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# The Church in Russia: Between the Law and Administrative Practice

*Mark Elliott*

### The November 1999 Court Ruling

Russia's Constitutional Court handed down a long-awaited ruling on 23 November 1999 substantially softening the blow of the restrictive October 1997 law on religion.[1] Suits brought in 1998 by a Jehovah's Witness congregation in Yaroslavl and the Glorification Pentecostal Church in Abakan, Khakassia, Siberia, involved the two groups that had suffered the greatest degree of government harassment in the previous two years. Registered prior to the 1997 law but not more than 15 years prior, both suffered discrimination and threats of closure under the 1997 legislation's two-tiered system of privileges and disabilities for those with and without 15 years of legal recognition. The Yaroslavl church dates from 1967 but only managed to secure official registration in 1992. In fact, it would have been impossible for it to register before the 1990s because Jehovah's Witnesses were proscribed under Soviet law.[2]

In an 18-page decision widely applauded by human rights activists, Chief Justice Valerii Zorkin ruled that the controversial 15-year provision of Article 27 does not apply to groups registered prior to the passage of the 1997 law; nor does it apply to any congregation which has joined a "centralized religious organization" with a legal presence in at least three of Russia's 89 regions.[3]

Human rights lawyer Lauren Homer sees the decision as "a great triumph" and "cause for rejoicing," while attorney Anatolii Pchelintsev, who represented the Pentecostal church in the case, calls it "a substantial victory."[4] Indeed, the vast majority of the thousands of churches founded by Protestants, Catholics, and new religious movements in the wake of Glasnost now have some legal protection under the court ruling. However, in Russian history arbitrary administrative practice frequently has been more important than the letter of the law. Thus, the observance of the court's decision by local authorities will require close monitoring. Furthermore, groups such as Jesuits, with direct lines of command to the Vatican rather than to Catholic hierarchs in Russia, and unregistered Baptists gain no benefit from the November 1999 court ruling.[5]

Keston Institute Director Lawrence Uzzell points out that the court did not actually declare any portion of the 1997 law on religion unconstitutional. On paper, the blatant discrimination between "religious organizations" and "religious groups" established in Article 27 still stands.[6] Chief Justice Zorkin explicitly wrote, "The state has the right to block those sects that are carrying out illegal activities . . . so as not to automatically grant the status of a religious organization." And in some cases authorities have the right "to obstruct missionary activities . . . [and] proselytizing" when "accompanied by offers of material or social benefits." The chief justice insisted on the state's obligation to protect against "the unlawful influence on people in need or distress, psychological pressure, or threat of force."[7] With such language, even Christ's injunction to share water and food with the destitute would appear to fit the Russian court's definition of bribery and manipulation. In truth, the line in Christian witness between genuine, godly compassion and unseemly material and psychological inducement can be difficult to draw. Still, it seems clear that Zorkin's language draws it in an extremely restrictive manner.

Artur Leontev, one of the defense lawyers in the case, believes the ruling "was made on the grounds of politics rather than jurisprudence."[8] As attorney Lauren Homer notes, "It was clear that the Constitutional Court was under great pressure to avoid finding the entire law unconstitutional, thereby antagonizing the Russian parliamentary bodies . . . . The court tried to take a middle ground and not find the law unconstitutional, but find a way that the majority of groups could reregister without special problems."[9] Thus, to the extent that authorities comply, the ruling takes a major practical step forward in the protection of freedom of conscience.

### Reregistration of Religious Communities: By Fits and Starts

Meanwhile, the vast majority of Russia's religious organizations were unable to reregister before the 31 December 1999 deadline established by the October 1997 law on religion. Deputy Minister of Justice

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Evgenii Sidorenko reported that out of approximately 16,000 religious groups officially registered in October 1997, only some 3,160 had completed reregistration by October 1999.[10] Tatyana Titova of Keston News Service estimated in mid-December 1999 that in some provinces as many as 50 percent of religious bodies had not yet reregistered.[11] In the fall of 1999 even the Moscow Patriarchate, with up to 10,000 parishes and auxiliaries not reregistered,[12] joined other parties in seeking a one or two year extension from the Duma. With the support of the Ministry of Justice and Yeltsin's Chief for Internal Politics Andrei Loginov, the Duma's Committee on Religious Organization recommended a one year extension. But with the Chechen war raging and the distraction of election campaigning, the Duma recessed in December without taking action.[13] Finally, on 21 February 2000 the Russian parliament passed an extension of the reregistration deadline to 31 December 2000. Currently some 7,000 religious associations have yet to reregister under the terms of the October 1997 law on religion.[14]

**In Russian history arbitrary administrative practice frequently has been more important than the letter of the law.**

The low rate of reregistration stems in part from the inability of officials to cope with massive paperwork.[15] But a more ominous explanation also is at hand. With a weakened federal government, Russia's local authorities are prone to interpret laws as they see fit. Thus in fall 1999 in Khabarovsk Krai officials rejected 62 of 65 applications for reregistration of religious bodies.[16] Even in Moscow, with its high level of international media exposure, the rejection rate as of 1 October was 30 percent (127 of 417 applications).[17] Finally, attorney Galina Krylova notes that many "non-traditional" groups have purposely avoided the reregistration process for fear of rejection and to avoid drawing attention to themselves.[18]

This defensive attitude was reinforced as local authorities continued with restrictions and harassment through the winter of 1999–2000: against Jehovah's Witnesses in the south Urals in Bashkortostan; against Catholics, Old Believers, Jews, and even Orthodox in Samara in the middle Volga; against Evangelical Christians–Baptists in Ioshkar-Ola, capital of the Mari El Republic; against Calvary Chapel Church parishioners and missionaries in Smolensk; against Pentecostals in Kirov and Kazan; against the Church of Christ in Cheboksary, Chuvash Republic; against Methodists in Moscow; and in Voronezh Province, against 13 different religious communities, including Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, and Jews.[19]

Media incitement of hostility towards religious minorities also plays a destructive role. Attorney Galina Krylova reported over 600 negative articles in the Russian press about Jehovah's Witnesses alone in the past four years.[20] Sad to say, media attacks on Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and new religious movements are the rule, rather than the exception. With Patriarch Alexi II's baseless charge in November 1999 that foreign missionaries often employ drugs to secure converts, one sees little hope in the near term for substantive interconfessional dialogue or religious tolerance in Russia.[21] As the *Manchester Guardian* recently reported, the Russian Orthodox Church "appears to have transformed itself from persecuted victim to bullying aggressor in a decade."[22] The recent election defeat of Deputy Valerii Borshov, one of the Duma's few, consistent advocates of freedom of conscience, strikes another blow. At the same time, a former employee of the Soviet Council for Religious Affairs, which previously kept a stranglehold on the church, now holds a significant post in the bureaucracy of the Moscow Patriarchate. "It's as if," Keston's Lawrence Uzzell notes, "post-war Germany had employed an ex-Nazi to oversee ethnic relations."[23]

Orthodox hostility toward non-Orthodox, the caprice of local authorities, and the bias of the Russian media compel those who champion religious liberty to continue careful monitoring of a fragile and vulnerable freedom of conscience in Russia.

