds were raised in 2014-15 for a 2016 greenhouse gardening project to demonstrate one approach to lessening dependence upon long-term outside contributions. The six sites selected for greenhouses included a church-based rehab center (Ukraine), a group home for orphans in foster care (Ukraine), a ministry center for orphan graduates (Russia), and the rural homes of three low-income, bi-vocational pastors (Ukraine).

Funds were raised in 2014-15 for a 2016 greenhouse gardening project to demonstrate one approach to lessening dependence upon long-term outside contributions.

Greenhouse sites were chosen that could serve to encourage replication by Eurasian churches and ministries by demonstrating how best to implement greenhouse cultivation on a modest budget. The demonstration greenhouses are relatively affordable (hence small in size); they are durable (hence rust-free galvanized steel framing and long-lasting polycarbonate panel covering); they hold promise of high yield (hence low-cost, gravity-fed drip irrigation); and they are characterized by low overhead (hence passive ventilation to avoid electric fans, and season extension, rather than winter cultivation, to eliminate fueled heating and increased maintenance costs). Requirements for each site included a one-month greenhouse gardening training course (Zaoksky, Russia, March 2016) and detailed record-keeping for inputs (labor, soil amendments, fertilizer, herbicides, and insecticides) and yield. Each site director was asked to plant only cucumbers and tomatoes in 2016 to simplify record-keeping. Site directors were free in 2017 and are free for subsequent growing seasons to make their own decisions on crop selection, fertilizing, etc.

A 38-page report on the greenhouse project addresses the above concerns through treatment of the following topics: definitions, greenhouse gardening benefits, the Mittleider Method of cultivation practiced at the Zaoksky farm where training took place, and specifics of greenhouse best practices including size; design; placement; orientation; foundation construction; framing; coverings; growing and transplanting seedlings; soil preparation; ventilation; watering; fertilizing; pruning; controlling weeds, plant diseases, and insects; harvesting; and marketing. The report concludes with an enumeration of practices to be avoided. Appendices provide an historic overview of the issue of dependency (Appendix I), a copy of the Greenhouse Garden Records Journal (Appendix II), and compilations of individual site and cumulative statistics on multiple categories of labor and yield (Appendices III-VII). The full report in English and in Russian may be downloaded at no charge from the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* website (www.eastwestreport.org). ♦

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

# Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: Will They Continue Their Sibling Rivalry or Make Common Cause in Combatting Secularization?

Mark R. Elliott

*Editor's note: The present article is a revised version of a presentation delivered on 6 September 2017 at the fifth meeting of the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England.*

## An Unusual Invitation

In October 2016 while in Russia, I was invited to speak at Kostroma Orthodox Theological Seminary by a longtime friend, Father Georgi Edelstein, a parish priest and professor at the seminary. Because of schedule conflicts, I was unable to accept this unexpected invitation. However, I did suggest that I might be able to speak at the seminary on a future trip to Russia.

Several developments made it possible for a group of Asbury Theological Seminary and Asbury University faculty and graduates from Kentucky to do just that in May 2017. 1) Kostroma Orthodox Theological Seminary Rector Georgi Andrianov invited up to ten Asbury faculty to participate in an international biblical studies conference in commemoration of the 270th anniversary of the seminary's founding. 2) Grant funding, along with more modest contributions from Asbury Theological Seminary and Wilmore Free Methodist Church, made the trip possible. 3) Finally, George Steiner, president of Orphan's Tree, a ministry to at-risk youth who have aged out of Russian orphanages, volunteered his staff to handle logistics in Russia.

As it turned out, half of 18 conference speakers were Evangelicals. With all that is currently negative in Russia's relations with the West and in light of the frequently strained relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and both Western and indigenous Evangelicals, the invitation for such a sizeable contingent of Evangelical faculty to speak in a Russian Orthodox conference struck me as highly unusual, if not unprecedented.

## Origins of the Invitation

Several circumstances appear to have played a role in prompting Rector Andrianov's invitation. First, I have enjoyed several decades of friendship and collaboration with Fr. Georgi Edelstein of the Kostroma Orthodox Theological Seminary faculty. He accepted my invitation to speak at a conference I organized at Wheaton College while I was on the faculty there; Father Georgi provided me with sage advice on numerous occasions as Riverchase United Methodist Church (Birmingham, AL) sponsored nearby Sudislavl Orphanage; I led two short-term mission teams from Clemson United Methodist Church and Southern Wesleyan University to work with orphans and to assist in the restoration of two of Fr. Georgi's three Orthodox churches; and I have published articles by and about Fr. Georgi in the *East-West Church and Ministry Report*, which I serve as editor. Through these many years of working together I was able to establish a strong relationship of trust with Fr. Georgi.

Second, Metropolitan Ferapont, appointed to the Kostroma Diocese five years ago, is supportive of positive working relationships with Evangelicals. As the Metropolitan explained, the study of the Bible provides common ground for all confessions, and he wanted conference participants to learn from each other. Finally, I have served as editor of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* for 25 years. It may be that the many articles published in the *EWC&M Report* aimed at balanced coverage of Orthodox Church life and improved relations between Orthodox and Evangelicals helped prepare the way for the invitation Asbury faculty received. In any case, I consider the opportunity afforded Asbury faculty and graduates to speak at the Kostroma Orthodox Theological Seminary conference to be one of the most unusual and significant invitations that has come my way in my 43 years of travel and ministry in Russia.

I consider the opportunity afforded Asbury faculty and graduates to speak at the Kostroma Orthodox Theological Seminary conference to be most unusual and significant.

## Evangelical Speakers at an Orthodox Conference

The International Biblical Studies Conference in Commemoration of the 270th Anniversary of Kostroma Orthodox Theological Seminary, 30-31 May 2017, included seven speakers from Russia, one each from Kazakhstan and Lebanon, and nine from the United States. The eight Asbury speakers provided the majority of the international contribution in their nine presentations, including addresses dealing with Old and New Testament studies; the Ascension; comparisons of Wesleyan and Orthodox understandings of sanctification/theosis/obozhenie; and biblical bases for social ministries including Christian hospitality, counseling for alcoholics, and local parish charity.

