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Return to a Hero City: Missionary Life in Wartime Ukraine

CHARLEY AND CHERYL WARNER

Having moved in January 2018 to Irpin, Ukraine, we were displaced—along with most of the city's 65,000 residents—by the full-scale Russian invasion of 24 February 2022. In our case, we left before the invasion, heeding warnings from the US State Department. Most Irpin residents fled after bombs started falling in the early hours of that Thursday morning. During the following days, thousands made their way to Irpin Bible Church, of which we are members. There, they were fed, housed in the church's basement shelter, and given evacuation assistance.

Aid distributed in front of the bombed-out Mission Eurasia building in Irpin, Ukraine (Source: C. & C. WARNER)

We never imagined that the war fought since 2014 in the Donbas area of southeastern Ukraine would come literally to our doorstep in this suburb northwest of Kyiv. Our rented home was under Russian occupation from shortly after the invasion until Irpin was liberated on 28 March 2022. Atrocities were committed in our street, which still bears grotesque scars. Across from our home stand the charred remains of Mission Eurasia's headquarters. Today, people come there twice a month to receive Christian literature, free hot lunches, and general humanitarian aid. Nearby are several damaged and destroyed houses—city officials report that 70 percent of buildings were damaged in the month-long Battle of Irpin [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-61667500].

Somehow, our landlady survived occupation in a nearby basement, showing extraordinary courage and resilience. She then worked tirelessly to repair damage to our home and restore order before we returned in July 2023. There were broken windows, shrapnel damage, and fences downed by tanks. Yet—amazingly—the house still stands, and we are living in it today. Chasing out the ghosts of the occupiers and reclaiming the house for advancing the Gospel has been a gift of redemption. Today, Bible study groups meet here, and overnight guests help us forge new memories. On Wednesday afternoons our landlady visits, and we read and discuss the Gospel of John together in the sunroom.

Families torn apart

Following last year's invasion, Ukraine's government declared martial law, which prohibits men aged between 18 and 60 from leaving the country. The aim is to maintain the pool of men eligible for military service. Those who have three or more children under 18 or certain medical conditions are exempt.

Millions of Ukrainians—thus mostly women and children—left Ukraine and have been living as refugees, primarily in Europe and North America. Some who live closer to home—such as in Poland—sometimes visit husbands and fathers in Ukraine. Men whose families are farther away have not seen their wives and children for nearly two years. One pastor stayed to minister among churches in his region but desperately misses his wife and children, who are with relatives in Australia. Through tears, another father told us of his wife and children in the US state of Washington. He was glad for their safety, but devastated by his family being torn apart.

All of this has been very difficult

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Wartime Ukraine *(continued from page 1)*

on marital and family relationships. As the war drags on, we hear reports of divorces in separated families, even among church-going families. There is no simple solution. Some families have lost their homes or job prospects and believe they have no reason to return. Others endured more separation than they could bear and have returned to Ukraine, figuring that they would rather face danger together than remain apart any longer.

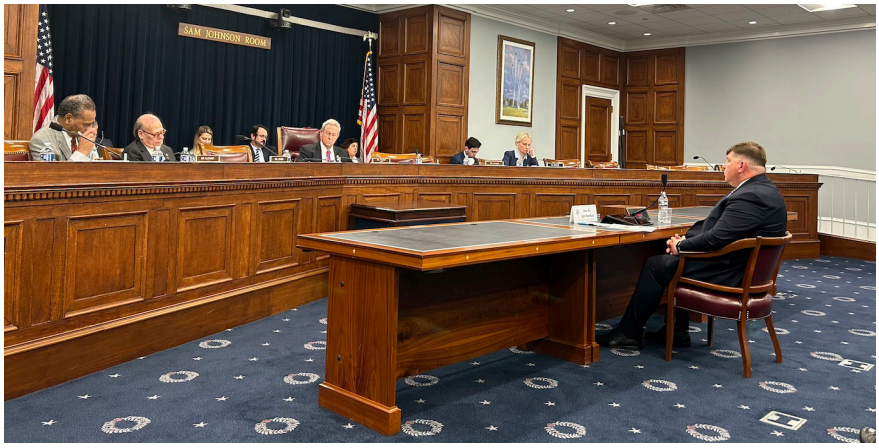
Friction

While some men received permission to leave the country legally, others have left with false documents or through bribes. This creates tension with those who have stayed in Ukraine; sometimes angry words erupt on social media. Those who broke laws in order to leave may face fines or jail time if they return. Those who left are perceived as living a great life in the West, while the reality for them as refugees is much more difficult and nuanced than their friends back home understand. The divide between those who stayed and those who left is reminiscent of some of the judgment directed towards believers who emigrated to the US in the 1990s. These are very broad generalizations, whereas individual circumstances, in fact, vary widely.

Debates about judgment and forgiveness also crop up online and in general conversation. Questions hang in the air. "My house is okay—God is good." "My house was destroyed. Is God still good?" People try to be charitable towards each other, but when someone has been to a lot of funerals lately, and they see people posting vacation pictures online, it stings. Emotions run high; sensibilities are raw.

New Neighborhoods Bible Church [*Bibliina Tserkva Novykh Kvartaliv*] conducting outreach in Irpin even after a rocket scored a direct hit to the church's building
(Source: C. & C. WARNER)

We have also observed a lot of grace shown to people who took different decisions, where people recognize that individual circumstances vary. Some needed to leave to preserve their mental health. Some lost their homes or livelihoods. Others needed to stay for elderly parents who could not make the trip. Our pastors advised people to make decisions about whether to stay or leave prayerfully before the Lord and not to judge others.



Pastor Igor Bandura testifies at a hearing of the US Helsinki Commission, Washington, DC, April 2023 (Source: C. & C. WARNER)

Informing the world

There is another exception regarding the law on Ukrainian men leaving the country. We are thankful that Evangelical denominational leaders have been allowed to travel abroad in order to inform Western governments and churches of the church situation within Ukraine and about what type of assistance is needed. In the past, the voice of Ukrainian Evangelical churches was rarely heard before governments. Today, there are meetings with US government leaders at high levels.

One example is Igor Bandura, who is Vice President of International Affairs for the Baptist Union of Ukraine. Since the full-scale invasion, Pastor Bandura has been able to visit churches throughout Western Europe and the USA. In April 2023 he also participated in a hearing of the US Helsinki Commission (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) in Washington, DC on "Church, State, and Russia's War on Ukraine." [https://www.csce.gov/hearings/church-state-and-russias-war-on-ukraine/]

In October 2023 another Ukrainian Evangelical leader, Ivan Rusyn, participated in a panel discussion at the Atlantic Council think tank, also in Washington, DC. Rusyn, a bishop in the Ukrainian Evangelical Church denomination as well as Rector of the Ukrainian Evangelical Theological Seminary in Kyiv, visited as part of a delegation of high-level religious leaders from the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. In his comments during the panel discussion, Bishop Rusyn highlighted the persecution of Evangelical believers in Russian-occupied Ukraine. "We are not [just] talking about the seizure of churches," he said. "We are talking about people killed simply because they have a different faith" [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/faith-leaders-highlight-russian-religious-persecution-in-occupied-ukraine/].

Sharing personal stories

Individuals also have their own personal stories to tell, and they need to talk. When greeting old friends or meeting new people since our return

to Ukraine, initial conversation usually covers questions about what happened on 24 February 2022. "Where did you go?" "What—or whom—have you lost?" "Where is your family?" Such conversations quickly go deep. A missionary friend observed that hugs are longer and tighter.

"It brings me such joy to see people coming back," one Ukrainian friend told us. Another said, "Because you are here, it's easier for us." It is hard to comprehend this, but the power of presence means a lot to people. For us, this is the best time to be in Irpin, which is reasonably safe now. We are learning from Ukrainians about perseverance, sacrificial service, and trusting God in the worst of circumstances. Their example to us is extraordinary. It is a privilege to listen to and honor their stories.

Olga, an older woman from occupied Mariupol, sat down next to Cheryl on a park bench one day and poured out her story of losing her home in the siege, fleeing through several countries to Switzerland, and eventually returning to Ukraine. There is nothing left for her to go back to in Mariupol. She said that she cannot believe Putin is doing this: "*What is the point?*" Olga is convinced that God saved her life. God continues to answer Cheryl's prayers that she will bump into her in the park. A few weeks ago, she greeted Cheryl with a hug.