### *What the Future May Hold*

To no one's surprise, Russian President Boris Yeltsin has been succeeded by an ardent nationalist. To be sure, Acting President Vladimir Putin, upon taking office 31 December 1999, publicly expressed support for democracy and civil liberties. But the former KGB chief also has deferred to the Russian Orthodox hierarchy even more effusively than did Yeltsin. Ultimately, however, whatever his degree of support for freedom of conscience, it appears unlikely that Putin or any other Russian strong man could successfully suppress Protestant or other non-Moscow Patriachate Orthodox expressions of faith, short of an improbable return to Stalinism. Basically, a decade of unprecedented freedom of conscience (1990–99) created enough of an expanded infrastructure that many faith communities outside the fold of the Moscow Patriarchate should be able to withstand present and future restrictions. ◆

### Notes

1. "Russian Court Softens Restrictive Religion Law," *Newsroom*, 23 November 1999, http://www.newrsoom.org; "Russian Constitutional Court Strikes Down Part of Controversial 1997 Law," Voice of America, 23 November 1999.
2. Active Jehovah's Witness membership in Russia, according to a movement spokesman, is 100,000. Pentecostal adherents in the former Soviet Union, approximately 700,000 in 1991, may exceed one million today. The majority reside outside the Russian Republic. Elizabeth Piper, "Russian Court Loosens Bonds on Religious Groups," Reuters, 23 November 1999; Mark Elliott and Robert Richardson, "Growing Protestant Diversity in the Former Soviet Union" in *Russian Pluralism, Now Irreversible?*, ed. by Uri Raanan *et al.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 193, 205-06.
3. "Russian Court Softens," *Newsroom;* Lawrence Uzzell, "Russia's Constitutional Court Reaffirms Status Quo," *Keston News Service (KNS),* 3 December 1999; Lauren Homer, "Major Victory for Russian Religious Organizations in Constitutional Court," *Law and Liberty Trust,* 29 November 1999; "Jehovah's Witnesses Win Russian Constitutional Case, But Court Upholds 15-Year Rule in 1997 Religion Law," Jehovah's Witnesses Public Affairs Office, 23 November 1999.

4. Homer, "Major Victory;" Andrei Zolotov, "Russia's Minority Churches Welcome Liberal Ruling on Religion Law," *Ecumenical News International*, 30 November 1999.
5. "Russian Court Softens" *Newsroom;* Lauren Homer, "Law and Liberty Alert: Developments Affecting Religious Freedom in Russia," 16 November 1999; "Russian Constitutional Court," *Voice of America.*
6. Uzzell, "Status Quo."
7. "Russian Constitutional Court," *Voice of America;* Zolotov, "Russia's Minority Churches."
8. Tatyana Titova, "Russians Disagree about Decision of Constitutional Court," *KNS*, 17 December 1999.
9. Homer, "Major Victory;" "Russian Court Softens," *Newsroom.*
10. Homer, "Developments."
11. Tatyana Titova, "Russians Not Greatly Alarmed by Duma's Failure to Extend Deadline for Reregistration," *KNS*, 14 December 1999.
12. Homer, "Developments."
13. Titova, "Russians Not Greatly Alarmed"; Robert Hosken, "Reregistration," Hosken-News, 28 December 1999, stargate@agape-biblia.org; Homer, "Developments."
14. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty *Newsline*, 22 February 2000.
15. Titova, "Russians Not Greatly Alarmed"; Hosken, "Reregistration;" "Russia May Extend Registration Deadline Under Religion Law," *Newsroom*, 7 September 1999; Maksim Shevchenko, "The Main Western Authority on Freedom of Conscience in Russia," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 22 September 1999.
16. Homer, "Developments;" "Russian Religion Law: Reregistration Pressure and Court Challenges," *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 7 (Fall 1999), 12; Hosken, "Reregistration."
17. Homer, "Developments."
18. "Russia May Extend Deadline," *Newsroom;* Homer, "Developments."
19. "Freedom of Conscience in the Republic of Bashkortostan," Human Rights Without Frontiers, 26 November 1999; "Russian Authorities in Volga Region Refuse to Register Catholic Parishes," *Religion Today*, 18 November 1999; Hosken, "Reregistration;" "Calvary Chapel Church of Smolensk Registered," *RIPnet News*, 19 November 1999; *Informational Bulletin of the Slavic Center for Law and Justice*, Issue 5, October 1999; Slavic Center for Law and Justice, 27 December 1999 and 27 January 2000; *RIPnet News*, 8 November 1999 and 6 January 2000; Tatyana Titova, "Registration in Samara Region: Civic Code Versus Canon Law," *KNS*, 17 November 1999; Tatyana Titova and Geraldine Fagan, "Governor of Samara Backs Down on Conflict Between Civil and Canon Laws," *KNS*, 23 November 1999; TV6, Moscow, 6 July 1999.
20. Galina Krylova, "The Jehovah's Witnesses Case in Moscow," 30 November 1999, CESNUR 99, Bryn Athyn, PA.
21. "Patriarch Accuses Missionaries," Associated Press, 17 November 1999.
22. John O'Mahony, "The New Believers," *Manchester Guardian*, 22 January 2000.
23. *Ibid.*

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# Guidelines for Contextualizing the Gospel for Russian Youth

*Mark J. Harris*

## The Need for Contextualization

To contextualize in evangelism is to communicate the truths of the gospel in such a way that hearers understand the message. People in every culture are raised with a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes. Some are held deeply, and in many cases, they have never been questioned. Others may be negotiable or debatable. But all affect how a person receives a new message. A cross-cultural worker must ask, "What core values are my listeners assuming as they hear my presentation of the gospel? What do they already believe that will affect their attitude toward the message?" Jumping right into a "standard gospel presentation" ignores the preconceived grid that already exists in hearers' minds—and the result will often be misunderstanding.

A common problem of those doing cross-cultural ministry is the assumption that their own cultural expression of Christianity is in fact part of the gospel, which results in attempts to convert people not only to Jesus Christ, but to a foreign culture as well. This is a common complaint against Americans, who tend to be very ethnocentric. Thus, evangelists must not only contextualize the message, but must decontextualize it as well, that is, remove their own cultural biases.

## An Orthodox Foundation

The Orthodox Church has been the predominant faith of Russia for just over a thousand years. It believes its forms, sacraments, and traditions derive uninterrupted from the apostles themselves.[1] The Church does not alter these forms in order to fit into a new context. These traditions are considered to be as authoritative as the Bible,[2] and thus cannot be changed arbitrarily. When a typical Russian youth thinks about "church," the images of Orthodoxy exert a strong influence.

Perhaps the most important issue is the Orthodox claim to be the one true church of Jesus Christ on earth,[3] while all others calling themselves followers of Christ are heretics. Those who seek to "cooperate" with Orthodoxy in evangelizing Russian youth are seeking in vain. This issue of the nature of the church must be dealt with directly by Evangelical believers, because Orthodox leaders are very forthright in making their exclusive claims publicly (though, perhaps, not so frankly when speaking to Westerners).

## A Culture in Disarray

The fall of Communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union left many Russians in various states of disillusionment, discouragement, and despair. At the same time, others expressed a new hopefulness and enjoyment of freedom. Suddenly all the rules had changed. Many older people have been plunged into poverty. On the other end of the spectrum, youth are growing up in an entirely different Russia.

Perhaps the most visible manifestation of change in Russia is the presence of heavy influences from

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other cultures, most particularly American. This is most clearly seen among youth, who commonly listen to Western music, follow Western fashions, and gravitate to clothing and accessories that bear English lettering. The influences go beyond material ones. Many Russian young people are assimilating alternate beliefs, values, and attitudes from abroad. Youth seem to be making up for lost time in their avid consumption of Western culture.

Yet not all respond in the same way to cultural changes. Russian youth subculture is far from monolithic. Two opposite positions seem to be developing, partially traceable to the longstanding debate between "Slavophiles" and "Westernizers." Slavophiles believed that Russia held the key to the regeneration of Europe through ideals found uniquely in traditional Slavic culture and Orthodox Christianity. Westernizers favored leaving behind these ideals to move toward more rational ways that they believed were found in Western thought.[4] The entrance of Communism into Russia complicated the issue even more, but did not eliminate the underlying controversy. Now the debate is heating up again, with some youth more traditional and patriotic, and others more contemporary and less proud of Russia. To contextualize the gospel for a Russian youth, one must learn where the young person stands along this cultural continuum.

**A common problem of those doing cross-cultural ministry is the assumption that their own cultural expression of Christianity is in fact part of the gospel.**

### *Barriers to the Gospel*

Although Russian ideas about God and spiritual life come primarily from Orthodoxy, the practices of common people display a mix of Orthodoxy, paganism, and folk superstitions. To understand this influence, familiarity with official church doctrines is not enough. Russian youth observe what is practiced by those around them, and this is often unattractive to them. On the other hand, the relative lack of personal demands in popular religion may seem comfortable compared to the gospel call to radical life change.