The hospitality extended to Western participants by Metropolitan Ferapont, Rector Andrianov, and Orthodox conference attendees could not have been more cordial. Not only the accommodations and meals, but the genuine interest that Asbury presentations generated, made it clear that Asbury's contributions to the conference were genuinely welcomed and were considered substantive. This could not have been clearer, for example, following Dr. Anthony Headley's address on counseling with alcoholics and their families and Professor Sarah Bellew's address on local parish charity. Their enumeration of best practices in working with alcoholics and in developing congregational compassionate ministry elicited questions from the audience that were anything but *pro forma.*

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## Father Georgi Edelstein

Father Georgi Edelstein, not to be confused with Rector Georgi Andrianov, was the catalyst for the invitation for Asbury faculty to participate in the Kostroma Orthodox Theological Seminary Conference. He is a respected figure within the pro-democracy element of Russian intelligentsia who is known and revered far beyond his rural parishes. In the Soviet era, in order to be ordained an Orthodox priest, Father Georgi managed to overcome the disabilities (as far as the KGB was concerned) of being ethnically Jewish and having an earned doctorate. In the early 1990s, he survived the disapproval of Orthodox hierarchs following his publication in Moscow newspapers of articles charging collusion between the Moscow Patriarchate and the KGB. In addition, he is the author of a courageously candid memoir, *Zapiski sel'skogo svyashchennika [Notes of a Village Priest]*.[1]

Father Georgi Edelstein's international standing (likely enhanced by his son Yuli's position as speaker of the Israeli Knesset) may have strengthened the hand of Metropolitan Ferapont and Rector Andrianov in inviting such expansive Evangelical participation in the Kostroma Orthodox conference. Whether or not this is the explanation for the Asbury invitation, in whole or in part, the hope is that it will serve as a foundation for future collaboration. To that end Rector Andrianov has invited Dr. Headley to return to give additional lectures on counseling alcoholics.

Arguably, the most significant ongoing Orthodox-Protestant collaboration occurs in East European Bible societies.

## Past Orthodox-Protestant Interaction

It should prove helpful to place Evangelical collaboration with Orthodox in Kostroma in its historical context. What follows is primarily a call for further research on the myriad aspects of the Orthodox-Protestant interface from the 16th century to the present.

1. In fending off Catholic threats, Ecumenical Patriarch Cyril Lukaris (1572-1638) authored a Confession of Faith that was Calvinist in essence, and as a result, was widely condemned in a series of Orthodox councils, culminating in its definitive repudiation at the Council of Jerusalem in 1672.[2]

2. Of all the descendants of the Protestant Reformation, Anglicans have been the most well-disposed toward Orthodoxy. The common ground of the two traditions has included resistance to papal claims to head the universal church and a shared devotion to the theological grounding provided by early Church Fathers.[3] Since the 1920s, Great Britain's Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius has been one expression of this Anglican-Orthodox interface. However, Anglican ordination of women and homosexuals has brought to an end Russian Orthodox willingness to dialogue with the Church of England.

3. It would be helpful to have a comprehensive study of Orthodox dialogues with various Protestant churches: with Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and others.[4]

4. Since 1976, the Chicago-based Fellowship of St. James and its *Touchstone* journal have sought to bring together Orthodox, Protestants, and Catholics "on the basis of shared belief in the fundamental doctrines of the faith as revealed in Holy Scripture and summarized in the ancient creeds of the Church."[5]

5. Beginning in the 1990s a number of informal Orthodox-Protestant theological discussions may be noted, including those organized by Keston College's Jane Ellis held at Moscow's Library of Foreign Literature, Bradley Nassif's six U.S. conferences of his Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism (1990-99),[6] Sergei Koryakin's gatherings of Orthodox and Evangelical theologians in Moscow,[7] and Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative meetings.[8]

6. In the post-World War II era, even though the predominately Protestant World Council of Churches (WCC) is theologically more distant from Orthodoxy than Evangelicalism, the WCC has provided substantial funding for various Orthodox publications and Orthodox participation in ecumenical gatherings.[9]

7. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the accompanying economic turmoil, mainline Protestant denominations, including the U.S. Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), donated millions of dollars of relief aid through the Russian Orthodox Church.[10] In addition, American Episcopalians set up the Moscow Patriarchate website in the early 1990s.

8. Mention should also be made of Orthodox-Protestant collaborative academic projects including Keston Institute's *Encyclopedia of Religion* and related books and articles;[11] Thomas Oden's 29-volume *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*;[12] American grant funding which has underwritten Moscow Patriarchate biblical studies conferences and publications; and the *Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya [Orthodox Encyclopedia]* project, based in Moscow, which at present is roughly half-way through the alphabet. It does not involve Protestant participation, but its surprisingly extensive coverage of Protestant history and theology is noteworthy.[13]

9. Findings from 51 respondents to a 2002-03 survey included five East European, Russian, and Ukrainian Protestant seminary faculties utilizing some Orthodox professors and two Russian Orthodox seminaries employing some Protestant faculty.[14] Whether the level of East European and Russian Orthodox-Protestant seminary cooperation has increased or decreased in the subsequent 15 years would be worth exploring.

10. Historically, the most substantive Orthodox-Protestant collaboration may have been the nuanced and generous YMCA support for Russian Orthodox émigré theological publishing, and the founding of St. Sergius Institute in Paris, a subject ably documented by Matthew L. Miller in his study, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture.*[15]

11. Arguably, the most significant ongoing Orthodox-Protestant collaboration occurs in East European Bible societies. The Russian Bible Society, for example, includes Orthodox, Baptist,

Pentecostal, charismatic, and Adventist staff and board members.[16]

12. Orthodox have been wary of Western mission activity in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but some cases of consequential cooperation do exist, including Gospel Light's support for the development of Russian Orthodox Sunday school curricula, Prison Fellowship's cordial working relationship with Orthodox in Russia and Ukraine, and World Vision's adaptation of the British Alpha Course for catechism in the Romanian Orthodox Church.[17]

