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Taking the Measure of 1990s Evangelism: Where Are Russian Converts Now?

Perry L. Glanzer

After speaking about the state of Christianity in Russia in a recent American Sunday school class, I was asked a common question. I had just cited a range of studies detailing the social and moral health of Russia and the level of religious observance in the country. Apparently the picture I painted did not correspond with the impression of Russia this person had received from evangelical mission groups. With a puzzled expression on his face he asked me, "I thought the early mission efforts in Russia were incredibly successful. Weren't they?"

Sorting Out Survey Data

Has Russia's spiritual condition changed significantly the past ten years? If one is to believe some reports of short-term missionaries returning from Russia, and even some sociological surveys, the religious changes have been tremendous. Andrew Greeley, a University of Chicago sociologist, claims that Russia has experienced a phenomenal religious revival. In his 1991 study, 22 percent of Russians claimed at the time of the survey that, although they did not previously believe in God, they now did. Along with the 25 percent who said they had always believed, a total of 47 percent of Russians surveyed claimed to believe in God. By 1998 this number had jumped to 60 percent. "In a remarkably brief period of time, Russia has become one of the most God-believing countries in Europe," claimed Greeley.¹

Of course, believing in God does not equate to Christian conversion. Nevertheless, mission groups have certainly claimed some success for these changes. For example, the International School Project (a branch of Campus Crusade for Christ) has asserted that up to 50 percent of the 40,000 people attending its events, most of which have been held in Russia, have come to Christ (www.isp.org).

Converts Without Church Homes

However, Orthodox scholar Dimitry Pospelovsky is not so sure Protestant and Catholic missionaries should celebrate their accomplishments. He argues

that Protestant and Catholic missionaries have actually been a dismal failure. He notes that in a recent survey only two percent of Russians claimed to be Protestant or Catholic.²

Based on my own quantitative and qualitative survey research I propose a hypothesis that does not dismiss Protestant mission efforts but does raise a fundamental question about their results in light of Pospelovsky's comments. I would suggest that Western missionaries have probably produced a significant number of individual converts, but the problem is that these individuals do not have a church home. Pospelovsky's own observations about recent survey data provide one basis for this claim. While the number of Russians claiming affiliation with Protestantism or Catholicism appears low, he also notes that the population of Russian Christians claiming to be Orthodox has also dropped. As a result, he writes, "about 58 percent of people belonging to Christ have no particular confession."³

Who are these people? I suggest that many of these Russians are similar to a group of 212 Russians I surveyed quantitatively and another 75 I extensively interviewed who, as a result of Western mission efforts, were either recent Christian converts or considered themselves "on the road to Christianity." I found that the vast majority of these individuals did not regularly attend either a Protestant or Orthodox church. They could not find a church home that satisfied them.⁴

Dissatisfaction with Russian Orthodoxy

What exactly were the reasons behind these converts' dissatisfaction with Orthodox or Protestant churches? With the Orthodox Church, the most common complaint was its failure to teach the Bible or Christianity in an understandable manner. For example, a teacher from Rybinsk doubted whether she would continue to attend the Orthodox Church because she "didn't understand anything. . . . There were some songs [and] some words which I didn't understand." A woman named Helen from Ryazan was perhaps the most articulate in summarizing the

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feelings expressed by a variety of Russians:

I can't believe blindly without thinking, without seeing, and there are a lot of such people in our country. If I go to our [Russian Orthodox] Church, I understand nothing. That's why it does nothing for me. What they are talking about is in their old Slavonic language. . . . There are a lot of people who don't understand those services at the church and they are searching their own way.

Since Orthodox prayers and liturgy in Old Church Slavonic were difficult to understand, the Russians I interviewed appreciated the simple, straightforward approach of Western Protestants. One Russian stated:

I even do not understand the words of our prayers because it is a very ancient language. I first heard the way Americans prayed and I liked it very much because the words were very simple and understandable and we prayed for things very important for us personally.