Secularism has been a central feature of the Russian cultural scene since the Revolution. Soviet public institutions and art assumed a life without God. Despite the revival of Orthodoxy, mass culture today operates very much in a secular mode. In spite of some reports to the contrary, there has been no mass movement of youth into churches. Only a small percentage of young people are involved in religion in any way. Thus the peer context for the average Russian youth is not spiritual. For young people to be "like everybody else," a strong drive among youth the world over, they should remain unreligious.

Along with every other Western influence have come religious cults of all kinds. Destructive cults have separated children from their families, frightening parents, who are all the more concerned by warnings from Orthodox priests. However, there is little discernment among parents concerning non-Orthodox faiths, the assumption being that they are all cults. When youth begin attending church, Evangelical leaders may receive calls from anxious mothers asking, "What is going to happen to my daughter?!" Some parents forbid their children to attend a non-Orthodox church. If a religious belief involves joining a particular group and entering into its practices, suspicion will arise. Some youth, however, feel that they can discern the difference between cults and legitimate religions, and are not overly cautious. Even with them, however, building trust is no easy matter.

Following the flood of Western Evangelicalism into Russia, many young Russians were trained with superficial methods of evangelism which tended to ignore Russian culture and promote a "cold turkey" approach without building trust. Many Russian youth have been "accosted" by such people, and tend to have a negative attitude toward anyone who approaches them with a "presentation."

Superficial methods also have resulted in young people believing that praying a prayer resolves the issue of salvation, with no further need for teaching or exhortation. Such young people become very difficult to reach with the gospel of a transformed life, which they may find threatening. To believe in God, wear a cross, be baptized, or pray a prayer is relatively harmless and will not raise eyebrows. But to love, worship, and serve Jesus Christ openly is to stand out very sharply within modern Russian youth culture.

Among young Russians attracted to the West, who see increased opportunities in a Russia that is moving toward Western freedoms, optimism about life and prospects can work at cross-purposes with the gospel. These youth are seldom open to a radical lifestyle change that will pull them away from the very things that hold for them such promise. They do not yet know that these promises are empty.

### *The Problem of Identification for Westerners*

Russians commonly believe that American and other Western visitors are wealthy. In comparison to the vast majority of Russians, Americans are indeed prosperous. This Russian perception creates various kinds of barriers to reception of the gospel. Russians wonder how wealthy visitors can understand the difficulties of their lives, and how their message can be relevant. They might say, "Well, it is easy to have faith in America, where you have everything you want."

Russians commonly mention that Americans are very friendly, but only to a point. At first they greatly enjoy the American habit of smiling, but their experience makes them wonder what is behind the smiles. Are they sincere? Russians expect friendship to be deeper and more interdependent than they see in American relationships. Americans in Russia often tend to isolate themselves from Russians except in religious settings. Then, since their knowledge of the people is not deep, their religious messages tend to be simplistic. For an American to truly connect with and impact a young Russian for the gospel, he or she will need to invest more time listening and observing than speaking.

Russians see both American and German culture as being too structured, with everything "cut and

dried." Russians feel nervous in highly structured environments, always afraid of breaking the rules. Western influence has caused Moscow to become much more orderly than the average Russian city or village. Young people are more flexible in adapting to a highly structured environment, but still tend to react unfavorably at first. Westerners must put aside their urge to fit Russians into their systems and structures, and reach them within their own cultural approach to managing life.

### *The Problem of Motivation*

In the early days after the fall of Communism, Westerners in Russia were a great novelty. Many Russians had never seen foreigners in person and would have been frightened to speak to them. Early visits by Evangelicals drew large crowds, curious to hear what foreigners had to say. This curiosity was the main driving force behind Russian young people, and a great many of them attended evangelistic meetings in the early 1990s. They wanted to find out all that they could, as information about Western culture had been largely withheld from them. A common response was, "Well, the Americans came, and we had lots of fun. They gave out Bibles and talked about God. But we don't really know what they wanted. They stayed a few days and then they left. Funny Americans."

Soft-hearted foreigners frequently gave away large sums of money in attempts to provide assistance. As this became common knowledge, many young people were present whenever an American group arrived. English-speaking Russians were also eager to practice their language skills with native speakers. Fluent English was a prime factor in finding work. Many Evangelical organizations and individual visitors invited Russians for a trip to America, and this also became a dramatic attraction. The desire of Russians to travel abroad has been commonly underestimated, and ulterior motives related to this desire were often not well discerned by those providing opportunities.

For many young people who did respond to the gospel message, it was often to a one-sided, misunderstood call. They wanted God's help in their lives, but did not hear the call to a changed life. They wanted instant results with no personal effort, and thus many became disillusioned. They did not want to hear about restrictions on an immoral lifestyle. The gospel of easy belief may have brought many to say the right words, but it brought relatively few to Jesus Christ.

### *Conclusion*

Many American Evangelicals commonly assume that they are able to write the gospel message on a "blank slate" when ministering to Russian youth. They assume that atheism left a vacuum that allows for rapid acceptance of the gospel. This simply is not true, and fruitful ministry demands that this illusion be broken. The combined influences of Orthodoxy, secularism, hedonism, superstition, fear of cults, and

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# Evangelism in Russia: What Works and What Doesn't

*Mark J. Harris*

## Mass Evangelism

**Advantages**—Large meetings in rented halls became associated with visiting Western evangelists in Russia in the 1990s. The primary advantage is that a neutral setting can be arranged where many people can be invited to hear the gospel. Advertising can be used to attract people and gifted speakers can be utilized.
**Disadvantages**—The main disadvantage relates to the misuse of this method by many Evangelical groups. Many Russians have responded to a public gospel invitation by performing the required step (raising hands, coming forward, praying a prayer, filling out a response card, etc.) but only a minute fraction of these have ended up in churches. Russians are often seen to respond due to the actions of the group around them, but with no deep understanding. A speaker cannot respond to the particular questions and problems of each listener in a mass group and the large numbers who respond in various ways make follow-up problematic.
**Primary Usage**—This method is best used when the main goal is general exposure to the gospel. Those listeners who are serious will come to further meetings in various kinds of neutral venues or give a trained believer the opportunity to visit them. They will be much less likely to take the big step of visiting a church.

## Church Evangelism

**Advantages**—An Evangelical worship service provides a setting where the visitor can observe a large group of believers together and see what they do. The site will more likely remain the same for future visits, unlike those rented for public meetings. The message of the gospel is combined with singing, prayer, and other forms of worship. In addition, bringing the young person to become a living part of a church is the goal of evangelism, so this step must necessarily happen sometime.
**Disadvantages**—The church can be an intimidating place for a young person to visit and may be too strange for an initial exposure to the gospel. The pulpit messages are less likely to be directed to the visitor and may be hard to understand.
**Primary Usage**—This method is best used when the main goal is exposure to worship. Visitors not only hear the gospel, but also see it being demonstrated corporately. The life of the body need not be described, because it is in fact experienced. A trained member has more freedom to follow up by conversing with a person who has visited the church. The resulting personal relationship is a more fruitful method of evangelism, especially in Russia.

## Small Group Evangelism

**Advantages**—A small group, usually meeting in a home, provides a more natural setting for a young Russian who can see how believers interact with each other, care for each other, and pray together. A visitor can see that believers are normal people, with a living faith that exists outside the four walls of the church. A visitor to a small group is much more conspicuous than in a church service, aiding in follow-up.
**Disadvantages**—The small group may be the most susceptible to being considered a cult, and this fact will frighten many away. It also may be less likely that a person will be there with adequate training to properly communicate with a visitor with particular needs. Visitors may feel conspicuous in a small group and thus be intimidated.
**Primary Usage**—This method is best used when the main goal is exposure to fellowship. The life of a church is best seen in the lives of its members and godly fellowship is the most important expression of that life.