Campus Crusade's "Mission Volga" attempted to enlist Russian Orthodox cooperation for viewings of its Jesus film. However, showings instead appear to have galvanized Orthodox opposition to Evangelical missions in the former Soviet Union, along with the even more ambitious and controversial CoMission, a collaborative outreach of dozens of Western Evangelical ministries.[18] Two Evangelical ministries that employ Orthodox believers in post-Soviet settings are Orphan's Tree, whose predominately Orthodox staff work with vulnerable youth who have aged out of Russian orphanages, and Navigators which utilizes Western Orthodox team members in its outreach in Serbia.[19]

13. In Ukraine, the past few years have witnessed unprecedented levels of cooperation among two of the three Orthodox jurisdictions, Evangelicals, and Eastern-Rite Catholics, driven in large measure by 2013-14 Maidan protests and Ukrainian churches' jointly held fears of Russian threats to their country's territorial integrity.[20]

14. Two intriguing and highly unusual examples of interface between Orthodox and Protestants have occurred in Romania and Georgia. Romania's Lord's Army, dating from the 1920s, is Orthodox, but with such Romanian Evangelical accoutrements as personal Bible study and an emphasis upon sobriety.[21] More recently, in just as surprising a reversal, Oxford Ph.D. Malkhaz Songulashvili has led a faction of Georgian Evangelical Christians-Baptists to adopt liturgical worship, iconography, prayers to Mary and saints, and priestly vestments.[22]

15. Finally, the writings and example of Father Alexander Men, noted for his spirit of charity across confessional lines, have served as a bridge between some Russian Orthodox and Evangelicals. Martyred in 1990 by assailants still at large, he managed to inspire cooperation among Christians of diverse traditions. As an example, David Benson, head of the Western Protestant mission, Russia for Christ, secreted Alexander Men manuscripts out of the Soviet Union which were then published by Zhizn s Bogom [Life with God], a Belgian Catholic publishing house.[23]

## A Recommendation for Improved Relations

In 2003 I published a set of eight recommendations for Evangelical missions ministering in an Orthodox context.[24] One of those suggestions urged Protestants to extend expressions of goodwill toward individual Orthodox priests and parishes at the local level. One example in the 1990s witnessed Father Georgi Edelstein renovate his Church of the Resurrection near Kostroma with help from Norwegian Lutherans, Canadian Baptists, and an Irish Catholic priest. Father Georgi, in turn, gave valuable advice and counsel to an American Methodist congregation sponsoring an orphanage near his parish. I will close with his advice for helping orphans, which should hold true for Christian outreach in general, whatever the confession: "The material help we give the children will be in vain if we do not also share with them Christ."[25] ♦

## Notes:

[1] *Zapiski sel'skogo svyashchennika [Notes of a Village Priest]*; Father Georgi Edelstein, "Thoughts on the Current Situation in the Moscow Patriarchate: Hypocrisy, Servility, or Complete Indifference to the Fate of Religion?" *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 10 (Fall 2002): 9, 11-12; Father Georgi Edelstein, "On Orphans, Spiritual Restoration, Repentance, and Religious Legislation," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 10 (Fall 2002), 13-15; Andrei Danilov, "Pentecostal and Orthodox in Common Cause," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 16 (Summer 2008), 16, 14.

[2] Mark R. Elliott, "Methodism in an Orthodox Context: History, Theology, and (Sadly) Politics," *The Asbury Journal*, forthcoming; George A. Hadjiantoniou, *Protestant Patriarch: The Life of Cyril Lukaris (1572-1638), Patriarch of Constantinople* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1961). Portions of this section on historical context are drawn from Mark R. Elliott, "East European Missions, *Perestroika*, and Orthodox-Evangelical Tensions," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 33 (Winter 1996), 14-16; and Mark R. Elliott, "Orthodox-Protestant Relations in the Post-Soviet Era," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 23 (No.5, 2003), 1-21; http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol23/iss5/2 .

[3] Elliott, "Methodism."

[4] John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias, *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1992); E. C. Miller, *Toward a Fuller Vision: Orthodoxy and the Anglican Experience* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse Barlow Co., 1984); S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002); S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005); S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007).

[5] www.stjamesfellowship.org.

[6] Bradley Nassif, "Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism: The Status of an Emerging Dialogue," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 1 (Spring 2000), 21-55.

[7] Sergey Koryakin, "Orthodox-Evangelical Conversations in Moscow: An Orthodox Perspective," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 25 (Winter 2017), 13; Johan Maurer, "Orthodox-Evangelical Conversations in Moscow: A Protestant Perspective," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 25 (Winter 2017), 13-14.

*(continued on page 10)*

In Ukraine, the past few years have witnessed unprecedented levels of cooperation among two of the three Orthodox jurisdictions, Evangelicals, and Eastern-Rite Catholics, driven by fears of Russian threats to their country's territorial integrity.

Father Georgi Edelshtein renovate[d] his Church of the Resurrection near Kostroma with help from Norwegian Lutherans, Canadian Baptists, and an Irish Catholic priest.

[8] Tim Grass, "The Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 22 (Winter 2014), 1-2; Mark R. Elliott, "Observations from the Lausanne Orthodox Initiative, Duress, Albania, 2-6 September 2013," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 22 (Winter 2014), 2; http://www.LOImission.org.

[9] Hans Hebly, *The Russians and the World Council of Churches* (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1978); William C. Fletcher, *Religion and Soviet Foreign Policy, 1945-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Michael Bourdeaux, Eugen Voss, and Hans Hebly, *Religious Liberty in the Soviet Union: WCC and USSR* (Keston, England: Keston College, Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism, 1976); and Elliott, "East European Missions," 15.

[10] Elliott, "Methodism."

[11] Sergei B. Filatov, ed., *Religiya i obshchestvo: Ocherki religioznoi zhizni sovremennoi Rossii [Religion and Society: Essays on the Religious Life of Contemporary Russia]* (Moscow, St. Petersburg: Letnii Sad, 2002). Michael Bourdeaux and Sergei B. Filatov, *Atlas sovremennoi religioznoi zhizni Rossii* (Moscow: Letnii Sad, 2005-2009; Sergei B. Filatov, *Religiozno-obshchestvennaya zhizn' rossiiskikh regionov* (Moscow: Letnii Sad, 2014- ).