Evangelicals' positive reputation

Evangelical churches were one place of refuge after the invasion, and people remember who helped them during their darkest hour—and continue to help. Irpin has been named a Hero City of Ukraine and Irpin Bible Church is a well-known part of this heroic service, awarded a medal by Ukraine's parliament for its efforts in the aftermath of the invasion. Our church has since established several volunteer centers in the local area, where people can come for general assistance or attend Bible clubs and other events. On 17 December 2023 a special Christmas event was held at our church for 450 IDPs [internally displaced persons, who seek refuge within the borders of their own state].

Bishop Ivan Rusyn (second row, fifth from right, wearing clerical collar) at the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC, October 2023 (Source: C. & C. WARNER)

Seventeen baptized at Irpin Bible Church, December 2023 (Source: C. & C. WARNER)

This demonstration of love and practical help gives credibility to the Gospel. Many people have been baptized in the period since the full-scale invasion. Pastors and volunteers report that people initially came to churches for humanitarian aid. Those who were curious stayed for Bible clubs and church services. Some have become believers. We hear of this happening throughout Ukraine: Churches that lost most of their membership because people fled the country are now filled with newcomers. At Irpin Bible Church, 17 new believers were baptized on 1 December, many of whom were older adults displaced from other cities. Many more were baptized in the preceding year and a half.

Loss of loved ones; prayers for defenders

Sunday services include moving times of prayer for peace in Ukraine. Our church's Telegram social media channel includes a list of military personnel who are from our church or are relatives of church members. Five have been killed in action, in addition to a volunteer who died helping a family to evacuate Irpin after the invasion. Home groups pray for loved ones who are in combat. Prayer requests for soldiers come in real time. Cheryl's Bible study group prayed for Pavlo, who was critically injured in battle and died a few days later, leaving behind his pregnant wife. Two women from our group went to his funeral the following week. Our group was visited by a woman whose brother is a Hero of Ukraine, meaning that he died in battle. Church members have also packed boxes of thermal wear, sweet treats, dried meats, and Scripture portions to give as Christmas gifts to local military personnel and defenders in combat zones. *(continued on page 4)*

Wartime Ukraine *(continued from page 3)*

Broken relationships

Ukrainians say things that indicate a sense of betrayal: "Russia was supposedly a 'brotherly nation.' How could they do this to us?" One woman who was born and raised in Russia and came to Ukraine 15 years ago shared that her church friends and even her father in Russia do not believe her when she tells them what has happened here. "We're there to liberate you from the fascists," they say, believing Russian propaganda rather than their own family members in Ukraine. It is too painful to talk to them, so phone calls have ceased. This is a bitter pill to swallow, adding insult to injury.

Ukrainian ministry leaders want their brothers in Russia to speak out against the war, even though they risk arrest and fines if they do so. Can these broken relationships be restored? Many are saying it will take more than a generation to overcome the rift. The wounds are too deep and too fresh for most people even to consider what reconciliation would look like right now. We have not observed an open desire for revenge—just hurt and a sense of bewilderment: "Why would they do this to us?" It makes no sense.

There is tension among Russian Evangelicals, too. A ministry leader in Moscow reports that Russians who left to avoid being conscripted but later returned to Russia for work have been ostracized by fellow church members who considered them disloyal to their country. A pastor who does not support the war was removed from his position and told he should read his Bible and pray more.

Russian language disappears

One noticeable change since 24 February 2022 is the almost overnight disappearance of the Russian language from the Kyiv Region. Before, both languages were used freely, often in the same conversation. About half the pastors in our church preached in Ukrainian and half in Russian. While no formal directive was issued, all prefer to use only Ukrainian now, and no Russian is heard at all in church services. Home groups and other church gatherings are now in Ukrainian. People who spoke Russian all their lives are now switching to Ukrainian, even if that is a struggle.

For many people, hearing Russian spoken seems to rub salt in their wounds. Two teenagers from Zaporizhzhia—a Russian-speaking city—told us that the war has impacted their generation by inspiring a strong movement to retain a distinctive Ukrainian identity, which includes speaking only Ukrainian. Streets named for Russian writers are being changed to honor Ukrainian writers. Others who are lifelong speakers of Russian—especially older people— sometimes feel berated and resent having their patriotism questioned. A refugee in the US who came from Mariupol said: "Just because I speak Russian doesn't mean I don't love my country. I am Ukrainian."

This has also presented a challenge for us, since we learned Russian more than 30 years ago in Odesa [Russian: Odessa], a Russian-speaking city where we rarely heard Ukrainian. The last thing we want to do is to offend anyone with our use of language. Many friends are gracious toward us and make allowances for us as foreigners, but we still need to understand the Ukrainian being spoken around us and to try to speak the preferred language.

Ukrainian soldiers receiving a church's Christmas care package, December 2023 (Source: C. & C. WARNER)

Lingering questions

Early on, people were asking: "Why? Did our nation commit some terrible sin and we are being punished?" A church leader said he concluded that Ukraine is no worse than many other nations living in peace. His answer now places the blame squarely on the evil being perpetrated against Ukraine by its nearest neighbor. The response of churches during wartime has been to care for people and to share Christ with the lost. They have had the joy of seeing people come to Christ and scores of new Ukrainian churches started in Europe.

Now the question seems to have shifted to: "How long?" People have visibly aged. Pastors and volunteers who have been carrying heavy burdens in caring for people are very tired. As winter sets in and attacks on the energy sector have increased, there is a grim determination to keep going, but people are weary. With support from Western allies faltering and fears of a protracted war that could go on for years, people are wondering what the future holds for their children. People are very grateful for the support of other nations in offering both military and humanitarian aid, as well as support for refugees abroad. There is also a sense that more help is needed in order to win the war, and not just to maintain the status quo.

Believers here are crying out to God and doing their best to keep trusting Him one day at a time, even as the end is not in sight. ♦

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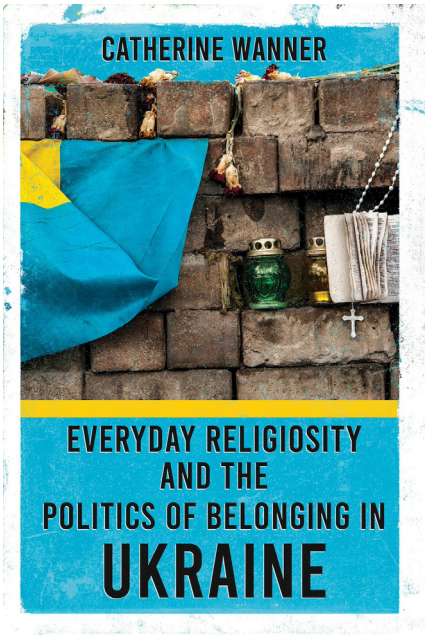
BOOK REVIEW

Everyday Religiosity and the Politics of Belonging in Ukraine
by Catherine Wanner
Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022
226 pp., $24.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-5017-6498-1

NICHOLAS DENYSENKO

Religion plays a significant role in Russia's war on Ukraine. Patriarch Kirill, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), has legitimized its violence and promoted ideological tropes justifying Russia's invasion. Controversial recent decisions by the Ukrainian government to expose and prosecute alleged collaborators among the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC)—until recently part of the ROC—has garnered the attention of the United Nations. The policies of the institutional Orthodox churches in Russia and Ukraine figure into the larger geopolitical conflicts that motivated Russia's decision to wage war on Ukraine.



Yet the public focus on institutional churches and statements by their leaders obscures a far more significant reality of religious life in Ukraine. Ukraine embraces religious pluralism, even among its predominantly Orthodox population. The situation on the ground, among ordinary Ukrainian believers, is one that challenges the image of rigid confessional loyalties to one of two Orthodox jurisdictions in Ukraine: the UOC and the recently created Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU).