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## Evangelism in Russia (continued from page 5)

### One-On-One Evangelism

**Advantages**—This method has the advantage of being the most flexible. It can occur anytime, at any place. The person doing this kind of work is able to focus attention on one person, allowing for more particular probing into the person's special needs and questions. This is the only method that can be used with the many people who will not accept any invitation to a group. A loving, wise believer can take the time and build trust, being careful not to rush youth into something for which they are not ready.

**Disadvantages**—In Russia one person evangelizing another is a very strange thing. Young people will likely feel that this is not a normal person talking to them. The fear of cults will also be a factor because this is the common approach of cults in Russia. The young person may be very reluctant to open up, so the method is often limited to close acquaintances or gifted personal evangelists.

**Primary Usage**—This method is best used when the main goal is exposure to personal counsel. Young Russians can see how this one person cares enough to take time and deal with their personal life problems. When church members are trained to do this kind of evangelistic ministry sensitively, it can become the most important way to give people first exposure to the gospel.

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**Contextualizing the Gospel** *(cont. from page 5)*

other factors have quickly made the soil resistant to simple seed planting among Russian youth. The ground must be broken and watered by wise Christian workers.

Those desiring to reach Russian youth need to become educated regarding the cultural and religious contexts that shape how their audience thinks and feels. Russian youth are not unreachable. Alongside fruitless efforts that have discouraged so many workers, one can observe as well encouraging, fruitful ministry underway. May God grant us the desire to proceed in our labors with wisdom and discernment, that a new generation will hear and see an effective, contextualized communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ. ◆

*Excerpted with permission from Mark J. Harris, "Suggested Guidelines For Contextualizing The Gospel For Modern Russian Youth." For a copy of the complete 20-page paper, contact the author at mark@cmc.ryazan.ru.*

### Notes

1. John Karmaris, "Concerning the Sacraments" in Daniel B. Clendenin, ed., *Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 30.
2. Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 109.
3. George Florovsky, "The Function of Tradition in the Ancient Church" in Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology,* 112.
4. James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 320–21.

# Young Russian Evangelicals on Western Missionaries

*Alison Giblett*

*Editor's Note: Findings published below come from a 1999 survey of 110 Russian youth in 20 cities from a wide range of denominational backgrounds.*

About 80 percent of young Russians questioned said that Christians from abroad could be helpful. However, 50 percent also said that foreigners had been either unhelpful or ineffective. The vast majority stated that foreigners had come with their own programs and had not taken sufficient time to listen to local Christians. Other problems were a lack of understanding of Russian culture; sermons that did not relate to local issues; and illustrations which were either incomprehensible or offensive. Examples included illustrations concerning golf, baseball, or learning to drive a car, which only a very small percentage of Russians can afford to do. Other sermons by Westerners sought to prove that we all fall short of God's standard, which is not doubted, or elaborated a list of reasons for belief in God. Logical proofs are unlikely to convince Russians to change their worldview. However, a life demonstrating the plausibility of God's transforming power is very challenging. One respondent noted that Western ministry fails "when foreigners do things their way without listening to local people." Another shared, "You cannot simply transfer foreign methods 100 percent."

Survey responses of interpreters were particularly perceptive, as they are often put in the awkward position of trying to minimize the offense of cultural misunderstandings. A 21-year-old interpreter, who had been involved with four different churches and clearly was used to working with foreigners, summarized the views of many:

> If foreigners come here to help, [the value of] their help depends on their attitude. You see, some come and try to hold on to their culture [and do] not try to understand our people, our culture. They sort of create their own society around themselves. It's true of fulltime missionaries! ◆

*Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Alison Giblett, "Christianity in Russia and Young People's Agenda for Change," M.A. Thesis, All Nations Christian College, Hertfordshire, England, 1999.*

## Religiosity of Russian Youth

*Editor's Note: Data derived from a 1997 survey conducted by the Russian Independent Institute of Social and National Problems and funded by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Respondents from Russia's 12 territorial-economic regions, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, included 1,974 youth, ages 17 to 26, and a control group of 774 adults, ages 40 to 60.*

### *What role should religious organizations play in the spiritual and social life of our country?*

| | Youth | Adults |
|---|---|---|
| Religious organizations should play an active role in society. | 5.4% | 7.0% |
| Activity should be directed only toward religious needs of believers. | 24.0% | 24.0% |
| Activity should be strictly limited to strengthening spirituality and morality in society. | 49.2% | 59.7% |

### *Religious pluralism*

| | Youth | Adults |
|---|---|---|
| Orthodoxy should become a state religion. | 11.5% | 16.3% |
| Religions should be equal under the law, independent of their doctrine and history. | 40.0% | 40.8% |
| Preference should be given to traditional religions. | 23.2% | 28.2% |

### *Belief in God*

| | Youth | Adults |
|---|---|---|
| Believe in God | 31.2% | 34.9% |
| Waver between belief and non-belief | 27.0% | 27.6% |
| Indifferent toward religion | 13.9% | 14.7% |
| Do not believe in God | 14.6% | 13.5% |

Note: Youth (12.4 percent), somewhat more than adults (9.3 percent), are attracted to various forms of nontraditional occult and New Age religious expressions including magic, sorcery, fortune-telling, spells, astrology, and belief in contact with spirits. According to survey data, large quantities of occult literature circulate in Russia, especially among youth and women.

### *What do you do in your free time?*

| | Muslim | Protestant | Orthodox | Total Youth |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Percent of youth of various confessions who responded "attend church or religious association" | 13.3 | 57.1 | 4.0 | 3.2 |

*Source: M. Gorhkov* et al. Molodezh novoi Rossii: Kakaia ona? Chem zhivet? K chemu stremitsia? [Youth of a New Russia: What Are They Like? How Do They Live? What Do They Strive For?] *(Moscow: Rossiiskii Nezavizimyi Institut Sotsialnykh i Natsionalnikh Problem, 1998), 64 pp. Available online at http://www.nns.ru/analytdoc/molod.html.*

# Christianity in Lithuania Today

*Donatas Glodenis*

Christianity in Lithuania has a long and intriguing history. Entering more than 600 years ago, when Lithuania was forming as a European state, Roman Catholicism soon took the dominant position. Conflict between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches dates back to those times. The sixteenth century brought tense conflict with the churches of the Reformation, finally resulting in the reestablishment of Catholic domination. Various Evangelical and marginal movements which arrived in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries still impact Lithuanian society today. Soviet occupation in the twentieth century led to the oppression of churches of all faiths. Recovery from this oppression and renewal of the Church in Lithuania could be the starting point for a discussion among different streams of Christianity in Lithuania.

### *The Catholic Church*

The Catholic Church in Lithuania for years was the dominant cultural and religious force. Today, it is by far the largest Christian confession in the country, with about 70 percent of Lithuanians professing to be Catholics. While spread throughout the country, the largest concentration of Catholics is in central, eastern, and southern Lithuania, where Lithuanian

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nationalist and Polish influence has been strongest. Of course, not all who profess to be Catholic practice their faith. Statistics show that only 14 percent of Catholics attend church weekly. Years of Soviet occupation left a mark on Lithuanian Catholicism. The church leadership did not adopt the reforms of Vatican II and in some cases even opposed the changes. At the same time, renewal movements faced indifference or distrust. Today, unprepared to face the rapid changes brought to Lithuania by Western influences, the Catholic Church in many instances is losing its authority in the eyes of the common people.

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However, the Catholic Church at the same time is experiencing renewal, resulting in a new ecumenical openness and cooperation with Evangelicals. The Charismatic, lay Franciscan, and other renewal movements that are evangelical in nature are having a strong impact, especially among youth. Publication efforts have been largely reshaped to face new realities and to become more relevant to the concerns of the laity. The leadership of the Church also is changing, as new Vatican II–minded bishops are appointed and seminaries are strengthened.