[12] Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001-2006.

[13] Moscow: Tserkovno-nauchnyi tsentr, 1997— .

[14] Elliott, "Orthodox-Protestant Relations," 1; Clifford Dueck to author, 6 December 2002; Nik Nedelchev to author, 10 December 2002; John Creech to author, 15 December 2002; Janice Strength to author, 9 December 2002; Karmen Friesen to author, 12 December 2002.

[15] *The American YMCA and Russian Culture; The Preservation and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity, 1900-1940* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).

[16] www.biblia.ru; Mark Elliott and Sharyl Corrado, "The Protestant Missionary Presence in the Former Soviet Union," *Religion, State, and Society* 25 (No. 4, 1997), 345.

[17] Elliott and Corrado, "Protestant Missionary," 345; Elliott, "Orthodox-Protestant Relations," 2-4; Max Rondoni to author, 25 October-1 November 2002; W. D. Wysong to author, 1 December 2002; Danut Manastireanu, "The Way: Adapting the Alpha Course for Orthodox Catechism," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 23 (Spring 2015), 8-9.

[18] R. Vito Nicastro, Jr., "Mission Volga: A Case Study in the Tensions between Evangelizing and Proselytizing," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 31 (Summer 1994); Perry L. Glanzer. *The Quest for Russia's Soul: Evangelicals and Moral Education in Post-Communist Russia* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2002); Zoya Bardina, "Success of Festivity with 'Jesus' Film," *Good News 2002, News Agency of Evangelical Christians-Baptists,* 16 December 2001; Bruce Wilkinson *et al., The CoMission:; The Amazing Story of Eighty Ministry Groups Working Together to Take the Message of Christ's Love to the Russian People* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004); G. E. to author, 10 December 2002; E. T. to author, 17 December 2002; K. D. to author, 15 December 2002; U.L. to author, 17 December 2002; S. T. to author, 16 December 2002.

[19] www.orphanstree.org; "Training Program in Serbia," www.navigatorsworldwide.org.

[20] Mark R. Elliott, "The Impact of the Ukrainian Crisis on Religious Life in Ukraine and Russia," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 22 (Summer 2014), 6-16.

[21] Danut Manastireanu, "A Comparison of the Georgian Baptist Church and the Lord's Army in Romania," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 24 (Summer 2016), 6-8; David P. Bohn to author, 27 November 2002; Tom Keppler, "A Summary of Trifa's *What Is the Army of the Lord?*" *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 2 (Summer 1994), 8.

[22] Malkhaz Songulashvili, "A Merging of Protestant and Orthodox Theology and Practice: Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 24 (Summer 2016), 1-4; 24 (Fall 2016), 11-14; 25 (Winter 2017), 5-8. Numerous critiques of Songulashvili's church appeared in the *East-West Church and Ministry Report*: James J. Stamoolis, Danut Manastireanu, Paul Crego, and David Bundy in 24 (Summer 2016); Valery Alikin in 24 (Fall 2016); and Sergei Filatov, Steven Benham, and Anonymous in 25 (Winter 2017).

[23] Mark R. Elliott, "Reflections on the Life of Father Alexander Men," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 37 (No. 1, 2017), 8-19; Janet Wehrle, "Father Aleksandr Men: In Dialogue With Society," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 7 (Summer 1999), 1-3; Yakov Krotov, "Fr. Aleksandr Men: Orthodox Priest and Christian Apologist," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 7 (Summer 1999), 16; David Benson to author, 12 August 2003; Greg Nichols to author, 9 December 2002.

[24] Elliott, "Orthodox-Protestant Relations," 15-18. Other guidelines include Lawrence A. Uzzell, "Guidelines for American Missionaries in Russia," and Anita Deyneka, "Guidelines for Foreign Missionaries in the Former Soviet Union" in *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls*, ed. by John Witte, Jr., and Michael Bourdeaux (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 323-30 and 331-40; Edward E. Roslof, "Guidelines for Western Assistance to Russian Orthodox: A Mainline Protestant Perspective," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 4 (Winter 1996), 6-7; and Connie Robbins and Rodney Hammer, "Giving Guidelines for Russian Short-Term Missions," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 11 (Spring 2003), 16.

[25] Father Georgi Edelstein to author, June 2002.

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# American Orthodox Philanthropy and Outreach: Global Ventures since 1989 in Russia and Eastern Europe

Matthew Lee Miller

The collapse of European communism in 1989 served as a catalyst for new projects of U.S.-based Orthodox philanthropy, with several jurisdictions sponsoring a variety of global outreach programs and organizations. Two nationwide, pan-Orthodox agencies for global ministry have also formed: International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC). This article shows how political, economic, and demographic shifts since 1989 have created new opportunities for global Orthodox philanthropic connections, with U.S. Orthodox churches continuing traditions with deep roots. Examples from Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, a research location, illustrate national trends.[1]

## Pre-1917 Russian Orthodox Charity

A growing number of historians are paying special attention to the history of Orthodox philanthropy. Over the centuries the Russian Orthodox Church developed its own distinctive approach to charity.[2] In Russia, as the proverb states, *bednost' ne porok*—poverty is not a vice. Spiritual leaders did not celebrate or condemn wealth, but challenged those with riches to practice stewardship and use their wealth to help the poor. Wealth did not suggest superiority—but an obligation. Sermons claimed that beggars were an incarnation of Christ. One word used for the poor was *ubogie* (belonging to God). Therefore the rich and poor ideally lived in symbiosis: the rich provided, and the poor prayed for them. Orthodox authors often opposed poor taxes or state programs, since genuine charity should be voluntary and private. The most common form of charity was giving to beggars on the street, especially near churches. Moscow was well-known for generosity to beggars—one estimate in the late nineteenth century suggested that residents gave over one million rubles in alms per year.