Catherine Wanner, professor of anthropology at Penn State University, has observed religious life in Ukraine closely since the end of the Soviet era. Her recent book, *Everyday Religiosity and the Politics of Belonging in Ukraine*, clarifies misconceptions about religious practice, teases out the perspectives and viewpoints of individual believers, and brilliantly demonstrates how vernacular, affective religiosity evolves and contributes in turn to the development of popular perspectives in the ongoing context of war.

Wanner completed this book before Russia's full-scale invasion. In fact, she notes that the typesetting for the manuscript was finalized on the first day of that invasion—24 February 2022. Her study instead captures the rapid evolution of Ukrainian public sentiment against Russia during the earlier phase of the war, in what is described as the "contained uncontrolled zone" of Donbas (182). Yet the timing of this book is fortuitous and not a lost opportunity, because it provides clear confirmation that the war actually began in 2014, and not 2022.

Wanner starts by establishing her methodological framework. She argues that previous studies on religion in Ukraine undervalue the "relational interplay between institutional religion and vernacular forms of religious practice" by focusing too much upon practices that go beyond those authorized by church doctrine and law (7). Wanner seeks to show how this relational interplay evolves and shapes public life in Ukraine. The rich, sensual textures and gestures of Eastern Orthodoxy's liturgies are found to facilitate an affective atmosphere that Wanner finds conducive to vernacular religiosity (8).

Wanner introduces her work by defining Ukraine's confessional space in Chapter 1 (35). Here she pays special attention to the "Russian World" [Russian: *Russkii mir*] platform that has been promulgated by Patriarch Kirill with a view to claiming religious space in the post-Soviet context.

Wanner's presentation gains momentum in Chapters 2 and 3, where she offers examples of vernacular religiosity in dialogue with the institutional church. Her examples include individual testimonies of "places animated with prayer" (58-59). The description of people's experiences of Kharkiv's "Goldberg Church" [Church of the Three Holy Hierarchs on Goldberg Street] is one of the most poignant. The structure itself has a unique history, originating as a warehouse before its transformation into a church by a Jewish convert to Orthodox Christianity (60-61). The internal configuration features open expanse, abundance of light, and medieval Byzantine chants (61). Wanner notes this church's reputation as a "place animated with prayer" [Ukrainian: *namolene mistse*, Russian: *namolennoe mesto*] as

(continued on page 6)

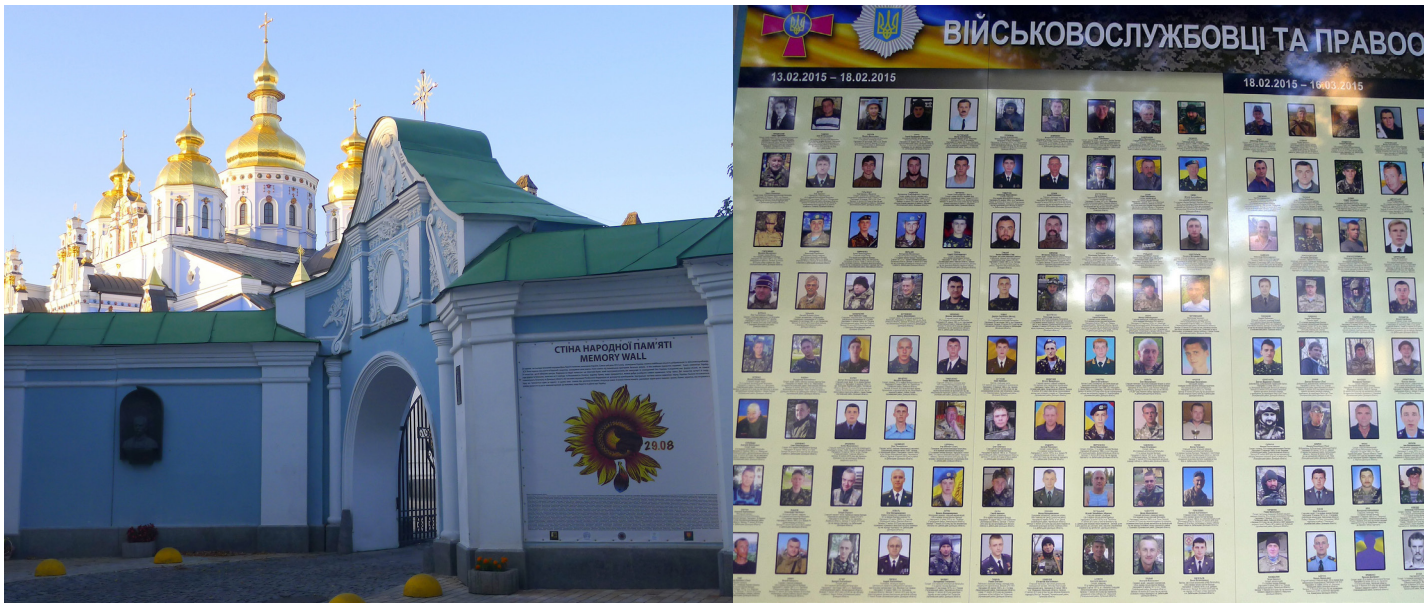
an example of a public space with a unique history that is conducive to vernacular religiosity because it promotes inner peace, calmness, and connection to departed family members (62). The qualities of the space contribute to the formation of individual religiosity despite the church's affiliation with the Moscow Patriarchate—its confessional identity largely does not figure in people's experiences (62).

The reality in which public spaces used by confessional institutions promote the formation of vernacular religiosity is epitomized by Wanner's clever description of religious pilgrimages as "vacationing with a purpose" (71). Monasteries in Ukraine are public shrines, despite the apparently opaque agreements for their use between the government and institutional churches. Wanner's assertions about the interplay of vernacular religiosity and institutional religion are confirmed with her presentation of pilgrims who visited a monastery in search of various degrees of spiritual therapy. Some of the women lied about their church affiliation in order to gain access to the monastery and its blessings. Wanner comments that the pilgrims' willingness to do this reveals their mistrust in church leaders and rejection of confessional politics (73). Her hypothesis at this point of the study previews one of her most profound assertions: Ordinary believers use "individual agency" to "reduce the political instrumentalization of religion" (188).

Wanner's study takes a decisive turn in her chapters examining the significance of the 2013-14 Maidan uprising, the creation of public shrines for commemorative spaces, and the ministries of military chaplains during the first phase of the war with Russia. She enriches readers' understanding and interpretation of the Maidan through a series of powerful eyewitness accounts on its meaning (89-90). She also emphasizes the struggle of the Maidan as Ukrainians' aspiration towards dignified human life and invites readers to see parallels between it and the 1989 Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia (114).

As an epic historical turn, the Maidan both challenged the political orientations of the institutional churches and displayed the vernacular religiosity of the Ukrainian people. Wanner engages the first-rate theological analyses of Cyril Hovorun and Myroslav Marynovych in their observations on the churches' opportunity to commit to solidarity with the people and fold their rejection of confessional politics into momentary episodes of ecumenical unity. Wanner's brief discussion of the creation of an ecumenical temple on Maidan Square, which was without any particular confessional patron and open to all, seems to suggest that the current of vernacular religiosity both superseded confessional claims to predominance and provided a snapshot of a potentially new Ukrainian nation that had no anchor in a particular past (97).

Wanner's presentation of public commemorative spaces, the intellectual debates surrounding their design, and the rapid evolution of Ukrainians' rejection of Russia in image, sound, verse, and song reveals the tensions caused by the convergence of public mourning, rage, and the relentless push for freedom and democracy independent of Russian domination. Wanner compares the erection of the shrine to the Heavenly Hundred [Maidan protesters killed by police snipers in early 2014] to the American Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, before considering the multivalence of public symbols (124). Her discussion of the memorial wall commemorating deceased soldiers at St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kyiv as a potential expression of rage is an important elucidation of the interplay between events, emotions, and the possibilities for transforming shrines



St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery (Orthodox Church of Ukraine) and a stretch of its perimeter memorial wall commemorating deceased Ukrainian soldiers, Kyiv, 2018 (G. FAGAN)

from spaces of grieving into sources of hatred and rage.