### *Traditional Minority Confessions*

Protestantism in Lithuania, dating from the Reformation, is represented by Lutheran and Reformed churches as well as Baptists, Pentecostals, and new Evangelical movements. The Lutheran and Reformed churches are concentrated in the western and northern regions of the country, influenced by the ethnic German population and historically Protestant nobility. Closely connected to their local communities, these Reformation churches have felt some of the effects of renewal movements, but these movements have not been prominent in these traditions. The same is true of the Orthodox Church, which has its own diocese in the capital city of Vilnius. Above all, it serves Lithuania's ethnic Russian minority. Most ethnic Russians settled in Lithuania during the Communist years, especially in Vilnius and Klaipeda.

### *Indigenous Evangelical Movements*

Baptists and Pentecostals, along with Adventists, are the most established and historically grounded Evangelical movements in Lithuania. Baptists date back to the middle of the nineteenth century, while Pentecostals and Adventists came to Lithuania in the

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early 1900s. While Adventists disappeared during Soviet rule, Baptists and Pentecostals survived and, as throughout the Soviet Union, were united by order of Stalin. After Lithuania regained its independence, Baptists and Pentecostals dissolved their union and formed separate denominations. Numerous independent Baptist and Pentecostal congregations, either underground in Soviet times or formed after the Soviet Union began to disintegrate, now function in Lithuania. Foreign missionaries established some of these churches. Baptist and Pentecostal congregations which date back to Soviet times often struggle with hyperconservatism and have difficulties adapting to the new situation, but Soviet-era defensiveness and a legalistic mentality no longer appeal to the majority of people. Nevertheless, the Pentecostal Union is growing dramatically. Between 1991 and 1998 the number of congregations rose from three to about twenty.

### *Western Influences*

Alongside established Evangelical churches, Lithuania now is home to numerous nondenominational congregations even more closely tied to the West than Pentecostals and Baptists. The Free Christian Church movement started almost two decades ago and has developed an independent status, although it is still supported by Canadian Mennonites. Free Christian Churches have been working closely with the Baptist Union, but have been unwilling to join it for fear of losing their identity as nondenominational churches.

Located in the larger cities, a smaller number of nondenominational Charismatic churches have been very active in ecumenical efforts, as well as in interdenominational missionary efforts sponsored by Youth With a Mission and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. One Charismatic church has joined the Association of Vineyard Churches in order to find a larger context for its faith and practice. The question of identity in a culturally rich country such as Lithuania might well be one of the most important concerns for all nondenominational churches.

The Charismatic Word of Faith movement is probably the strongest Evangelical church in Lithuania. Started in 1989 by Christians heavily influenced by North American and Swedish Word of Faith Charismatics, the Word of Faith movement grew dramatically, spreading through dozens of cities,

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## Religious Movements in Lithuania

| Confession | Membership | Weekly attendance | Churches |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Roman Catholics** | 2,500,000 (70 percent of the population) | 500,000 (14 percent of the population) | 688 |
| **Russian Orthodox** | 180,000 | 5,000 | 31 |
| **Old Believers** | 50,000 | 1,500–2,000 | 27 |
| **Lutherans** | 30,000 | 3,000 | 48 |
| **Reformed** | 11,000 | 400–500 | 8 |
| **New Apostolic Church** | 5,600 | 4,000 | 45 |
| **Muslims** | 5,000 | 500 | 5 |
| **Jews** | <5,000 | 200–300 | 6 |
| **Word of Faith** | 2,800 | 3,500 | 56 |
| **Jehovah's Witnesses** | 2,200 | 2,500 | 18 |
| **Pentecostals (all)** | 1,800 | 2,000 | 38 |
| **Baptists (all)** | 1,100 | 1,300 | 32 |
| **Adventists** | 1,000 | 600 | 21 |
| **Eastern Rite Catholics** | 900 | ? | 5 |
| **Mormons** | 450 | 300–400 | 3 |
| **Hare Krishna** | 300 (?) | 200–300 | 12 |
| **Methodists** | 220 | 250–300 | 6 |
| **Buddhists** | 200 (?) | 200 (?) | 7 |
| **Nondenominational** | 140 | 250 | 3 |

*Sources: Donatas Glodenis and Holger Lahayne, eds.* Religijos Lietuvoje [Religions in Lithuania] *(Siauliai: Nova Vita, 1999); E-mail from Donatas Glodenis, 31 January 2000.* Religijos Lietuvoje *is available for $8 (U.S.) from Nova Vita Publishers, Box 75, 5400 Siauliai, Lithuania; tel: 370-1-440-419; fax: 370-1-438-378; E-mail: novavita@siauliai.omnitel.net.*

large and small, in its early years of existence. Much more moderate growth has been the case since 1993, perhaps because of the fading appeal of Western culture in Lithuania, as well as doctrinal changes occurring within the movement: Word of Faith churches gradually began deemphasizing Prosperity Theology, which promises material abundance for the truly faithful. The movement now cooperates with other Evangelicals and has been instrumental in publishing the first Bible in contemporary Lithuanian.

Overall, an estimated 25 Western missionaries currently reside in Lithuania, not including 30 to 60 Western faculty and staff at Lithuania Christian College in Klaipeda and Vilnius Theological College. While some churches and Christian organizations, such as the United Methodist Church and Youth With a Mission-Lithuania, are fully dependent on the West, the majority of missionary-led churches are not as strong as indigenous churches. The Western missionary presence may also at times be detrimental as it prevents the formation of genuine Lithuanian churches and ministries and creates an unnecessary "distance" between ministers and simple churchgoers. The strongest Protestant churches minister without extensive foreign funding and interference.

**Lithuanian Christianity is undergoing a transition from uniformity to pluralism and an adaptation to the complexities of a democratic system.**

### *Christian Higher Education*

Catholics support three seminaries as well as theological faculties in five state universities. Protestant educational institutions are not numerous in Lithuania. The Lutheran Church supports a theological faculty at Klaipeda University. Pentecostals operate Vilnius Theological College, a two-year training center, while Word of Faith and some other churches have their own training centers. Lithuania Christian College in Klaipeda has indirect ties to the Free Christian Churches, but this liberal arts institution emphasizes its interdenominational composition. Canadian Mennonite philanthropist Arthur DeFehr has provided generous funding for the school and has recruited a sizeable group of North American Mennonites and representatives of some other Protestant denominations to staff and support the college. The student body includes non-Christian and Christian students from numerous confessions. In time, this Evangelical, interdenominational center may help transcend confessional divisions. A current problem is a cultural gap created by North American influence and English-language instruction, but this difficulty should decrease as the College obtains more Lithuanian faculty and develops a more distinctly Lithuanian character. At the same time, the partnership facilitates links and crosscultural communication between Lithuanian and Western Evangelicalism.

Lithuanian Christianity is undergoing a transition common to Christianity in many post-Communist societies: a transition from uniformity to pluralism and an adaptation to the complexities of a democratic system. The Church has to learn to live in this new context, faithful both to Lithuanian culture, with the changes that liberty brings, and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. ◆

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# The Church in Central Europe: Not Prepared for Freedom

*David Machajdik and Juraj Kusnierik*

The mid-1980s saw some Christians in some local churches starting to speak about and "do" evangelism. The climate in society was changing. It became possible to share one's faith in a secular environment. People from a completely atheistic background became Christian. It was not a mass movement, nor was it a "national revival." The only possible (and still today probably the best) method of evangelism was sharing one's life—including one's relationship with God—with friends and relatives. All this was done informally, sometimes secretly. The word "ministry" with its spiritual connotations was as yet unknown.