In an odd quirk, foreign missionaries explained Christianity in ways that were much more understandable to Russians and Ukrainians than was instruction from the Orthodox Church. One Muscovite gave a common explanation for this appeal:

Christian Americans I met made me come to know God. It was mainly their influence. I think services in our churches don't help draw people closer to God if they're nonbelievers. If people just go to church, they will not understand it. And the way Americans work is very important—reading, explaining, and studying the Bible. It was important for someone to discuss my doubts. Otherwise, I would still have them. Who would explain them to me? You cannot just come up to the priest at the Orthodox Church and ask him why this or that is done. He'll just say he's too busy.

These comments are consistent with the observations of Kent Hill and Mark Elliott who claim that Orthodoxy's failure to deal with the "creative tension between faith and reason" has led increasing numbers of highly educated Russians to embrace Protestantism and Catholicism.⁵

A small but significant number of Russians, especially those who had experience attending Protestant churches, expressed two other reasons for their disillusionment with Eastern Orthodoxy. One secondary reason concerned its emphasis on suffering. That Christians should be sorrowful,

suffering people is apparently deeply ingrained in the Russian psyche. One former United Nations translator who interpreted for Western missionaries spoke disparagingly about "This emphasis on suffering, only suffering" and how it permeated the Orthodox tradition, even down to standing for its liturgy: "People are expected to stand for hours and hours on end in the services. No chairs are up. It's the same thing—you must suffer in order to become closer to God."

Another secondary issue concerned the quality of community. One Russian found her experiences at Orthodox churches isolating:

I thought that church should be like your family, God's family. In the Orthodox Church, when you enter, the first thing you see is old people standing and moving. Nobody knows who you are, what's your name, nobody asks where you live, where do you work, what's up with your life. Just like separate people standing in the same building.

In contrast, Russians found the American Protestant churches remarkably personable. One noted:

The leader of their [Protestant] church knows everybody by name and knows all the problems. It's different in our [Orthodox] church. When I come to our church I feel a stranger there, because I don't know people. . . . I can't think about them as my friends. I don't know them.

On the Protestant side, they found a new and unique intimacy—something they had not experienced in their own tradition. Helen related:

I listened to a service from the American church . . . but I was crying. Why? First of all, all the people who come to this church know each other. They know their lives and they pray for each other. And in our church we don't know anybody. And when I heard this service from your church, they know the problems of each other. It makes me so comfortable, so nice, and so warm. They're praying not only to God, but they're praying for me. They're praying for my family. Perhaps that's why I was crying when Heidi prayed for me for the first time. I felt [it]—personally for me, for my family, for my children.

Helen and other Russians found that a church service that focused on the personal needs of the community was a unique and touching experience.

And Dissatisfaction with Protestantism as Well

Still, new converts were not quite ready to embrace contemporary American Protestantism either. Mary,

With the Orthodox Church, the most common complaint was its failure to teach the Bible or Christianity in an understandable manner.

an interpreter from Ryazan, said of the American church plant, "I couldn't go there alone—I went with [American missionaries], but I think that when they leave I won't go." Helen, the teacher mentioned above, described a similar reaction.

I went to the Full Gospel Church three times. I went there with my American friends, and almost every time I left the church I was depressed. I cried a lot after that. I don't want to go to that church anymore. I like the church—I am very glad for them because they meet each other with such joy—but I can't go there. I don't know why.

As in this case, Russians often found it hard to describe the reasons. They often would mention that American Protestant church plants did not touch their Russian soul.⁶ This characteristic appeared tied to the fact that American services were "too loud," so that they "couldn't even concentrate."

Russian Christians Without Church Homes

Russian educators often shared how they felt caught between Orthodoxy and Protestantism. They wanted something that combined the two traditions. As one teacher expressed, "I just wish I could find something in between Orthodox Christianity and Protestantism." Some attended services at both Protestant and Orthodox churches. As one educator said, "I listen to the teachings in Pastor Mark's church [the American Protestant church]. When I want to pray, sometimes I go to the Orthodox Church." It appears that he found the Bible teaching he wanted in the Protestant church, but for rituals invoking reverence and awe, he went to the Orthodox Church.