Before the imperial period Russian law made poor relief the primary responsibility of the church. However, during the reign of Peter I poverty became an issue of public policy as well as religious piety. Peter established new laws, and the state created more than 90 almshouses which housed over 4,000 people. Catherine II made a more concerted effort to provide government assistance through social welfare boards, which operated orphanages and hospitals.[3] In the nineteenth century emperors supported poor relief primarily through organizations which brought together state and private enterprise. The Department of the Institutions of the Empress Maria and the Imperial Philanthropic Society operated with this approach. Voluntary associations were secular Western imports that appeared in Russia in the eighteenth century. The establishment of a charitable association required personal permission from the emperor.[4]

The strong development of voluntary associations under Alexander II showed that philanthropy had become an integral part of Russian society. During the era of his reforms, society pressed for the opportunity to organize and make contributions. In 1855, Russia possessed 40 private charitable societies, but by 1880 that number had increased to over 300. The government showed lenience in approving associations but evaluated groups for political loyalty.[5] In the 1880s the work relief movement appeared in St. Petersburg. The peak of charitable organization was the period 1896-1900, when over 1,000 new associations were founded. Donations to charity often became symbols of status; associations often relied on lotteries, balls, and other fashionable public fundraisers.[6] After the October Revolution the Soviet government initiated a harsh campaign to limit the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, which led to the closing of a variety of philanthropic organizations.

## Orthodox Philanthropy in an American Context

The Russian Orthodox churches of the U.S. continued many aspects of this legacy of philanthropy as they developed roots in a new land. In the twentieth century Russian, Ukrainian, Greek, and other Orthodox jurisdictions in the U.S. developed an ethnocentric approach in social ministry. However, a greater desire for unity, outreach, and social responsibility has emerged since 1989.[7] This process has often been the result of transnationalism, the dynamic of immigrants maintaining connections and involvement with their homelands.[8] Two episcopal organizations have made special contributions to unity in the U.S.: the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the Americas (SCOBA) and the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches in America (SCOOCH). Founded in 1960 and 1973, they brought together the leaders of most jurisdictions for discussions of common concerns and contributed to closer relationships and cooperation. In 1994 bishops from 28 SCOBA member jurisdictions met at Ligonier, Pennsylvania, in the largest meeting of this type held in the U.S.[9] The Orthodox Church in America (OCA), the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, and Ukrainian, Greek, Romanian, and Serbian churches participate in the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, which replaced SCOBA in 2009.[10] The Armenian, Coptic, Eritrean, and Ethiopian jurisdictions take part in SCOOCH. These two episcopal organizations possess limited influence since they have no authority over member jurisdictions; any decisions must be approved by the bishops and/or European homeland hierarchs.

The collapse of European communism has contributed to immigration, but it has also served as a catalyst for many new projects of ministry and philanthropy.[11] Jurisdictions sponsor a variety of global outreach programs and organizations. OCA has sponsored a Christmas Stocking Project to provide aid for children abroad and the Russian Child Adoption Project. In addition, OCA has initiated practical partnerships between individual U.S. and Russian

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Two pan-Orthodox agencies for global ministry have formed: International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC).

parishes. Ukrainian congregations support the St. Andrew Society, which provides aid for Ukraine, while the U.S. Armenian Archdiocese has operated the Fund for Armenian Relief and the Women's Guild, which provides aid for Armenia.[12]

As noted previously, two national pan-Orthodox organizations for global ministry have emerged: the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) in 1992 and the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) in 1994. These ventures have encouraged believers from a variety of jurisdictions to work together in relief and development work and global outreach. IOCC has worked in Russia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Greece, Georgia, and Palestine. This organization, led by executive director Constantine M. Triantafilou, is based in Baltimore, Maryland. Projects have included aid for orphans, schools, hospitals, refugees, and the elderly. OCMC, based in St. Augustine, Florida, has been working in multiple locations in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia.[13] Minnesota believers have actively supported both of these ventures.

The first wave of IOCC projects focused on Russia and other former Soviet states. The second wave of projects in the 1990s focused on Yugoslavia and its successor states.

## IOCC Abroad

A small group of experienced philanthropists in the U.S. founded IOCC as an organization under the direction of SCOBA; the founders were Charles Ajalat of Los Angeles, Andrew Athens of Chicago, and John Rangos of Pittsburgh. Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow traveled to the United States in 1991 and met with Greek Orthodox Archbishop Iakovos, the head of SCOBA, requesting social service assistance. At that point, Russian Orthodox possessed limited expertise in social service work, since all programs had been administered by the state. SCOBA leaders understood that a legal organization was needed to apply for available U.S. government grants; organizations such as World Vision, Catholic Charities, and Lutheran World Relief had been receiving government funding for global aid projects for many years. The first IOCC leaders were Orthodox believers who had gained experience working with Catholic relief agencies. This was the first Orthodox attempt to cooperate among jurisdictions and access government funding. The first wave of IOCC projects focused on Russia and other former Soviet states. U.S. parishes were asked to give donations for projects in the 1990s. At one point, annual private donations totaled one million dollars, and annual government grants provided 35 million dollars from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other sources. The second wave of projects in the 1990s focused on Yugoslavia and its successor states. During the war in the region, the U.S. Department of State asked IOCC to apply for grants to help in Serbia with refugee resettlement, agricultural co-ops, and microenterprise development. The third wave of projects centered on refugee and resettlement projects in Syria and other locations in the Middle East. Currently IOCC employs approximately 30 U.S.-based staff and 200 international workers, with locals assessing needs and recommending sustainable solutions. IOCC has only four U.S. and Canadian expatriate employees working overseas.[14]

## Minnesota Orthodox Philanthropy

Local Minnesota Orthodox parishes have supported global and local service projects in a variety of ways. Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in St. Paul takes three collections a year for a variety of philanthropy and missions programs: recent donations have supported an African education fund and displaced Ukrainians.[15] St. Mary's Greek Orthodox Church in Minneapolis supports an active missions and evangelism committee. For nearly 20 years St. Mary's parishioners have traveled to Guatemala to help with an Orthodox orphanage. The parish also supports Anastasia Barksdale, an OCMC missionary working in Albania. Half of the proceeds from St. Mary's annual Greek festival support mission and outreach programs.[16] St. Sahag's Armenian Church works with the Fuller Center for Housing Armenia in building one house a year in Armenia to help address the housing shortage created by the 1988 earthquake. The parish also supports orphanages in Armenia.[17]