Then came the revolutionary changes in 1989. Christians "went public." The first (and at the same time the last) big evangelistic events took place. Famous evangelists visited Eastern and Central European capitals. Mission organizations supported by local churches started to do "street evangelism." Religion was given air time on radio and television. Foreign missionaries arrived. It was only natural to expect a great growth in the church. However, this growth has not taken place. People see the church as important and as a useful component of society, but they themselves do not want to be under its influence. After the initial enthusiasm was over, the church somehow "faded out." It is still there; it is surviving, but not growing very much.* The reasons

**By growth we do not mean simply growth in the number of church members. We mean primarily growth in the knowledge of God, growth in the character of individual Christians, growth in depth of relationships and commitments to each other, growth in impact in politics, culture, art, and education, growth in godliness, growth in compassion and service, growth in discernment, growth in justice, growth in grace, growth in love.*

are many. We are able to perceive and comment on only some of them.

- **The Church was surprised by the complexity of the free world.** After 1989 Christian leaders did not have much to say about issues discussed in society such as nationalism, business ethics, or the role of the state. Even topics frequently discussed by Christians in the West (such as abortion, ethics, social involvement, or education) were new to the church in post-Communist countries. During the first years after the change of regime, leading personalities in the church did not see these issues as important. They thought that preaching the message of personal salvation did not need to take a new context into consideration. The Gospel was thus unintentionally reduced to a set of slogans without any connection with the complex reality of life. Methods learned from nineteenth century revivals did not always work in a post-Communist society.

- **Gaps in theology were patched up by fervent activism.** Only a handful of English or German speaking pastors had limited access to theological literature and even that was more on a popular level. Classical works of systematic and historical theology were not available. There were big and significant gaps in theology as a result of forty years of atheistic socialism. Problems arose when a lack of theological insight was perceived as a virtue. Weakness was called strength. Theology was seen as a useless intellectualism, leading one to confusion. Gaps in theology were thus patched up by activism. Many activities were going on, but superficiality was often their common denominator. Religious programs on television are easily recognizable by their naivete, simplicity, superficiality, and cultural weirdness. They are also very boring. They do not usually have much to say to the ordinary skeptical Central European even if he or she is searching for truth and the meaning of life.

- **The Church in post-Communist countries has been burdened by its unresolved past.** The great majority of Christians living under Communism were apolitical. That meant that they did not openly criticize the totalitarian regime in which they lived. They very rarely supported or had any relationships with dissidents. Some church leaders tried, with varying degrees of success, to win more freedom for their churches by a "controlled collaboration" with the Communist regime. An example of this was that some signed statements rejecting the demands voiced by any given dissident movement, even if they were usually convinced that the truth was on the side of the dissidents, in order to gain greater freedom for various ministries in their churches. It is difficult now to judge these acts. The Church has not as yet gone through the process of reflecting on its activities under the Communist regime, though. It is awkward now to speak about a life of truth, about ethics, or about a radical rejection of evil. It makes it very difficult to react to accusations of compromising behavior on the part of the church and its leaders.

- **An inferiority complex fostered a small view of God.** Many Christians, when they entered the "public arena," were embarrassed by the questions they were asked. People who did not take Christian assumptions for granted asked questions which Christian activists, whose message was "Jesus is the answer," were not able to answer. To avoid this embarrassment, they did not give space for dialogue and swept unpleasant questions under the carpet. A strange kind of inferiority complex has developed: those who in theory believe in an omniscient and omnipotent God, those who in theory boldly proclaim that Christianity has all the answers, in practice are afraid of questions. Jesus is viewed as loving, compassionate, and pious. He is not very often seen as the most intelligent person who ever lived.

- **Evangelical churches remain inaccessible.** Like a hangover from the previous regime Evangelical churches remain locked up and fenced in. Only the initiated can find their way around. To outsiders, churches are practically inaccessible. It is no surprise that in some smaller towns or villages strange rumors are spread about bizarre religious rituals which take place behind closed doors:

> Shortly after the fall of Communism we were putting up posters in the streets of Bratislava, advertising a public evangelistic meeting. A young Gypsy stopped by and asked us about other similar events. He was very much interested, but only until he found out that sexual orgies are not part of the program. For him Evangelical fellowships had that connotation.

- **The Church is distant from its cultural and social environment.** This might be a residue of the fears inherited from the times of Communism, when Christians were afraid of spies and secret police. It could also be based on a subconscious, but often correct, assumption that if they enter into an authentic dialogue with non-Christian fellow citizens, they will not be able to give meaningful answers to their questions. They know Jesus is the answer, but they do not know what the question is.

The Church has a tendency to accept the role imposed on it by the expectations of society. It then becomes a social institution, aimed at the development of ethics and charity. It loses sight of its ultimate goal, which alone gives meaning to its existence: to know God as the creator and the one giving meaning and purpose to the whole of life. ◆

**People see the church as a useful component of society, but they themselves do not want to be under its influence.**

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# Taboos in the Central European Church

*Dusan Jaura and Juraj Kusnierik*

*Editor's note: In 1998 SEN, an Evangelical Protestant research center in Bratislava, Slovakia, surveyed Protestant clergy and active church members in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Croatia on subjects typically regarded as taboo. Answers given by respondents were analyzed and compared to identify the churches' most common "silent areas," which are described below.*

**Every community has its own favorite "no go" subjects.**

Every community has its own favorite "no go" subjects—matters other people may often talk about but which, for various reasons, the community considers inappropriate. What is not talked about often better describes a community and its values than that which is a frequent subject of discussion. Sometimes our silence speaks louder than our voices.

### Money

We started to understand the importance of money after 1989. Obviously it did exist before, but its value was limited because only a few products and services were for sale. You often needed to know the "right people" to achieve your goals. Now, one primarily needs money.

Churches in all Central European countries are still significantly financially supported by the state. This is a residue of the Communist regime. Communist authorities controlled churches by making them financially dependent on state subsidies. Recently they have been receiving support from Western churches. As a result many local churches have relatively large buildings, fully equipped offices, and several paid workers—all of which mean high overhead costs. Church leaders know that this situation will not last very long and so they feel the responsibility for church finances. In spite of this pressing need, talk about money and finances is not very common.

- **Businesspeople in the church.** Within a church there are usually several quite wealthy people. They are often the subject of gossip but, as some of them told us, very rarely directly approached. They sense that covetousness is sometimes hidden behind talk about "social justice." These Christians lack a place to talk about their difficult struggles in the business world and consequently rarely think about their business life in the context of a Christian worldview.

- **Lack of transparency.** A church in Slovakia decided to send one of its members to start a new church in a nearby town. The church and its new missionary decided that this mission would be a full-time ministry and so the church, with help from an international organization, would pay him. The problem was that nobody really knew how much money he received and he did not understand the concept of accountability. He had no job description and he viewed giving reports to the church as somewhere between unnecessary bureaucracy and insensitive power games. This example also applies to the incomes of pastors. Here too problems center on the lack of clarity and accountability.

- **Poverty.** A Gypsy woman with a small child entered a church building on a Sunday morning. She sat through the service and afterwards wanted to speak with the pastor. She told him she and her child were very poor, actually quite hungry. Would he give them some money? This situation is not so rare in post-Communist Central Europe; and in Balkan and former Soviet countries it is almost an everyday experience. What should Christians do? How should they deal with these discomforting people?

These difficult questions should be discussed, studied, preached about, and prayed about. Unfortunately, this rarely is the case.

### Sex

"When are you going to 'make love'?" our seven-year-old daughter asked my wife and me one evening. Talking about sex and love has been part of her world at least since she started school. We, her parents, cannot avoid talking about it and thoughtfully explaining it. To pretend we are unaware of her questions, or that we do not hear them, would be counterproductive. However, Christians often do exactly that. Of course, we have lectures, write articles, and preach sermons about the importance of the family, the dangers of premarital sex, and the problems facing single-parent families.

All this may well be very good, but where or to whom does a teenager go as he or she comes to terms with his or her own sexuality? Is there somebody somewhere he or she can talk to? Is there a safe place for a mature man dealing with temptation at his workplace to talk and pray? To whom would a man discovering homosexual attractions go where he knows he would be really heard and not just rebuked or disciplined? These subjects need privacy. They are not supposed to be discussed publicly. The problem is that the atmosphere in churches in Central and Eastern Europe does not give the safe space needed for personal growth. Potentially threatening issues are avoided.