Of course, historical factors play a role for some. One teacher who had been very critical of the Orthodox Church in our interview still attended an Orthodox Church because of her respect for tradition: "I respect my grandfathers. . . . I want to prolong this continuation by generation. But I'm definitely sure that the Russian Orthodox Church needs to change." At the Protestant church, they found teaching they could understand, community, and an emphasis upon the joy of the Christian life that they longed to have in their Orthodox Church. Yet most still feel tied to Orthodoxy for a variety of spiritual, historical, and cultural reasons. They are torn in two.

Sadly, if these converts are any indication, the successful evangelical work of Western missionaries has produced a population of Russian Christians without church homes. If further research proves this hypothesis to be true,⁷ evangelicals may need to reevaluate their recent mission work in Russia. While Western missionaries cannot bear the sole blame for this problem, they may have contributed to it by giving improper attention to church planting or by planting churches that have clearly not appealed to

Russian sensibilities. This failure of Western mission converts to identify with a church will also mean that the church will continue to be considered irrelevant not only to their own spiritual well-being, but also to their society's moral and social well-being. Overall, these results provide evidence supporting Walter Sawatsky's concern, expressed almost a decade ago, that initial approaches to missions in the former Soviet Union failed to consider critical ecclesiastical issues.⁸ Are we seeing the results of failing to follow that advice in Russia? ♦

Edited excerpt published with permission from Perry L. Glanzer, The Quest for Russia's Souls: Evangelicals' Experiment with Moral Education in Post-Communist Russia (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, forthcoming, 2002).

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¹Andrew Greeley, "A Religious Revival in Russia?," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 (1994), 253–72; "Russia Growing More Religious, Sociologist Says," Associated Press, 6 April 2000.

²Dimitry Pospelovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1998), 385.

³*Ibid.*

⁴Members of a Western Christian group considered the 212 Russian Christians surveyed their most promising leaders. Of these leaders, only 35 percent attended church weekly. In contrast, 45 percent attended church rarely or never. Nineteen percent attended church monthly, while one percent did not respond.

⁵Kent Hill and Mark Elliott, "Are Evangelicals Interlopers?," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 1 (Summer, 1993), 3–4.

⁶J. B. Dunlop, "The Russian Orthodox Church as an 'Empire-Saving' Institution" in *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, Vol. 3, *The International Politics of Eurasia*, edited by Michael Bordeaux (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 15–40.

⁷My recent experience in Russia gives me no reason to doubt my hypothesis. One missionary who has lived in Vologda for the past eight years, a city where extensive Western short-term mission work took place, told me that she could identify only 14 converts from Western mission efforts in the city who attend a church.

⁸Walter Sawatsky, "After the Glasnost Revolution: Soviet Evangelicals and Western Missions," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16 (April 1992), 54–60.

Successful evangelical work of Western missionaries has produced a population of Russian Christians without church homes.

Analysis of World Christian Encyclopedia Figures for Post-Soviet Christians

Mark Elliott

The *World Christian Encyclopedia* would appear to be too generous in its estimates of Orthodox communities, even with the understanding that nominal believers are included.

The second edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), edited by David Barrett, George Kurian, and Todd Johnson, greatly expands and updates the calculations of the pathbreaking 1982 edition of the same work. The editors are to be commended for their massive investment of time and labor in the extremely difficult task of measuring the size of Christendom, and indeed, other world religions as well.

The accompanying table from the *World Christian Encyclopedia* provides estimates for the number of Christians in the former Soviet Union and Central and Eastern Europe. While helpful especially for comparative purposes, individual totals for various confessions in various countries deserve, in some cases, close scrutiny and qualification. The comments below illustrate why some calculations could be misleading.