## OCMC Abroad

Fr. Luke Veronis has played a leading role in the formation of OCMC. A Greek Orthodox priest, he led the development of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Mission Committee in 1966. This body evolved into the Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Mission Center in 1984 and the OCMC in 1994. At this point the organization came under the direction of SCOBA. As of 2014, 2,500 short-term and 115 long-term missionaries have served with the organizations in 30 countries. Two executive directors have provided leadership: Fr. (later Bishop) Dimitrios Couchell (1984-1998) and Fr. Martin Ritsi (1998 - present).[18]

As of 2017, the active OCMC career missionary team includes several staff members working in Eastern Europe: four individuals or families in Albania and two in Romania. Twelve additional individuals or families serve in Guatemala, Kenya, Mongolia, New Zealand, the United States, or multiple countries. The variety of endeavors includes church leadership, teaching in schools and seminaries, youth outreach, musical training, social service, counseling, and liturgical translation. OCMC also recruits and sends short-term teams to support career missionaries and church programs in a variety of locations, including Albania, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Uganda, and the United States. In 2017, volunteers served in summer camps, educational programs, health ministries, and construction projects. Leaders and administrative staff members are based at OCMC headquarters in St. Augustine, Florida. The OCMC magazine, available online, promotes the programs of the organization and provides information on recent developments.[19]

In conclusion, U.S. Orthodox churches have recently grown in visibility as they have practiced their faith on a global scale. Many of its parishes have built new links with their surrounding communities as they have simultaneously developed new philanthropic connections across borders. ♦

**Notes:**

[1] This article builds on the author's experience as a historian of Orthodoxy and Russian-American cultural relations. See Matthew Lee Miller, "Eastern Christianity in the Twin Cities: The Churches of Minneapolis and St. Paul, 1989-2014," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook*, 30/31 (2014/2015): 101-44; and Matthew Lee Miller, *The American YMCA and Russian Culture: The Preservation and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity, 1900-1940* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013). In this article, Orthodox refers to churches and believers of both Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox jurisdictions. For an introduction, see John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Thomas E. FitzGerald, *The Orthodox Church* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995); John H. Erickson, *Orthodox Christians in America: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Anton C. Vrame, ed., *The Orthodox Parish in America: Faithfulness to the Past and Responsibility for the Future* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003).

[2] Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty Is Not a Vice: Charity, Society and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3-4.

[3] Lindenmeyr, *Poverty*, 7-36.

[4] Lindenmeyr, *Poverty*, 75, 99-110.

[5] Lindenmeyr, *Poverty*, 60-65, 72-73, 112-19, 121-24, 130-39.

[6] Lindenmeyr, *Poverty*, 169-73, 198-202, 207, 214-15, 237. Excellent photos and a lengthy bibliography of Russian philanthropy are found in Viktoriia Nikolaevna Zanozina and Elena Anatol'evna Adamenko, *Blagotvoritel'nost' i miloserdie v Sankt-Peterburge: Rubezh xix-xx vekov* (Saint Petersburg: Liki rossii, 2000).

[7] Alexei D. Krindatch, "Orthodox (Eastern Christian) Churches in the United States at the Beginning of a New Millennium: Questions of Nature, Identity, and Mission," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41 (September 2002): 558.

[8] Peter Kivisto and Thomas, *Beyond a Border: The Causes and Consequences of Contemporary Immigration* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2010), 159.

[9] Erickson, *Orthodox Christians*, 105; See 109-12 for the Ligonier Statement.

[10] "About the Assembly of Bishops," Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America website, http://assemblyofbishops.org/about.

[11] FitzGerald, *The Orthodox Church*, 129; Frances Kostarelos, "The Eastern Orthodox Christian Church in North America: Continuity and Change in the Twenty-First Century" in *Holding On to the Faith: Confessional Traditions in American Christianity*, ed. by Douglas A. Sweeney and Charles Hambrick-Stowe (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 173. For an Orthodox reflection on globalization, see Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos), *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), especially the chapter "Globalization and Religious Experience," 179-99.

[12] Krindatch, "Orthodox (Eastern Christian) Churches," 552-53.

[13] Krindatch, "Orthodox (Eastern Christian) Churches," 559; OCMC website, http://www.ocmc.org.

[14] Interview of Mr. Dan Christopulos, IOCC, Edina, Minnesota, 1 October 2014.

[15] Interview of Fr. Jonathan Proctor, Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, St. Paul, Minnesota, 24 September 2014.

[16] Interview with Fr. Thomas Alatzakis, St. Mary's Greek Orthodox Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 20 August 2014.

[17] Interview with Fr. Tadeos Barseghyan, St. Sahag Armenian Church, St. Paul, Minnesota, 23 September 2014.

[18] Fr. Alexander Veronis, "The Orthodox Christian Mission Center," http://www.hchc.edu/missions/articles/articles/the-orthodox-christian-mission-center.

[19] OCMC website, https://www.ocmc.org/about/open_teams.aspx.

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## The Work of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center in Albania

Kristina Whiteman

The Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) is the overseas mission sending agency for the canonical jurisdictions of the Orthodox Church in the United States.[1] Along with other Pan-Orthodox agencies, its work is overseen by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America (ACOB-USA). As the only American Orthodox[2] body tasked with overseas mission,[3] OCMC recruits, trains, supervises, and supports short-term mission teams, long-term missionaries, and other related mission projects.[4] The OCMC is a relatively young organization, having been reorganized as the Pan-Orthodox American mission agency only in 1994; however, its roots go back to the Greek mission renewal movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s.[5]

OCMC's official mission is to "make disciples of all nations by bringing people to Christ and His church." Although its vision is firmly rooted in evangelism, its values include holistic mission in the language and culture of indigenous peoples.[6] While OCMC has a mission presence in Uganda, Kenya, Mongolia, Indonesia, Guatemala, Romania, Alaska, and Albania, its work in Albania is the focus of this article.