The exploration of public shrines extends to the final chapter on the ministries of military chaplains and the interaction between secular and religious forms of therapy. Wanner astutely observes that the Soviet regime used psychiatry as a tactic of waging war on its own citizens, a sharp memory that induced pain and stigmatized psychiatric care (171). Her profiles of military chaplains explore the possibilities for using religious practices to promote healing for soldiers as well as the wider public. Wanner's discussion of this issue represents her own expertise and also confirms her thesis on the interplay of vernacular religiosity with institutional religion. The construction of interconfessional chapels in hospitals evinces the power of vernacular religiosity, while the ministries carried out by chaplains express the acknowledgement by some church officials of the power of everyday religion.

While Wanner's study focuses on the period between the Maidan and the full-scale Russian invasion, it also encompasses the legacy of the Soviet era. Her study reveals the convergence of multiple phenomena: challenges to modern Ukrainian identity in confessional conflicts, Russian aggression, and Ukrainians' underlying desire to construct their own future. Her analyses of interviews with individuals and explorations of public commemorative spaces confirm her thesis on the power of individual agency to express a personal religiosity that draws from the official Orthodox cult but does not comply with all its rules and stipulations.

Ecumenical Church of the Greek Catholic Church commemorating the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Ukrainian New Martyrs, Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred Alley, Kyiv, 2018 (G. FAGAN)

Everyday Religiosity and the Politics of Belonging in Ukraine also engages three issues that will require further study and discussion in the coming years. The first is the rapidly evolving crisis of the OCU and UOC. The UOC's attempt to find a liminal space of separation from both the ROC and the OCU in the context of the war convinced neither the Ukrainian people nor the Zelensky administration. Wanner notes that the percentage of "just Orthodox" among Orthodox believers in Ukraine—defined as those who eschew confessional affiliation—has declined since the creation of the OCU in 2019 and the subsequent escalation of Russian aggression. The UOC still enjoys some support, but this is rapidly declining, even among its own clergy. The dynamic reconfiguration of confessional entities in Ukraine may portend a shift towards a population more sympathetic to the OCU.

The second issue concerns the formation of public spaces and the use of houses of worship owned by the people rather than religious entities. In this context Wanner notes the 2005 decision by the administration of President Viktor Yushchenko to establish 14 October—the feast day of the Protection of the Mother of God—as a national holiday (156). Many of Wanner's examples straddle the line between public commemorative spaces or shrines and the slow evolution of a civic religion. Discerning this line is a topic warranting further analysis, especially given the propensity for the politics of memory to be exploited for discrimination, violence, and war.

The third issue relates to Wanner's presentations on mourning, grief, and therapy. Her focused discussion of these in the chapter devoted to military chaplaincy contrasts spiritual and secular therapeutics. Here she does not engage with the danger posed by clergy who conflate spiritual practices with psychology, especially in the ritual practice of confession and reconciliation. It would be helpful to tease out the role of sacramental confession in promoting healing among those afflicted by the war. However, Wanner's entire study hints at the role played by public shrines in promoting a mode of death and resurrection: grief and mourning, the act of dying to the destructive practices of the past, and of rising to a new national life. Wanner's study therefore provides fertile ground for a fruitful discussion on public healing and reconstruction.

In summation, Wanner's study of religiosity in modern Ukraine is original and ground-breaking. It validates her thesis on the power of vernacular religiosity and offers numerous pathways for further exploration in the areas of confessional politics, civic religion, and public health. ♦

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Traditional Worship in Baptist Churches in Belarus: Formation, Features, and Internal Conflicts

LEONID MIKHOVICH

An abridged extract from the author's 2021 Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam doctoral thesis with the above title.

Traditional worship in Russian-speaking Baptist churches is rarely analyzed from historical and theological perspectives, especially by Russian-speaking Baptists themselves. My own interest in this topic and position as a researcher should be clarified at the outset, as my upbringing, age, education, and ministry all affect my view. I grew up in a Baptist home in Soviet-era Belarus and have been visiting Baptist churches since my childhood. Our first family trips were aimed at attending worship services in remote villages. There, as children and teenagers, we could put our gifts into practice by reciting poems, participating in music ministry, and preaching our first sermons. During the Soviet era, attending the worship of Evangelical churches[1]—including illegal gatherings—and participating in them, determined the identity and way of life of a believer to a much greater extent than nowadays. I am also interested in researching traditional worship as a Baptist minister—I take part in the planning and conducting of such worship, and I preach on a regular basis. This subject is also of particular importance to me as one of the leaders of the Belarusian Baptist Union and the rector of its seminary.

Baptist Church at 61/1 Fortechnaia Street, Brest (G. FAGAN)

In this case, "traditional worship" refers to the typically two-hour sermon- and hymn-based worship which has dominated in Belarusian Baptist churches for the last century or so. Among its prominent characteristics are two to four sermons, three or four congregational songs using the hymnal *Pesn' Vozrozhdeniia* [Russian: *Song of Revival*], piano and choir, and communal prayer open to all church members. Belarusian Baptists do not use the definition "traditional" themselves, and such a traditional form does not have the status of mandatory law for churches. For that reason, the presence, number, and sequence of certain components may vary somewhat in different churches at different times. However, they are united by similar "deep structures" of worship and a stable set of values and characteristics.

Deacon Stepan Pekun (d. 2018) and Pastor Viktor Zdanevich of the Church at 61/1 Fortechnaia Street, Brest, 2003 (G. FAGAN)

In most churches—especially those with a well-established form of gathering—getting together is called a *bogosluzhenie* [Russian: "divine service"], which is analogous to the German word *Gottesdienst*. This also reflects the Russian Synodal translation of the Bible, where the term "divine service" is used four times: Jeremiah 52:18; Romans 9:4; Hebrews 9:1, and Hebrews 9:6.

Due to close relationships between Russian-speaking Baptist churches during their formation, a similar type of worship was common across the former Soviet Union. Such congregations in Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and other republics followed—and many still follow—the same pattern, with only slight modifications. It is therefore possible to use the term "Russian-speaking Baptist worship" as a synonym for traditional worship in those contexts. Furthermore, many Russian-speaking churches in the United States and other countries also worship in this "traditional" way.

Given the lack of a more established status for the Belarusian language and Belarusian national identity, however, one cannot point to a specifically "Belarusian" type of Baptist worship. As it stands today, the character of public Baptist worship in Belarus has been influenced more by regional ties than by national identity. Meetings in southwestern Belarus, for example, are somewhat closer in spirit to meetings in northwestern Ukraine, where there is more in common than with churches in the north of Belarus.

The vast majority of Baptist churches in Belarus belong to the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Belarus (UECBB), which as of 2018 had 252 member churches. I have visited more than 100 of these, and on about 70 of those occasions I observed worship, took notes and photographs, and studied the worship space. Several times during my research, I also visited two large and influential independent churches in the southwestern city of Brest, namely the Church at 61/1 Fortechnaia Street and Christmas Church, in addition to four "unregistered" churches.[2] The principal time-frame of my research was 2008–17. My guiding question has been: How is implicit theology related to understandings of established Baptist worship in Belarus? Or, to be more specific: How have historical, political, religious, and theological contexts influenced this particular type of worship?

Luka Gladky surrounded by extended family, 1932 (Source: SLUTSK BAPTIST CHURCH)

Historical background

Evangelical Christianity reached Belarus from several geographical sources. A seminal book on the history of Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches in the former Soviet Union identifies four primary ones: southern Ukraine, Siberia, Germany and Austria, and the United States.[3] My analysis demonstrates that while the Evangelical movement in Belarus indeed emerged from several sources, it was also marked by spontaneity.

From the mid-19th century, poor peasants began to move from Belarus to southern Ukraine in search of employment. After being introduced to the Gospel there, some were converted and began to preach to their neighbors and relatives upon returning home, thus establishing the first communities in southeastern Belarus.

One such peasant was Dmitry Sementsov. Encountering Baptists in southern Ukraine, he joined them there in the city of Odesa [Odessa]. In 1877 he returned to Belarus, where he gathered a group of Evangelicals and established a church in his village of Usokhi, Gomel Region, in 1879. By 1885 this group had grown to 95 members. The influence of a southern Ukrainian source has also been detected in other villages in Gomel Region, as well as parts of neighboring Mogilev Region. By 1905 there were at least two more Baptist churches on that territory, comprising around 500 members (including children) by early 1906. Northern Belarus experienced other influences, namely from the Baltic region and the neighboring Russian region of Pskov.