1. The *World Christian Encyclopedia* would appear to be too generous in its estimates of Orthodox communities, even with the understanding that nominal believers are included. Figures for Orthodox in Russia (75,950,000), Ukraine (27,400,000), Georgia (2,886,814), and Romania (19,000,000) are so expansive that they would appear to reduce the definition of Orthodox to descendants of populations historically associated with the Orthodox church. For purposes of comparison, in the 1990s British researcher Patrick Johnstone scaled back his figures for Russian Orthodox from 72 million affiliates in *Operation World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993, p. 467), to a more conservative 24 million in Patrick Johnstone and Peter Brierley, *World Churches Handbook* (London: Christian Research, 1997, p. 711).
2. The high degree of secularization in most post-Soviet states should raise questions, not only

The Christian Population of Post-Soviet States

	COUNTRY	ORTHODOX	CRYPTO-CHRISTIANS(1)	ROMAN CATHOLIC	UNAFFILIATED CHRISITANS(2)	INDEPENDENTS(3)	DOUBLY AFFILIATED(4)	PROTESTANTS*	EVANGELICALS	PENTECOSTALS/CHARISMATICS
FORMER SOVIET UNION	Armenia	2,752,493		180,000		28,000		12,000	1,900	76,900
	Azerbaijan	345,302	12,000	7,500		3,600		1,400	450	10,000
	Belorussia	4,986,077		1,350,000	606,991	110,000		130,000	30,800	95,000
	Estonia	230,000		5,875	356,678	46,000		240,000	72,000	60,000
	Georgia	2,886,814		55,000	81,666	42,000		24,000	9,200	30,000
	Kazakhstan	1,401,803	140,000	510,000	118,177	650,000		25,000	10,000	82,000
	Kirghizia	363,065	40,000	1,600	22,580	70,500		30,000	3,000	17,800
	Latvia	555,000		490,000	1,445	115,000	-146,075	560,000	168,000	90,000
	Lithuania	114,000		3,105,000		32,000	-85,903	44,000	8,900	51,300
	Moldova	1,950,558		73,000		670,000		78,000	20,000	49,000
	Russia	75,950,000		1,500,000	689,841	7,800,000	-3,464,943	1,633,300	560,000	6,475,000
Tajikistan	93,000	110,000	4,412		15,000		17,000	1,900	3,200	
Ukraine	27,400,000		5,578,901	199,349	8,500,000	-1,284,804	1,340,000	1,016,000	4,035,000	
Uzbekistan	188,934	210,000	40,000		120,000		44,000	12,500	150,000	
CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE	Albania	1,101,230		521,390	27,519	17,000		20,000	6,000	100,000
	Bosnia	700,000	230,000	681,135	4,917	750		2,700	400	32,400
	Bulgaria	5,886,450		90,000	6,053	580,000		95,000	120,000	140,000
	Croatia	250,000		3,960,000	2,417	11,386		26,000	6,700	127,820
	Czech Rep.	60,000		4,135,936	1,636,174	270,000		320,000	127,000	256,000
	Hungary	90,000		6,330,000	13,940	165,000		2,560,000	455,000	690,000
	Macedonia	1,200,000		70,600	1,127	8,192		7,000	3,120	7,700
	Poland	1,030,000		35,743,059	260,097	330,000		195,000	140,000	2,015,000
	Romania	19,000,000		3,237,000	11,990	290,000	-5,430,087	2,380,450	1,395,302	1,350,000
	Slovakia	21,000		3,660,186	286,266	23,000		600,000	115,000	246,000
	Slovenia	12,000		1,659,006	92,675	31,000		32,000	13,800	69,500
Yugoslavia	6,046,000		546,557	339,179	185,000		99,000	42,400	250,000	

*Includes Anglicans

(1) Crypto-Christians—Secret believers, hidden Christians, usually known to churches but not to state, secular, or non-Christian religious society

(2) Unaffiliated Christians—Persons professing allegiance and commitment to Christ but who have no church affiliation

(3) Independents—One of Christianity's six ecclesiastico-cultural megablocs, separated from, uninterested in, and independent of historic denominationalist Christianity (the other five megablocs)

(4) Doubly Affiliated Christians—Persons who are baptized members of two or more denominations at the same time

Source: David Barrett, George Kurian, and Todd Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