### Authority

Interestingly, authority is a very ambiguous issue in Protestant circles, which generally share a low view of institutional authority. No church institution or office mediates between God and men; yet it is very common that a local church pastor, bishop, secretary, etc., of a denomination exerts considerable authority. When a pastor walks into the church assembly on Sunday morning, people stand up to show respect in some Evangelical churches. Pastoral authority is especially strong in small towns and villages. The rigid authority structures of many Evangelical churches in

Central Europe (and not only there) are often gossiped about. It is often cited as the reason why more independently minded young people as well as mature middle-aged church members find it hard to identify with the church. It does not support, but rather suppresses, personal growth. The Church is seen as a good place for children and elderly people, but not for strong, active, and creative men and women.

Do strong, dominant personalities influence and/or manipulate a small community? To what extent do Christian fellowships take and copy prevailing cultural patterns of authority rather than seek biblical principles, values, and examples? These very important questions are rarely discussed in Central European churches. Why? One reason might be the fear of touching sensitive areas which could lead to tensions in relationships. The status quo might be brought into question.

### Politics

Church attitudes toward public life have changed dramatically in post-Communist Central Europe: from apolitical (usually justified by theological reasons, but often caused by fear and uncertainty), through hyper-activism during and shortly after the revolutionary changes, to a cynical and skeptical attitude towards the "dirty world of politics" today. The situation seems to be "settled" in most Central European countries for now. No dramatic, revolutionary change is looming. Some people are interested in politics, follow parliamentary debates, government sessions, and international diplomacy. Most of the population is more interested in practical issues of everyday life, such as their family financial situation, their businesses, taxes, public transportation, crime, unemployment, healthcare, or education.

In Central European Christian communities, discussions of politics and economics carry a great amount of emotional baggage. To avoid conflicts, pastors and teachers tend either to avoid these issues or to repeat religious clichés that cannot offend anyone. The majority of the population sees Christianity as irrelevant. It does not seem to have much to say about reality as we know it.

### Small Communities

Most Protestant churches in Central Europe consist of small groups. Many Christian communities still recall, in living memory, the negative attitudes secular society held towards them. This strengthens the feeling of being a small, insignificant group of "good guys" in a hostile environment. Such a minority attitude reinforces the tendency toward uniformity, strong group loyalty, isolation from the outside world, and the black-and-white concept of the world found in most Evangelical communities. Some areas of culture, such as politics, philosophy, or rock music, are seen as a threat to Christian group identity. Involvement in them is discouraged and suppressed.

The way out of this theologically weak and culturally irrelevant Christianity is to learn, think, and talk about the greatness of the church, which is the body of Christ. It is greater than a small group meeting behind closed doors in small, dimly lit rooms. Studying church history, communicating with other Christians, and getting information about what is going on in the Christian world, might help in the struggle with our sense of smallness.

### From Defensiveness to Engagement with Society

Church communities were quite homogeneous until a few years ago. They consisted of slightly socially disadvantaged or marginalized people. The possibilities for work in some areas of life (art, management, or education) were limited. Other areas (politics or journalism) were completely closed to them. As a result of this, the economic and social diversity of Christians was very small. Political diversity was an unknown term. The picture is quite different ten years after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Churches are attended by successful businessmen as well as by the unemployed, by sportsmen as well as artists, by people with various levels of education, varying tastes, varying political orientations. If church leaders continue to try to suppress colorful reality by uniformity and legalism, their churches will become irrelevant and unattractive places.

### Safe Space

When we talk to Christians in various Central and East European countries we often hear the same complaint about the church: It is too rigid, too authoritarian, with too little space to be oneself. Safe space should allow people who come into church to be themselves and feel secure enough to ask their most significant questions in an atmosphere of trust and respect. Christians do not have to pretend they know all the answers, but should be committed to respecting those people who come to them. Safe space, a medium for the development of trust and deep, authentic interest in other people, should be a mark of the church. ◆

**The way out of theologically weak and culturally irrelevant Christianity is to learn, think and talk about the greatness of the church, which is the body of Christ.**

*Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Dusan Jaura and Juraj Kusnierik,* Taboos in the Central European Church *(Bratislava, Slovakia: SEN, 1999). The 20-page paper is available for $10 U.S. at http://www.citygate.org, or from SEN. See p. 11 for contact information.*

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# New Bible Institute Registered in Bulgaria

*Gary Griffith*

The Council of Ministers of the Bulgarian government granted official registration to the Bulgarian Evangelical Theological Institute (BETI) on 14 June 1999, almost ten years after the fall of Communism. Before the collapse of Marxist rule, Evangelical Christians faced much opposition from the government, although several Bible schools held classes unofficially. Classes at BETI began in September 1999, with an official opening ceremony at the Dr. Long Memorial Methodist Church in Sofia on 15 October 1999.

At the new institute, each of the six registered Bulgarian Evangelical denominations may operate its own school or faculty. The Institute's academic committee determines instructional requirements for each qualifying faculty, which maintains a standard curriculum and academic level, with approval from the Bulgarian government. The six denominations are: The Union of Evangelical Congregational Churches, the Evangelical Methodist Episcopal Church, the Union of Evangelical Pentecostal Churches, the Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches, the Bulgarian Church of God, and the United Churches of God in Bulgaria.

The Institute's board of directors consists of representatives from each of the denominations. Daniel Ignatov serves as rector, Roger Capps as dean, and Milcho Angelov as director of academic affairs. Four faculties have thus far been established, each with its own dean and faculty council: The Faculty of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, The Counseling Faculty of the Church of God, The Faculty of the United Churches of God, and The United Theological Faculty. The United Theological Faculty represents Baptist, Church of God, Congregational, and Methodist denominations and follows in the tradition of the former Bulgarian Biblical Academy—Logos.

After four and one half years of study and successful defense of a diploma project, students will receive a bachelors degree recognized by the Bulgarian government. The European Evangelical Accrediting Association (EEAA), of which the Institute is a member, is currently reviewing the Institute's program in consideration of accreditation status. The Institute is also a member of the Council for East European Theological Education (CEETE). Funding for the Institute will come initially from foreign sources through gifts to the Institute or individual faculties. Nik Nedelchev, former director of the Bulgarian Biblical Academy—Logos, and president of the European Evangelical Alliance, commented on the focus of the Institute: "Our purpose continues to be to prepare Bulgarian Christians for the ministry and so we offer solid theological training. The fact that the students will now receive a recognized bachelors degree for their efforts makes it all that much more worthwhile and we praise God for this opportunity!" ◆

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**The Role of Luck** *(cont. from page 16)*

But I knew the important phrases: "I don't know what that word means." "Can you explain that to me again?" "What does that mean?" Every conversation became a learning experience.

I can't brag about my language ability. I have a long way to go, and still, conscientiously, work on my Russian. While my reading is improving through hours of practice, a 10-year-old can write better than I can. I still tend to overuse slang expressions. Translating and interpreting is extremely difficult. When typing in Russian, I "hunt and peck." Conversant as I am on topics such as cooking, the plan of salvation, or raising a kitten, I cannot fluently discourse on politics, literature, or theology. I have learned to speak quickly, making it less obvious that word endings are often wrong.