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## Albanian Traumas

The church in Albania dates back to the first century A.D.[7] At the epicenter of the 11th century split between Eastern and Western Christianity and later overtaken by Islam, Albania nonetheless maintained its Orthodox Christian witness across two millennia. Named an autocephalous Orthodox Church in 1937, Albania, shortly afterward, was plunged into World War II and then totalitarian Communist rule.[8] The systematic destruction of the Orthodox Church, indeed, of all religion in Albania, followed.[9]

By the time the Communist regime collapsed in 1990-91, the Albanian Orthodox Church lay in ruins both literally and figuratively. While only 15 elderly and infirm priests and three deacons had survived persecution, thousands of Orthodox believers privately had kept their faith alive.[10] Under these extraordinary circumstances, it was concluded that the Church of Albania would need outside help in rebuilding. In 1991 Archbishop Anastasios (now Archbishop of Tirana, Durres, and All Albania) became the head of the Albanian Orthodox Church.

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It is almost impossible now, looking at the resurrected Church in Albania, to comprehend how completely Christianity had been annihilated in this country. I once asked an Albanian acquaintance whether the stories were really true--was it really, truly an "atheist" country? "Oh yes," she replied. "I myself had literally never even heard the word God until I was ten years old, let alone have a concept of who God was. And I am not unusual in my country." This woman now holds an important post in the Albanian Orthodox Church. Her personal story is an example of the astonishing work of the Holy Spirit.

## Archbishop Anastasios

It is important to note the importance of the work of Archbishop Anastasios in Albania, both because he has been one of OCMC's closest partners and because he himself is a preeminent figure in Albania and, indeed, in worldwide Orthodoxy. He was a key figure in the Greek youth and missions movements of the 1950s and 1960s and has been involved with the World Council of Churches since the early 1960s. He established the official Greek missions agency in 1968, directed the service branch of the Greek Orthodox Church in the 1970s, and spent the 1980s in East Africa as its acting archbishop.[11] As he had done in his other ministries, in Albania Archbishop Anastasios has focused on raising up an indigenous Albanian clergy, on empowering local laity, and on living out the Orthodox faith in a truly "Albanian" manner.

It is difficult to quantify the numerical growth of the Church under Archbishop Anastasios. A 2011 census put the Orthodox population of Albania at seven percent, but this number is strongly contested by the Albanian Orthodox Church, which cites anti-Orthodox bias and poor polling techniques; the Church maintains that approximately 24 percent of Albanians are Orthodox. Archbishop Anastasios' service in Albania has not always been easy. Traditionally tensions have existed between Albania and Greece. Although without success, a worldwide search had been made for an Albanian qualified to be the hierarch. Some Albanians, nevertheless, opposed the appointment of a Greek as head of the Albanian Orthodox Church. Unfortunately this remains an issue for some nationalistic factions within the country. In the Church, however, even his former critics have appreciated his ministry and have come to support his leadership. What is clear, even with the difficulties Archbishop Anastasios has faced, is that his spirit of love, peace-making, ecumenical openness, and passion for the image of God in all people has been a key component in the resurrection of the Albanian Orthodox Church.[12]

## OCMC in Albania

OCMC missionaries and short-term mission teams have been a part of the work in Albania since the early 1990s, as have OCMC-funded mission projects. Archbishop Anastasios' service in Kenya in the decade prior to his move to Albania put him in contact with OCMC missionaries, several of whom came to serve with him in Albania. Early long-term missionaries, both priests and laity, ministered in various capacities, assisting with theological education, health care, social ministries, primary education, youth programming and summer camps, and relief work. Much of the focus of this early work was the training of indigenous Albanian believers who would increasingly assume the work of missionaries.

Over the course of the past quarter century, Albania has continued to be the field where OCMC is most active.[13] Every year several short-term mission teams (which last between one and four weeks) travel from the U.S. to minister alongside long-term missionaries. Participants are enriched by their experience of the resurrected Albanian Church. As they offer their gifts in service, they at the same time increase their passion for missions at home. Thus, OCMC's work has become an important missional bridge connecting the U.S., Albania, and the rest of the world.

Over the years multiple OCMC "mission specialists" (who serve for mid-range periods, often in roles where they have special skills) and long-term missionaries (who serve for at least two years) have served in Albania. The work of OCMC missionaries has continued to vary widely, including assistance with computer literacy, soup kitchens, catechism and youth programs, seminary education, translation, and medical missions. As of 2017, four missionary households were active in Albania.[14]

Current OCMC missionaries work in the field of education and children's and young adult ministries. Two serve at the Protagonist School, which began in 2002 with 15 students and now enrolls over 700 students in elementary and high school classes. Several missionaries teach at the Resurrection Orthodox Theological Academy, which

trains both clergy and laity in the Orthodox faith. Ministry to students at the University of Tirana, ministry through the Central Chidren's Office of the Orthodox Church of Albania, and summer camps in Albania all fall under the leadership of OCMC missionaries.

From the fall of the Communist government in 1990-91 to the present, the Orthodox Church in Albania has labored to rekindle the light of Christ in the lives of the Albanian people. At every step, OCMC has been a collaborator in this work. Like any partnership, it has had its ups and downs; in the end, however, those who have come for long- and short-term ministry have created an alliance that seeks to bring the gospel to those who have not heard it, to faithfully make disciples, and to glorify God through the strengthening of the Body of Christ. ♦

**Notes:**

[1] Recognized Orthodox jurisdictions in the United States number 13. Each is considered "canonical," being in communion with the larger Eastern Orthodox Church.

[2] The phrase "American Orthodox" is used to denote the broad category of all canonical Orthodox in the United States of America. "Orthodox Church in America" is the specific Orthodox jurisdiction in the U.S. that grew out of the Russian Orthodox Mission.

[3] The International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) is also under ACOB-USA. While it does operate outside the U.S., its primary focus is disaster relief and development projects, rather than missions.

[4] For more information on the work of OCMC, see https://www.ocmc.org.

[5] Alexander Veronis, "History and Background of the OCMC," *The Dedication of the New Archbishop Anastasios & Archbishop Demetrios Missionary Training and Administration Building* (St. Augustine, FL: 2009).