- about Orthodox estimates, but about what appear to be overly generous figures for Catholics in such countries as the Czech Republic (4,135,936) and Slovenia (1,659,006).
3. The vast majority of Catholics in Ukraine are Eastern Rite, not Roman, so the figure of 5,578,901 must include Catholics of both rites, despite the fact that the heading is Roman Catholic.
 4. The concept of "Independents," Christians "separated from, uninterested in, and independent of historic denominationalist Christianity," is meaningful and a very significant phenomenon, particularly in Africa and Asia. But one would be prudent to seriously question such startling figures for Independents as 7,800,000 in Russia and 8,500,000 in Ukraine without careful evaluation of specific relevant sources, which the *World Christian Encyclopedia* does not provide.
 5. Christians with some connection to Protestant Reformation teachings and beliefs are enumerated under four headings: "Protestants," "Anglicans," "Evangelicals," and "Pentecostals/Charismatics." These four categories total 8,668,300 for Russia, a figure which is so far beyond any estimate for Russian believers with Reformation distinctives ever published that one is inclined to give it little credence. I published an estimate of 2,960,000 Protestants in the former Soviet Union in 1991 for all Reformation-related churches, with the Russian Republic at that point accounting for only 33 percent of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and only three percent of Pentecostals. See Mark Elliott and Robert Richardson, "Growing Protestant Diversity in the Former Soviet Union" in *Russian Pluralism—Now Irreversible?* ed. by Uri Ra'an'an et al. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 200-01, 205. No published sources or other communications I have received would suggest that church growth in the 1990s would justify a current figure of 8.6 million Russians

affiliated with Reformation-related churches. Overlap among the four Protestant Reformation categories might partly explain what appears to be an extraordinarily high estimate. But explanatory material provided for *World Christian Encyclopedia* statistical tables indicates that categories are "mainly mutually exclusive" (Vol. 1, p. 32). Perhaps some of the "Protestant" figure for Russia (1,630,000) includes non-Trinitarian Jehovah's Witnesses whom Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson define as "marginal Protestant" (Vol. 2, p. 664). Neither Western evangelical missions nor indigenous Russian Protestants would abide such an inclusion. But even adding Jehovah's Witnesses still would not justify the figure given for Russian Protestants in this writer's opinion, especially if "Protestants" and "Pentecostals/Charismatics" are "mainly mutually exclusive."

6. The estimates for Pentecostals/Charismatics in Russia and Ukraine (10,510,000) bear no resemblance to figures this editor has ever read or heard. I do believe that Pentecostals/Charismatics in the former Soviet Union now outnumber other Evangelicals, conceivably as much as two to one, and the *World Christian Encyclopedia* performs a service by noting growing Pentecostal/Charismatic strength. But the figures, at least for Russia and Ukraine, are so high that skepticism about them may cause some to question what I believe should be undeniable, that in the former Soviet Union Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are growing much more rapidly than are other Evangelical churches.

In summary, the 2001 edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* is useful for comparative purposes, but individual figures for individual confessions, at least for post-Soviet states, require cautious use. ♦

Mark Elliott is editor of the East-West Church & Ministry Report.

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A Sobering Critique of Russian Protestant Church Growth

David C. Lewis

Anti-Orthodox Protestant

It is unfortunate that relationships between the Orthodox church and foreign missions have sometimes been soured by the anti-Orthodox stance of some Protestants. Even though such individuals are not typical of most foreign missions, from an Orthodox perspective it may be difficult to distinguish between the different kinds of Protestants. A few negative experiences can create stereotypes and motivate the Orthodox church to try to reduce foreign influence among Russian Protestants.

Anti-Protestant Orthodox

All Protestant churches together can claim a membership of no more than a few percent of the population, whereas somewhere between 45 and 75 percent of Russians identify themselves as in some sense Orthodox, although this no doubt includes many who are Orthodox according to their culture rather than their belief.

Despite its numerical advantage, parts of the Orthodox church have also felt increasingly threatened in the last few years by certain Protestant

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All Protestant churches together can claim a membership of no more than a few percent of the population.