The planting of churches increased considerably during and after the First World War. Returning refugees and prisoners-of-war contributed to this ministry. One was Luka Gladky, who came to faith in Austria in 1914. When he returned home, he was thought to be deranged because he read a New Testament that he had brought back with him, abstained from alcohol and tobacco, and was bold enough to remove all icons from the walls. Eventually his mother and sisters joined his faith, and a home church was founded in Otradnoe, a village near Soligorsk in Minsk Region. Gladky then founded the church in the nearby village of Lesovnia.[4]

Another connection may be traced to the United States, where some Belarusians also went in search of employment. Converted in the United States, they started to share their faith on return to their homeland. One was Afanasy Gurin of Selishche village, near the city of Pinsk in Brest Region. When Gurin was asked about his conversion, he reportedly replied: "While I was staying in America, I went to a sectarian school, where I learned to read and write and also learned the sectarian doctrine, which was the reason for my joining the sect."[5] (Here, the terms "sectarian" and "sect" are attributable to the Orthodox missionary who recorded the conversation with Gurin, for Evangelical Christians did not use such terms.)

The Evangelical movement also spread to what is now Belarus from areas now in modern-day Poland. For example, Lukash Dzekuts'-Malei (1888-1955)—a renowned Belarusian public figure, pastor, and preacher who translated the New Testament into Belarusian—moved to Brest after being converted in the Polish city of Białystok. There, he encountered Evangelicals and was baptized by German Baptists in 1912.[6] Dzekuts'-Malei actively ministered in and around Brest, and his church had over 800 members by 1926. Within a few years, 19 Evangelical churches were planted in Brest Region, with services held at another 70 locations. By 1937 the Baptist Union centered in Brest had 85 churches, 275 affiliates, and 13,800 believers.

Here in western Belarus—which was part of Poland after 1921—the Evangelical movement developed later than in eastern Belarus, but it proved to be especially effective at church planting. This was despite the fact that Poland directed efforts towards quenching the movement via its local administrations and police. Since the majority of its books were printed in Russian, the Protestant movement was considered to be "undesirable for Polish statehood."[7] The authorities could forbid believers from teaching choir singing, distributing religious literature among church members, and teaching people religion. Nevertheless, Evangelicals on Polish territory managed to carry out dynamic missionary activity, organize Bible and choir director courses, and distribute Bibles and New Testaments, because they had more freedom than their fellow believers in the eastern—then Soviet—part of Belarus. Thus, from 1922-29, their followers increased eightfold to 7,865. Baptist churches in Belarus today still enjoy the fruit of this activity—the town of Kobryn, for example, has the largest Baptist house of prayer in the country.

Lukash Dzekuts'-Malei (Open Source)

(continued on page 10)

Lukash Dzekuts'-Malei (left) near Brest, 1924 (Source: KRYNITSA ZHYTSTSIA)

Components of worship

Hymns in Russian published by Ivan Prokhanov (1869-1935)—founder and leader of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians (AUCEC) as well as a writer, poet, and translator—were especially important in forming the spirit of worship services.[8] Prokhanov published 1,037 hymns, 624 of which he wrote himself, including the very popular: "*O, Obraz sovershennyi*" ["O, Perfect Image"]; "*Za evangel'skuiu veru*" ["For the Evangelical Faith"]; "*Vzoidem na Golgofu, moi brat*" ["Let Us Go Up to Calvary, My Brother"]. Prokhanov also translated 413 lyrics from English and German, many of which have become classics in Baptist music ministry, such as "*Slushaite povest' liubvi v prostote*" ["Simple Love Story"]; "*Ne proidi, Iisus, menia Ty*" ["Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior"]; and "*Liubliu, Gospod', Tvoi dom*" (I Love Thy House, Lord).

Numerous worship songs—especially ones which could be traced to the revival tradition of Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey, were also employed. As a result of his visit to western Belarus in 1926, the writer James Hay Colligan observed in *The Times* [of London] that

> **thousands of farmers turn away from traditional services in the Russian Orthodox Church, and they have their meetings according to the evangelical pattern as it has been done in Great Britain and America over the last fifty years. Revival hymns are very popular; people listen to a tuning fork and all the congregation unanimously joins in singing. Such worship services of "believers," as these people are called [Editor's note: the Russian term used remains *veruiushchie*], are so popular that, in one of the villages where I addressed a large congregation, the local parish church was almost empty.[9]**

While worship services developed over time, the general scheme remained the same. Notes by a Christian who attended a service in Brest in October 1922 describe how a worship service appeared in its more developed form:

> **On Saturday night, brother Feodor Trihoniuk harnessed a horse, and we went to Brest-Litovsk to the service of God's children. We drove all night and at dawn came into the city. At 10 a.m., brothers and sisters as well as visitors gathered from all the neighborhoods of Brest, and the house was filled. The meeting was opened by singing "I Hear Thy Voice" and prayer. Brother Dzekuts'-Malei read from the prophecy of Isaiah 12, and instructed brothers and sisters. Two brothers then shared about Christ. The meeting ended at 12 o'clock. After the meeting, four people gave their hearts to the Lord.[10]**

Active opposition from the state, the official Orthodox Church, fellow villagers, and even close relatives by no means prevented conversions to Evangelical Christianity. On the contrary, it contributed to a distinct expression of indigenous faith culture conveyed, for example, in the minor key of many worship tunes. For, as Pavel Pavlov, one of the leaders of the Baptist Union, claimed, an exotic plant from overseas would not have survived on Russian soil.[11] Instead, the Russian-Ukrainian-Belarusian Evangelical community, starting from individual communities in the first period of its existence (1867-1917) and having survived two periods of severe persecution in the 1890s and 1920-30s, grew by more than 200,000 members.

The growth of the Evangelical movement in Belarus demonstrates Baptists' flexibility, as they adapted forms and content in order to implement Baptist beliefs and practices within their own culture and to create distinct Belarusian/Russian churches. Evangelical leaders were evidently aware of the problem of adaptation. They wondered how a revival with an English character in St. Petersburg could become a revival in the broader Russian-speaking environment. Such questions included doctrinal and social issues, in addition to patterns of worship.

Prokhanov viewed the Evangelical movement as a national reformist movement and argued that the Evangelical Church was equivalent to the restored early Christian Church in its teaching. Just as Prokhanov addressed broader societal and cultural issues, Dzekuts'-Malei's work encompassed a variety of cultural, linguistic, and educational aspects. He helped found the cultural society *Belaruskaia hatka* and translated the New Testament into the Belarusian language. With his fellow workers, he taught not just about Christianity but also general subjects, and organized shelters and nursing homes. In this manner Dzekuts'-Malei wished to introduce the Gospel into everyday life and to promote Baptist faith and practice as a potential national religion of Belarus. However, contextualization required time and effort. It had taken several decades, for example, before Eastern Slavic Protestantism learned to write indigenous hymns and for the influence of Western hymnal literature to diminish.

Yet it is important to note that, while the new Evangelicals emphasized independence and originality, they did not reject the experience or help of Western believers, whose way of thinking about worship still became a model for many churches. The process of adopting Western ideas was not always smooth, however, and it was accompanied by failures as well as successes. In this regard, it is interesting to note how the borrowing of Western hymns by Russian-speaking churches

Choir of Slutsk Baptist Church, 1930
(Source: SLUTSK BAPTIST CHURCH)

was assessed in different Slavic Evangelical contexts. Princess Sophia Liven (1880-1964), an active Evangelical Christian, addressed the practice of some educated representatives of the upper class in St. Petersburg of translating hymns into Russian. She believed that "the new living church was in need of spiritual hymns… but as for the tunes—they were primitive in regard to music, and were somewhat alien to the Russian ear, as they were an exact repetition of the English ones."[12]

The issue of contextualization again became fresh after the fall of the Iron Curtain, when Western forms and practices were reintroduced into Russian-speaking churches. The links between various Western churches and Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches in Belarus have encountered similar tensions. Many Baptist believers would express their discomfort with new forms of praying—such as being seated rather than standing or kneeling, as has been their custom—or being asked to pray in small groups of people, rather than as a whole congregation. Some believers are offended by humor in a sermon, by laughter and applause in the house of prayer, and by lack of respect shown to the Bible as a book.