Yet I feel comfortable with Russian. I have read Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* in the original—twice. I can purchase tickets, counsel a struggling young wife, pray with a new believer, take telephone messages, understand a sermon, and worship—really worship—in my Russian church. Is this luck? No! It is due to hours of effort and tedious work. Is it worth it? Absolutely! Is it for everyone? Probably not. But please don't tell me how lucky I am. Each person is given 24 hours every day. I have chosen to use many of them in language learning activities. To others, God has given different priorities and opportunities. Some teach, publish, distribute humanitarian aid, or raise children. Each must obey the call of God. Yet God has called me to learn Russian. It's been a lot of work. ◆

**Sharyl Corrado** *is assistant editor of the* East-West Church & Ministry Report.

# RESOURCES

**The Slavic Center for Law and Justice,** founded in September 1998 by the Institute of Religion and Law and the Christian Legal Center, serves to "defend the rights of citizens and organizations in the area of freedom of conscience and religion." Its English-language ***Information Bulletin,*** distributed free-of-charge in print or by E-mail, provides brief accounts of relevant legal issues. Contact: Institute for Religion and Law, Leninskii Prospekt 20, podiezd 5, 117071 Moscow, Russia; tel: 7-095-795-39-79; fax: 7-095-954-92-55; E-mail: irlaw@glasnet.ru.

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***Evangelie za koluchei provolokoi [The Gospel Behind Barbed Wire].*** Bimonthly. Circulation: 6,000. Reviewed by Maria Demeshkina.

Published bimonthly in Moscow by Russian Christian Radio (Russkoe Khristianskoe Radio), this magazine is distributed free of charge to inmates and to ministries working in prisons. Evangelical in character, biblical and informative in nature, it is geared towards the needs of inmates. It includes issues inmates face when they first become believers or upon their release, urgent prayer requests, questions about the Bible, testimonies, scientific arguments for God, sermons, book reviews, Christian poetry, and hymn texts. Highly recommended for ministries working with Russian-speaking inmates. Contact: Tatiana Kurakova, Russkoe Khristianskoe Radio, Box 141, 125047 Moscow, Russia; tel: 7-095-719-7538; fax: 7-095-719-7539.

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The 33-page annotated English-language **Panorama of Russia Religion Subject Catalog** of current Russian books is now **available online at http://www.panrus.com.** Contact: Panorama of Russia, Box 44-1658, Somerville, MA 02144; tel/fax: 617-625-3635; E-mail: mbraun@channel1.com. See also *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 6 (Summer 1998), 14-15.

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**Kolesova, O. S.** ***Seite rasumnoe, dobroe, vechnoe... [Sow What Is Reasonable, Good, Eternal...]*** St. Petersburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 1996. Reviewed by Olga Loukmanova.

This little book is a serious and thoughtful attempt to look at Russian classical literature and evaluate "the personal drama of Russian authors" and their work in the light of Christ's Gospel. O. S. Kolesova is an expert in language and literature, a teacher, lecturer, and journalist with experience in literary criticism. A sensitive and careful critic, her judgments invariably are charitable, yet always abide by the scriptural standards of truth and holiness. Kolesova discusses the very complex issue of redeeming classical literature for Christian education, calling her readers to develop the skill of careful analysis of great literary masterpieces: that is, the skill of discerning what is true and good and rejecting that which is false, without being too harsh and judgmental. The book treats the lives and writings of such great authors as Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Pasternak, Gogol, Bulgakov, Dostoyevsky, and Nekrasov, and includes a bibliography of recommended works for each. Every name is known and loved by Russian readers and every name is the subject of controversies and debates.

After long years of Party-line opinions, falsehood, or silence, it is refreshing to read a truly informed opinion of a person who loves God, loves and knows Russian literature, and has experienced firsthand both Communist brainwashing and an awakening to the truth of Christ. Christians will find this book a helpful guide to Russian classical literature, and a helpful tool for learning the skills of biblical criticism. Kolesova's work also is a worthy example of an attempt to redeem a part of Russian cultural heritage for Christ. Here works analyzed on the basis of God's truth provide a truly powerful incentive to become reacquainted with some of Russia's greatest and most profound writers.

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**Harris, Mark and Delissa Harris.** ***Krasota sviatosti [The Beauty of Holiness].*** Moscow: 1997. Reviewed by Maria Demeshkina. 113 pages.

Written for a teen and preteen audience, this helpful book on Christian ethics covers a great variety of topics. Beginning with the beauty of creation and its purpose, the authors explain to teenage girls how that beauty was lost, and how they can find a new life and grow and cultivate their beauty through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. This 113-page, biblically based guide helps equip young girls to deal with practical issues such as peer pressure and romantic relationships. The American authors wrote the book while in Russia specifically to address needs experienced in their ministry. Highly recommended.

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E-mail:markdelisa@compuserve.com

An English edition is available with bulk purchases of the Russian edition.

EDITORIAL

# The Role of Luck

*Sharyl Corrado*

I would like to share a pet peeve of mine. **I hate being told how fortunate I am to speak Russian!** Knowing that people mean this as a compliment, I hesitate to be honest. Yet, hoping that some readers may be challenged by my words, I will risk offending others. Over and over, I have been told by missionaries, professors, friends, colleagues, and random people on the street, "You are so lucky to speak Russian!" It is wonderful to speak Russian. I thank God daily for the blessing it has been to me personally, as well as the ministry and learning opportunities it has provided. Yet it hurts to have it glibly attributed to luck.

Aspects of my lifestyle and personality have certainly facilitated the Russian language acquisition process. Being extroverted, I enjoy spending time in conversation, and consciously chose to forgo time alone to be with Russian speakers. My linguistics background includes theoretical coursework in second language acquisition, which I directly applied on a daily basis in Russia. I began Russian language courses at age 18, an opportunity not available to all. Being unmarried has allowed flexibility to spend time in conversation and books that others may have devoted to spouses and families.

I am fortunate that these characteristics and opportunities have aided in my language learning process. I cannot fault those who, for these or other reasons, have not acquired proficiency. But when told how "lucky" I am, at times I want to lash out in anger. "Do you realize how much work I put into that? Do you realize that for two years of college, not a single weekday passed that I did not spend 50 minutes in class and at least as long studying? Do you realize that for an entire semester, I rose every Friday at 5 a.m to study verb endings for three hours before a 9 a.m quiz? Do you realize that I spent thousands of dollars in college tuition on Russian classes? Or that because of an emphasis on foreign languages, I did not take a single history, economics, political science, music, art, or psychology class during a four-year liberal arts education?" A full 50 percent of my undergraduate career was devoted to foreign languages. At times I regret that. But it was a sacrifice that I felt worthwhile as I devoted my elective coursework to foreign languages.

**The Russian church has survived for thousands of years with minimal input by foreigners. God will continue to keep and guide her while we learn, rather than teach.**

At age 22, I was given the opportunity to move to Russia—a dream come true in many ways. I opted to live with nationals from day one. Though in contact with a handful of English-speakers, including some of my housemates, I chose to spend as much time as possible using my limited Russian. A tutor was willing to work with me two hours every day—no matter how tired or busy she or I may have been. I sought relationships with non-English speakers, even when our time together consisted of listing the Russian names of vegetables in the refrigerator, followed by drawing and naming vegetables that were not at hand. I attended meetings of our ministry leadership team, simply listening, as my Russian was not competent even to follow the details, much less contribute. I strove to compensate for my lack of verbal skills by cooking for those who needed extra attention, or running mundane errands for those busy with important ministry activities. (This, too, became language practice, as I learned early on—often the hard way—how to take trams, trolleys, and buses across town in search of train tickets, flour, or acrylic paint). I devoted 10–15 hours every day to conscious language study and practice. I remember well the loneliness of days on end with no more than surface conversations.

I have met many missionaries who feel they do not have time to invest in language, something I understand well. They likely are too busy, given the job description they attempt to fulfill and responsibilities they have undertaken. Yet for those serious about depth, rather than quantity, of ministry accomplishments, job descriptions can be revised and responsibilities delegated. The Russian church has survived for years with minimal input by foreigners. God will continue to keep and guide her while we learn, rather than teach.

By my second year, I could avoid many of my initial mistakes and attempt deeper conversations. While opting for four rather than 10 hours of formal language instruction per week, practice only increased. Late-night conversations about issues such as sexually transmitted diseases, birth defects caused by industrial pollution, and cures for alcoholism became a regular part of each week. Of course I hadn't studied the vocabulary to discuss these topics.

*(continued on page 14)*

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