Russian Protestant Church Growth (cont. from page 5)

groups on account of Protestants' potential sponsorship from more affluent churches in the West. Russian Baptists, Pentecostals, and others have benefited from literature and finance for church buildings and the salaries of evangelists. The Orthodox church has also felt threatened by the mass evangelism of Protestant preachers who have held evangelistic campaigns in Moscow and some other cities. Western preachers have the financial resources to pay for advertisements on local television and radio, the printing of advertising posters and leaflets, and the provision of free scriptures and other literature handed out at the campaigns themselves. Superficially it appears that large numbers are responding at these campaigns, but in fact many of them fail to become integrated into Protestant churches.

A Case Study of Protestant Church Planting in Tatarstan

Pentecostals

Six months after Vasily Yevchek began to plant a church in the city of Naberezhnye Chelny, he had a congregation of about 500 people. In February 1993 his brother Peter started a church in the nearby town of Yelabuga, which after one month had a congregation of about 60 to 80 people. In Nizhnyekamsk, another city in that region of Eastern Tatarstan, their colleague Stepan Borisov had about 100 people in his church just three months after he had begun his missionary work there. During the same period another 100 people joined the church started by Stepan's brother, Vasili Borisov, in the nearby town of Zainsk. Another colleague, Nikolai Jubak, had a congregation of 50 people two months after he began to plant a church in the small town of Kamskiye Polyani.

On the surface this appears to be a phenomenal growth rate among these new Pentecostal churches in the valley of the Kama River in Eastern Tatarstan. Statistics like these could make some Orthodox clergy feel that Protestants are a threat, but this reaction is based on very superficial and limited observations. What tends to happen is that there is an initial period of apparent success and growth, but the rate of growth usually slows down after some months and the momentum is often lost. Rapid growth needs to be followed by a period of consolidation and a greater focus on the teaching and training of those who have come to faith. At the same time there is likely to be a certain amount of loss: as in Christ's parable of the sower, there will inevitably be those whose initial enthusiasm is strangled by the cares of this world, or whose roots were not put down deeply enough to withstand pressures or persecution.

Compared to the populations of these settlements, the number of Protestants is still insignificant. The 500 Pentecostals in Naberezhnye Chelny still constitute less than 0.1 percent of the population of 508,163 people. The same is true of the other cities:

Pentecostals constitute about 0.5 percent of the population of Nizhnyekamsk (numbering 192,525), no more than 0.15 percent of the 54,360 population of Yelabuga, less than 0.3 percent of the 36,932 people in Zainsk, and about 0.3 percent of the approximately 15,000 in the settlement of Kamskiye Polyani. It might be argued that the figures for one denomination do not represent any kind of threat to the religious establishment, but collectively the different Protestant denominations together represent a substantial number. I do not have exact figures for Eastern Tatarstan, but to the best of my knowledge the Baptist and Charismatic churches are of a similar size, sometimes smaller, than the Pentecostal churches detailed above. However, while studying the Tatar language at the Academy of Sciences in Kazan in 1991 I also conducted some research on the overall situation in the city.

Orthodox

The major Christian denomination is of course the Orthodox church, but it is difficult to assess the number of "members" because many of those who regard themselves as Orthodox attend the church only for special festivals. Moreover, the style of service is such that people often come and go during the course of the service and can move around to some extent on account of the lack of seats; so there is a problem in assessing the number of regular attendees. This is easier for Protestant churches in which there is seating provided and in which people feel a greater sense of obligation to stay to the end of the service if possible (although in practice there is also considerable freedom in this). Father Pavel, who conducts services in Tatar for baptised Tatars, reckons the total community to be several dozens of thousands, but only about 150–200 come to his services held at times of special festivals. The regular, committed congregation is about 60 older people.

Baptists

During the Communist period there had been a registered Baptist church in Kazan which I did not manage to visit, but I was told that its members, numbering about 100 or so, were mainly older people who were quite conservative. However, I did visit what for many years had been the unregistered Baptist church. It was meeting on the edge of the city in a building which was packed out with possibly up to 100 people. To a large extent the style of the service was quite traditional—the men in the front rows leading the service while women (all wearing headscarves) and children were relegated to sitting around the walls. Some of the more progressive elements in the church wanted to be less rigid in their attitudes and also to be more open to contacts with other churches (both within Russia and abroad), so a few years later the majority of the members split off to form a separate congregation. I estimate the attendance at the new congregation to have been around 200 in 1997—indicating an approximate

doubling in size over five or six years.