It is hard to imagine a study of worship without an analysis of liturgical texts. Yet there are few items directly associated with traditional Baptist worship in Belarus: namely, the Bible, hymnal(s), and collections of poetry. There are neither prayer books nor written texts and directions, including for Communion, funerals, weddings, ordinations, and baptisms. There are some other useful items that have indirect relation to worship services, however. *Bratskii Vestnik* [*Fraternal Messenger*] magazine is an indispensable resource for the study and analysis of Russian-speaking Baptist worship, as it was the only legal Baptist magazine published bi-monthly from 1945 to 1993. (In 2005, the publication was relaunched as a press organ of the Euro-Asian Federation of the Unions of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.) In the Soviet era this publication united churches and smaller groups of believers, and in the absence of other theological resources or means of communication it is difficult to overstate its role.

The leadership of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) considered "proper formation" of church members "both from the spiritual and civil point of view" to be the main objective of the magazine.[13] *Bratskii Vestnik* covered various aspects of church life, published sermons, articles for Christian edification, commentaries on biblical texts, information about how the leaders of the Union and its regional units visited churches, as well as what decisions the Union made. Many communities practiced communal reading of the magazine, such as reading it aloud before the start of a worship service. Nevertheless, it was an official publication controlled by the Soviet authorities, and so a considerable amount of information on church life was avoided, especially regarding the forced closure of churches, arrests, and the activity of unregistered churches. Yet in the almost complete absence of other literature or information sources, its spiritual influence was still felt far beyond Moscow. To provide a personal example, my brothers and I used *Bratskii Vestnik* to prepare our sermons when we were only teenagers, making use of "Meditations for Preachers" by Aleksandr Karev, who was chief editor of the magazine, as well as AUCECB General Secretary, from 1944 until his death in 1971.

Orthodox influences

The religious—and particularly Orthodox—context has played an important role in the formation of traditional Baptist worship in Belarus. Obvious examples are services dedicated to events in the life of Christ, such as the Baptism of the Lord, the Meeting of the Lord (held on 15 February to commemorate the Presentation of Christ in the Temple—Luke 2:22-38) or the Transfiguration. Annunciation Day draws attention to Mary, but she is presented not as an intercessor, patron, or Mother of God, but as a model of humility and obedience to God's will who still needs salvation.

Christmas celebrations also reflect the Orthodox context. The 21st century has seen the transition of most Belarusian Baptist churches to celebrating Christmas in line with the West on 25 December. However, many continue to celebrate Christmas for a second time on 7 January [Editor's note: when many Eastern Orthodox celebrate Christmas] and use this "Second Christmas" primarily for evangelism. "First Christmas" is rather for internal church use and an awareness of unity with Evangelicals in foreign countries. The content of both Christmas worship services is generally the same. Yet in January, to take Golgotha Church in Minsk as an example, the worship service has an evangelistic focus and there is a call to repentance. In other churches—including at two other Minsk churches, Light of the Gospel and Bethlehem—there may be evening theater performances for non-Christian audiences.

The secular New Year celebration is a special period dedicated to being alert, even though the numerous Christmas events and concerns do not always allow concentration on prayer. Committed church members still try to attend all worship services—meaning that, during a period of 16 days, one could visit up to 20 services. However, this is the only time of the year when there is such a large number of meetings. This results from the "two" Christmases as well as New Year between them, and the fact that Sunday services are never canceled, regardless of the days of the week on which Christmas and New Year fall.

(continued on page 12)

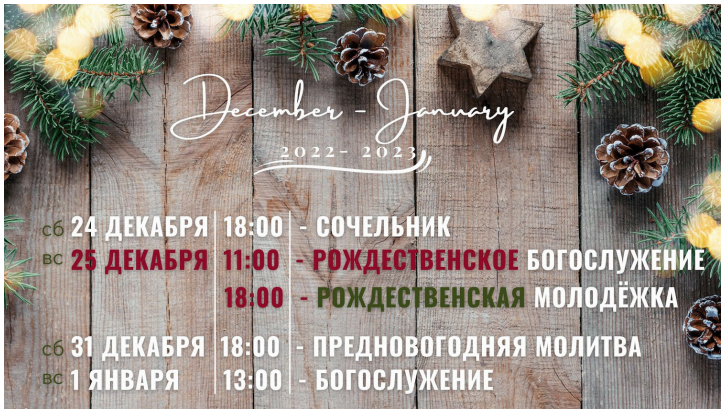
Baptist Churches in Belarus *(continued from page 11)*

The schedule of the Church at 61/1 Fortechnaia Street in Brest offers a typical example of the 2012-13 holiday season in a large church:

23 December (Sunday) – morning and evening services.
24 December (Monday) – evening service on "Western" Christmas Eve.
25 December (Tuesday) – morning and evening services on Christmas Day.
26 December (Wednesday) – morning and evening services on the second day of Christmas.
27 December (Thursday) – regular weekly prayer service.
30 December (Sunday) – morning and evening services.
31 December (Monday) – a New Year's Eve evening service.
1 January (Tuesday) – a New Year daytime service.
2-4 January (Wednesday to Friday) – prayer services every evening.
6 January (Sunday) – morning and evening services on "Orthodox" Christmas.
7 January (Monday) – morning and evening services continuing Christmas celebrations.

Although services during the Easter season are less frequent, there still may be eight services over the nine days from Palm Sunday to Easter Monday. The importance of Easter is also reflected by the length of the season. While Christmas motifs are gone in a week or two, Easter is remembered for 40 days in many churches. Here, worship also reflects Orthodox context. On Easter Day itself, besides the singing of the Paschal *troparion* by the congregation ["Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!], ministers greet participants with the words "Christ is risen!" This is usually repeated three times, the congregation responding "He is risen indeed!" on each occasion. Worship services begin in this manner until Ascension.

Orthodox origins and surroundings, perhaps in combination with national specifics, also account for Baptist



Announcement for Christmas services at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minsk (Source: BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH)

Choir of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minsk, Easter 2023 (Source: BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH)

restraint and reverence—especially in prayer—and the demonstration of respect to the worship location. In particular, kneeling during prayer is practiced in traditional Baptist worship services, although in recent times people may also stand during the service. Prayer in the sitting position would not be considered appropriate at a traditional meeting.

Singing is another bridge leading to the permeation of Orthodox theology and worship character into traditional Baptist communities. As far back as the 1860s, some Evangelical Christians who had split from Orthodoxy continued to sing Orthodox devotional songs before their own hymns were written.[14] A favorite hymn of Evangelical believers remains "*Strashno bushuet zhiteiskoe more*" ("The Sea of Life Is Terribly Raging"), written in the 19th century by Ivan Kulzhinsky, an Orthodox school teacher in Chernigov, Ukraine. The author's ad hoc examination in early 2008 of the repertoires of the first choir of Light of the Gospel Church in Minsk revealed that a third of the hymns regularly sung in worship there were the work of Orthodox authors. The Baptist style of performance, however, tends to be more classical and vivacious compared to the style of singing of the same hymns by the Orthodox.

Another key point is the way in which Baptists use general terms for baptism, the Lord's supper, marriage, dedication of children, ordination, consecration of a house of prayer, and prayer over the sick. These are referred to as "church acts," but the terms "sacred rites," "commandments," and even "sacraments" are also in use, pointing to Orthodox influence. Thus, it is not uncommon for a preacher—when praying over the bread before communion—to ask, "O Lord, bless this sacrament," or for a believer to pray for the "holy sacrament of Eucharist." (Adopted in 2003, *The Doctrine of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists' Faith in Belarus* names baptism and the breaking of the bread as the Lord's commandments, while the other "rites"—marriage, dedication of children, ordination, consecration of a house of prayer, and prayer over the sick—are considered to be "church acts." It is noteworthy that seven are listed, suggesting a parallel with the seven sacraments of the Orthodox Church.)