[6] https://www.ocmc.org/about/index.aspx.

[7] Lynette Hoppe, *Resurrection: The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania 1991-2003* (Tirana, Albania: Ngjallja Publishers, 2004), 9.

[8] An autocephalous Orthodox Church is one in which the national council of bishops is not under the authority of any other national bishops, while remaining in communion with the worldwide Orthodox Church.

[9] Hoppe, *Resurrection*, 10-13.

[10] Hoppe, *Resurrection*, 15. Just prior to the worst state persecution it is estimated that the Albanian Orthodox Church consisted of "three dioceses presided over by bishops, 12 districts headed by high-ranking priests, 330 parishes, and 25 monasteries." Hoppe, *Resurrection*, 13.

[11] Luke Veronis, *Go Forth: Stories of Missions and Resurrection in Albania* (Ben Lomand, CA: Conciliar Press, 2010), 49. Orthodox bishops are canonically required to be celibate. See also Jim Forest, *The Resurrection of the Church in Albania: Voices of Orthodox Christians* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2002).

[12] Veronis, *Go Forth*, 49.

[13] Lynette Hoppe, who served in Albania for eight years, is an example of hard-working OCMC missionaries. Lynette and her husband Nathan Hoppe arrived in 1998 as part of a group of long-term OCMC missionaries. Lynette was actively engaged in many areas of ministry, especially to children and to the poor. Diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004, Lynette continued to minister to others through the final 20 months of her life. Upon her death on 27 August 2008, she was granted her final wish to be buried in Albania "as an everlasting symbol of the love of Christ, which is stronger than death." Her example of authentic faithfulness continues to be a witness to those in Albania and, indeed, to all who know her story. Luke Veronis, ed., *Lynette's Hope: The Witness of Lynette Katherine Hoppe's Life and Death* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 2008).

[14] https://www.ocmc.org/about/view_country.aspx?countryId=3.

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**Orthodox Philanthropy** *(continued from page 16)*

to strengthen the sharing of information, networking, and collaboration among the many Orthodox social departments, structures, and organizations. In 2007, to continue the work of the Orthodox diakonia conference in Valamo, the IOCC commissioned a survey of social service organizations worldwide.

*Editor's Note:* Orthodox Diakonia Worldwide, *excerpted here, is the product of this survey initiative.*

This study marks the aspiration of increasingly more Orthodox organizations and Churches to move from charity and philanthropy towards contributing to the ongoing development and humanitarian work by governments and international NGOs (religious and secular). The types of disadvantaged groups that are served by these organizations include the elderly, the poor, the homeless, the sick, people with disabilities, orphans, victims of human trafficking, and people displaced by war and conflict or natural disasters. However, beyond charity work, some [Orthodox] organizations have shifted their activities from charity, emergency relief, and general philanthropy towards development with a broader focus that aims to assist marginalized communities attain self-reliance and empowerment. Poverty reduction, agricultural production, rehabilitation, health, education, and vocational training are priority areas among these organizations. ♦

Some [Orthodox] organizations have shifted their activities from charity, emergency relief, and general philanthropy towards development.

# An Overview of Orthodox Philanthropy

The foundation of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) in 1992 was an important stepping stone in the establishment of an integrated, systematic, and global Orthodox humanitarian agency.

*Editor's Note: The present article consists of excerpts from* Orthodox Diakonia Worldwide: An Initial Assessment (May 2009). *It is based upon an International Orthodox Christian Charities survey of Orthodox charitable agencies and departments and broader-based charities in which Orthodox participate.*

## Historical Reasons for Limited Orthodox Diakonia

Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff has underlined the detachment of the Christian East from historical and social realities and its dedication to mysticism and contemplation. The Eastern Orthodox Church has often been criticized as being "other-worldly" and indifferent to the plight of social life. Eastern Orthodox mystical spirituality has typically looked inward and "above" the affairs of this world, placing more emphasis on salvation and the celebration of rites and sacraments and less on direct missionary action or social service.

*Editor's Note: In addition, East European and Middle Eastern Orthodox endured Ottoman domination from the 15th to 19th centuries, followed by the Communist assault on Russian and East European Orthodox in the 20th century. This subjugation left very little opportunity for organized Orthodox diakonia (social ministry) for nearly six centuries.*

Also related to the weak presence of social action on an international scale is the predisposition of Orthodox Churches to national affiliation. National churches are often deeply connected to ethnic characteristics, thus blurring the dividing line between spirituality/religion and ethnic/national characteristics. The propensity of Orthodox Churches towards identifying themselves with a specific nation means that they can set themselves apart in favor of maintaining strong ties to the state and local or regional institutions.

## Growing Orthodox Emphasis upon Diakonia

After 1961, when the majority of Orthodox Churches joined the World Council of Churches (WCC), the WCC developed a program to assist in the development of Orthodox diakonia programs, including bishops and priests actively engaged in social problems and practical acts of philanthropy. An important milestone, which marked an overall change in Orthodox social theology and service, was the 1978 international conference on "An Orthodox Approach to Diaconia" at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, in Greece, upon the initiative of the WCC. This conference acknowledged the need for the Orthodox Church to engage more actively in social service.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of many Communist regimes [in 1989-91], new opportunities opened for the revival and social involvement of national Orthodox Churches in their respective countries. National Eastern Orthodox Churches in many Central and Eastern European and Balkan countries and in the former Soviet Republics faced the opportunity of revitalization and greater social involvement in the public domain, but also the challenge to respond to poverty and other pressing socio-economic hardships by offering social assistance and humanitarian relief [but] with minimal resources.

The foundation of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) in 1992 as the official international humanitarian organization of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA), was an important stepping stone in the establishment of an integrated, systematic, and global Orthodox humanitarian agency. In 2004 the International Conference on Orthodox Social Witness and Diakonia, organized by the WCC, IOCC, and Orthodox Church Aid from Finland (OrtAid), in Valamo, Finland, brought together leaders of Orthodox social service organizations, theologians, and other academic specialists, church hierarchs, and other representatives. They exchanged discussions and analysis, and shared practical experiences on current Orthodox social service worldwide. The conference mandated the organizers

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