Undated Soviet-era service, Slutsk Baptist Church (Source: SLUTSK BAPTIST CHURCH)

Another significant area of influence concerns special prayers for the needs of believers. As in the Orthodox Church, these play an important role in the Baptist worship service. In small churches, believers name their prayer requests aloud, whereas in larger churches, worshippers send notes listing their requests to the pastor before or during the service. While this practice resembles prayer in Orthodox churches, the Orthodox have established a set of rules for writing and submitting prayer notes; for example, these notes should not contain a person's last name or patronymic, title, rank, or degree of relation.

Finally, there are echoes of Orthodox practice in the tradition of decorating houses of prayer with biblical texts, which goes back to the very beginning of the Evangelical movement in Belarus, when worship services were held in believers' homes. Even today, in the "red corner" (the corner of the sitting room opposite the entrance and between the windows, where there would be a cross and/or an icon in an Orthodox household), elderly Christians often display the text: "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" [John 4:24]—a clear indication of the disapproval of the Orthodox practice of icon veneration. It would be much easier to place a framed Scripture on a wall but—located in this particular corner—the reference to worshipping in spirit and in truth explains the absence of an icon.

Such artifacts, however, may also gain an "iconic" value in themselves. Baptists' zeal in filling their houses or apartments with Scriptures could possibly explain a recommendation in *Bratskii Vestnik* that "in the home of a Christian everything should contribute to spiritual joy and glory to the Lord. There should be no more than two or three Scriptures in austere frames, bookshelves with good books, and some reproductions of paintings on religious topics or landscapes, etc."[15]

While Baptists in Belarus built their theology on the denial of Orthodox forms, their worship thus has continued to reflect some of the spirit and character of Orthodoxy. ♦

Notes:

[1] I explore "Baptist" worship, but the terms "Evangelical Christians," "Evangelical believers," and "Evangelicals" are also used. They refer not only to Baptists but to the various Evangelical Protestant groups which existed in the Russian Empire and later on Soviet territory until October 1944, when the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) was established. After the Second World War, the term "Evangelicals" thus generally came to mean Baptists, or Baptists and Pentecostals. The latter were forced to join the AUCECB in August 1945 on condition that they abandoned speaking in tongues and foot washing in worship. They left the AUCECB once they were able to form their own Union again in 1989.

Meanwhile, the term "Evangelical Christians"—with emphasis on the capital "E"—can refer to a specific group of churches in Russia and the USSR which established their own "All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians" in St. Petersburg in 1909 and merged with the Baptists in 1944. In Belarus, however, "Evangelical Christians/believers" and "Baptists" are often used interchangeably, and "Evangelical Christians-Baptists" (ECB) and "Baptists" are also used as synonyms.

[2] There are around 25 Baptist churches in Belarus which are registered with the state authorities but do not belong to larger formal church organizations. In 2015 there were also 73 unregistered churches belonging to the independent Council of Churches movement of Russian-speaking Baptists, which dates back to 1961.

[3] *Istoriia evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov v SSSR*, Moscow: Izdanie Vsesoiuznogo soveta evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov, 1989, 380-91.

[4] A.L. Gladkii and A.I. Firisiuk, "80 let razluk i vstrech," *Krynitsa Zhytstsia*, no. 2 (2007), 18-21.

[5] A record of missionary trips by an Orthodox diocesan missionary to the Pinsk and Mozyr uyezds, National Historical Archives of Belarus, f. 136, op. 1, spr. 38344, 1.

[6] Leonid Kovalenko (ed.), *Oblako svidetelei Khristovykh*, Kyiv: Tsentr Khristianskogo Sotrudnichestva, 1997, 161. On Dzekuts-Malei's life and ministry see A.I. Bokun (ed.), *Lukash Dzekuts'-Malei i belaruskiia peraklady Biblii*, Brest:Al'ternat'va, 2011.

[7] T.V. Lisovskaia, "Deiatel'nost' protestantskikh obshchin i organizatsii v Zapadnoi Belarusi v 1921-1939 gg.," *Vesnik Grodzenskaga dziarzhaunaga universiteta imia Ianki Kupaly*, series 1, vol. 2 (67), 2008, 81.

[8] V.A. Popov, *I.S. Prokhanov, Stranitsy zhizni*, St. Petersburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 1996. See also Prokhanov's autobiography, *V kotle Rossii*, Chicago: World Fellowship of Slavic Evangelical Christians, 1992.

[9] J. Hay Colligan, "White Russia—A Visitor's Impression," *The Times*, 7 September 1926, quoted in Gai Pikarda [Guy Picarda], *Niabesnae polymia. Pratestantskaia tsarkva belaruski natsyianal'ny rukh na pachatku XX stagoddzia*, Minsk: Knigazbor, 2006, 15.

[10] S. Pekun, "Luka Nikolaevich Dzekuts-Malei: zhizn' i sluzhenie," *Krynitsa Zhytstsia*, no. 2, 2000, 9.

[11] P. V. Pavlov, "Doklad na 3-m Vsemirnom kongresse baptistov v Stokgolme, Shvetsiia, 6.7.1923," in Leonid Kovalenko (ed.), *Oblako svidetelei Khristovykh*, Kyiv: Tsentr Khristianskogo Sotrudnichestva, 1997, 219.

[12] S.P. Liven, *Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie v Rossii. Vospominaniia kniazhny S.P. Liven*, Chicago: Slavic Gospel Press, 1989, 16.

[13] *Bratskii Vestnik*, no. 3 (1969), 65.

[14] L.I. Kharlov, "Iz istorii muzikal'no-pevcheskogo sluzheniia nashego bratstva," *Bratskii Vestnik*, no. 6 (1981), 46.

[15] A.R. [partly anonymous], "Khristianin v bytu," *Bratskii Vestnik*, no. 5 (1977), 65.

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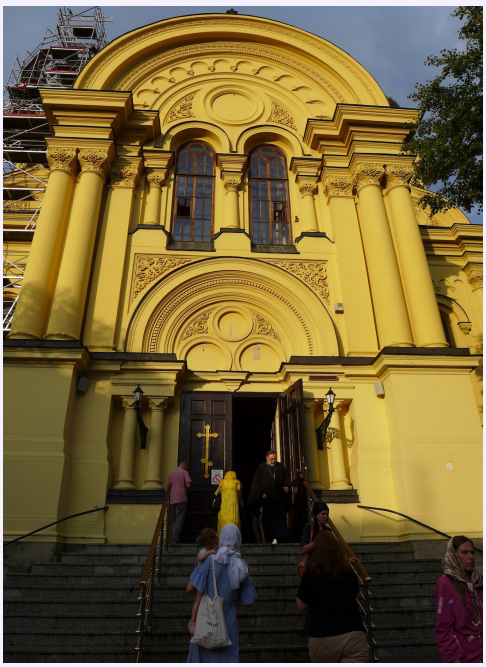
Small But Varied: Poland's Orthodox Church



Orthodox Metropolitan Cathedral of St. Mary Magdalene, Warsaw (G. FAGAN)

With influences from all points of the compass, cultural complexity is particularly characteristic of Christian communities across Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland. The Polish Orthodox Church is no exception. Acknowledged as autocephalous—or independent—by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1924 and by the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1948, it is one of the world's smaller local Orthodox Churches, with approximately 500,000 members. Within Poland it has around 500 parishes, 10 monasteries, a theological academy, and a seminary.

Fr. Doroteusz Sawicki, auxiliary priest at the Church's Metropolitan Cathedral of St. Mary Magdalene in Warsaw, outlined Polish Orthodoxy's linguistic and ethnic variety to the editor of the East-West Church Report *during an August 2022 interview at the cathedral offices. [Fr. Doroteusz's lengthier comments on Orthodox efforts to assist refugees fleeing from the war in Ukraine may be found in the* East-West Church Report, *vol. 30, no. 3, 9-11.]*

Are there any regions in Poland where Orthodoxy is particularly strong?

That has not been the case since the Second World War. Until then, the cities of Vilnius [now capital of independent Lithuania], Grodno [Belarusian: Hrodna, now in western Belarus], and Lviv [now in western Ukraine] all belonged to Poland. Most Orthodox lived there. After the Second World War, the Communist authorities resettled Orthodox populations from those areas—particularly if they were both Ukrainian and Orthodox—and scattered them throughout Poland, especially on former German lands that were allotted to Poland: the new western regions and Prussia. This was so that there would be no strong concentrations of ethnic or religious identity.

There are still many Orthodox in eastern areas of Poland, however: on [northeastern] Podlasie territory, centered on the cities of Białystok, Hajnówka, Bielsk Podlaski, and Siemiatycze; on [eastern] Chełm territory, centered on the cities of Lublin and Chełm; and in southeastern Poland, centered on the cities of Przemyśl, Nowy Sącz, and Gorlice. There are also Orthodox in large Polish cities such as Warsaw, Gdańsk, Poznań, Szczecin, and Wrocław, because many Orthodox went there to work or study. Now, because of similar emigration from Belarus—and also from Ukraine due to the war—it is hard to name a place where there are no Orthodox.

Orthodoxy in Poland is also multi-ethnic. Today, the majority is Ukrainian—although it is difficult to say how they define their position towards the Polish state, as they are refugees who hope to return to Ukraine at some point. Besides Poles, we also have Belarusians, Serbs, Russians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, as well as many Greeks and Cypriots.

These are Orthodox who have come from other countries. Within Poland, there are Polish Ukrainians and Polish Belarusians—somewhat different from Ukrainians and Belarusians—and also small [Slavic] ethnic groups: Lemkos, Boykos, and Hutsuls. They are indigenous to the far southeast and have always professed Eastern Christianity.

Do these small groups have their own languages?

Yes, or dialects. Services are often in Church Slavonic because Polish is not the language of the whole congregation. We also have services using the local pronunciation of Church Slavonic—such as Lemko—or that incorporate a local language component. In our Warsaw cathedral, for example, the Sunday sermon is in Ukrainian every second week, and in Belarusian once a month. We have an 11 a.m. chapel service entirely in Greek. In the cathedral's lower church we have services for children and teenagers, in which Scripture readings are in modern Polish. At our chapel on Lelechowska Street, services are entirely in modern Polish.

The Orthodox chapel on Lelechowska Street is dedicated to a 20th-century martyr from Georgia: St. Gregory [Georgian: Grigol] Peradze (1899-1942). Also in August 2022, the editor of the East-West Church Report *briefly asked its parish priest, Fr. Henryk Paprocki, about his distinctive community.*

How did you acquire your association with St. Gregory Peradze?

St. Gregory was a professor at Warsaw University between the world wars, a lecturer in patrology and an Orientalist of international renown due to his vast knowledge of ancient and modern languages—24 in all. He wrote a great deal in Polish and Georgian, and his writings on pilgrimage to the Holy Land are hugely significant because he described things that no longer exist. He perished in Auschwitz concentration camp due to the assistance he gave to those who were suffering there.

When I was a student at St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, I was asked to collect information about him in Poland. I began in 1978, and this led to his canonization in 1995. During all this time we were thinking about how to honor his memory. We organized this parish in 2005, and another church dedicated to St. Gregory Peradze has also been built in Białystok.

You translated the Orthodox liturgy into modern Polish, which is used in this parish. Are your parishioners typically new to Orthodoxy?

No, they are usually "cradle" Orthodox. A lot of Georgians also come here, as well as Ukrainians, Belarusians—we're an international parish. The use of modern Polish was very unusual 50 years ago, but now it is a regular occurrence.

In Pursuit of the White Angel *[Polish:* W Poszukiwaniu Białego Anioła*], a 1996 documentary about St. Gregory Peradze with English subtitles and featuring Fr. Henryk Paprocki, may be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypwH3IYJOV0.* ♦

(Below) Orthodox Chapel of St. Gregory Peradze, Warsaw. (Below left) Fr. Henryk Paprocki and parishioners outside the chapel and adjacent icon museum. (G. FAGAN)

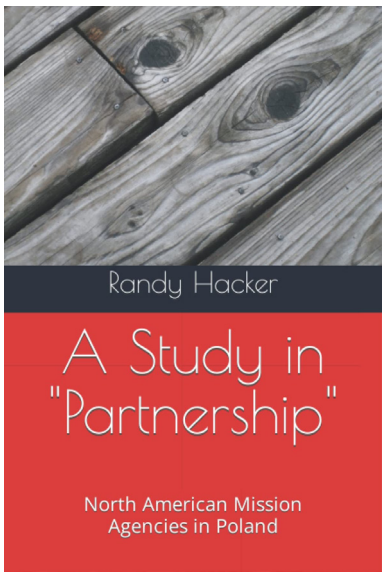
BOOK REVIEW

A Study in "Partnership": North American Mission Agencies in Poland

by Randy Hacker
independently published, 2021
113 pp., $10.00 (paperback), ISBN 979-8-49619-272-9

MYRA WATKINS

Noting the apparent lack of an in-depth study into Evangelical experiences of partnership between North American missionaries and Polish churches, US missionary Randy Hacker seeks to fill the gap by building upon his own long experience in Poland, where he has pastored churches and mentored local leaders and missionaries since 1999. Hacker's research identifies both positive patterns in and barriers to such relationships, and recommends best practices for North American missionaries and Polish church leaders wishing to promote thriving and fruitful partnerships.



Compared with the Catholic Church, Evangelicals in Poland are small and recent, most of their denominations having arisen during the twentieth century. As Christianity has been present in Poland for over a thousand years, Hacker's concise overview of that history is invaluable here. For many Poles, the Christian faith started out as a burden imposed upon them by their ruler. Still, a religious patriotism developed with the romanticized struggle of Polish Messianism, which reached its peak when a Pole, Karol Wojtyła, was elected Pope John Paul II in 1978. It was also prior to the fall of Communism in 1989 that North American missionaries first began to partner with Polish Evangelical churches.

Hacker's study continues by utilizing his own recent online survey of North American missionaries, a focus group of more experienced North American

(continued on page 16)

Hacker Review *(continued from page 15)*

missionaries, and personal interviews with Polish Evangelical leaders in order to assess the nature of their partnerships. By "partnership," he means any formal or informal working relationship between a missionary and a local church, co-operation with a registered local religious organization being a requirement for foreign missionary activity in Poland.

On the basis of his analysis, Hacker then offers ten recommendations for North American missionaries in Poland to become more effective: prayer, focusing on personal relationships, learning Polish, working to understand Polish culture and values, choosing to live a similar lifestyle, becoming a student of Polish history, respecting Polish denominations, avoiding great promises, clear communication, and taking a humble posture of service.

Among Hacker's suggestions to Polish partners is the need for them to demonstrate clarity of vision, as a lack of this quality was cited by North American missionaries as a particular barrier to partnership. Indeed, both North American missionaries and Polish church leaders rated differences in ministry vision and/or philosophy as among the top barriers to effective partnership, alongside differences of method. For Polish leaders, missionary agency restrictions were the primary barrier (72). In most cases, however, Polish leaders judged that their partnerships with North American missionaries had been a significant source of encouragement.

The main weakness in Hacker's research is one that he readily admits: As he serves in a Baptist church in Poland, most of his missionary contacts have come through the Baptist Union. While his research suggests that North American missionaries tend to partner with the Baptist Union, his affiliation therefore may have impacted his findings.

As a US missionary who has served in Poland as well as Ukraine for more than a decade, I highly recommend this book to new missionaries as a source of wisdom on how to begin, as well as to long-term missionaries who may still lack such an in-depth perspective as Hacker's. Having reflected upon the patterns that emerge from his analysis, I would emphasize the Polish leaders' advice for North American missionaries to remember that they are in Poland to serve, and so should build up relationships with local churches. They may also work towards defining resulting partnerships, but only once trust has been established. Furthermore, as missiologist Scott Klingsmith points out, churches in Central and Eastern Europe today seek missionaries who offer expertise in areas they have not yet developed. By recognizing this, we may avoid awkward scenarios in which missionaries look for Polish translators in order to conduct ministry that Poles can do just as well, if not better, themselves (69).

Evangelical missionary concert in downtown Warsaw, August 2022 (G. FAGAN)

Finally, I concur with Hacker that similar studies of partnerships elsewhere in Eastern Europe could be of significant service to such relationships. ♦

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