Also in Kazan is the Nazareth Church, established in 1991 by Baptist missionaries from the Light of the Gospel Mission based in Rovno, Ukraine. On my first visit to the church in 1991, a 23-year-old man who led some of the meetings told us that when he first came in May 1991 he was the only one his age, but then a nucleus of younger people formed as he brought his friends. At first the congregation consisted mainly of older people, but the average age was becoming younger and some of the ideas of the younger Christians were also becoming more accepted. He reckoned that the regular attendees numbered about 70 to 80 people, but there were also casual visitors. I estimated the attendance six years later, in 1997, at about 200. This again indicated an approximate doubling during half a decade.

Pentecostals and Charismatics

Those present [during] my visit to the Pentecostal church numbered probably 200. However, in 1989 a flourishing Charismatic church had been founded by a young couple named Sergei and Julia Borisenkov, who had grown up in the Pentecostal church. On my first visit to this new church in 1991 there were 79 committed members, but the average attendance was between 100 and 200. Most of them were younger people; about 10 to 15 people were in the 30- to 40-age range, another 15 older than 40, and the rest were students or young people. Over the next few years the church grew rapidly, and by 1995 had already become the largest Protestant church in Tatarstan, having about 700 members, plus another 100 or more attendees who were not yet full members. They had also started church plants in Naberezhnye-Chelny and Novokuibyshevsk.

This Cornerstone Church—the name by which it had been registered—had by 1995 a salaried staff of six people. Sergei Borisenkov continued to be the founding pastor, but he was also training others to take on leadership roles. Many in the church seemed to appreciate the preaching skills of a young man named Roman, who later became the leading pastor. At first Sergei devoted himself to administrative matters, but after a while both Sergei and Julia became unhappy with some of the emphases in Roman's style of preaching. Finally the Borisenkovs felt that they had to leave the church they had founded and start again. By 1998 their new congregation had about 200 people in attendance.

Another Charismatic church was founded in the summer of 1991 by the Calvary Chapel denomination in the USA. Initially this new church called itself Mission Golgotha, but later, simply the Church of Christ. Pastor Alexander Polishchuk told me that at the beginning perhaps 100 or so became Christians when they came to hear an American evangelist, but only about 30 remained—although some went to other churches. After that the church grew to some extent: on my first visit in 1991 I estimated the congregation to be about 55 to 60 people. Since then there has been some growth, but

the church then suffered from restrictions introduced in November 1993 by the mayor of Kazan regarding the use of public buildings for religious purposes. For a while the church was meeting mainly as house groups, rather than as a combined congregation. In Kazan there is also a Seventh-day Adventist church. Its pastor reported in 1991 that a small group of less than 30 people had grown to more than 50.

Tatarstan Protestants Well Under One Percent

In conclusion, it can be seen that the overall number of Protestants remains a tiny fraction of the population of the city. At the time of my survey in 1991 there were about 1,000 Protestants in the Baptist, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches combined. However, the population of Kazan in 1989 was 1,087,584—therefore Protestants represented in the region of 0.1 percent of the city's inhabitants. Since then the Baptists have approximately doubled in numbers and attendance at Charismatic churches (especially the Cornerstone Church) has multiplied by a factor of perhaps four or five, but the overall number of Protestant Christians remains merely a fraction of one percent of the population. Therefore it appears that the Orthodox reaction to Protestantism seems to be out of all proportion to the real numbers involved. The small number of Protestants can hardly be seen as a threat, unless their numbers appear to be magnified in the eyes of the Orthodox establishment. If so, the most likely explanation for this reaction probably lies not in the actual growth figures of the Protestant churches themselves but in the impression conveyed by Western-style mass evangelism.

Evangelical Exaggeration

A problem for some Westerners is a felt need to show results—preferably spectacular ones—to those who have financially supported their missions. Glamorous success stories are often the best way of doing this. Too often mission strategy can be influenced, perhaps almost unconsciously, by what looks good to supporters. Hence there is a danger of stressing quantity at the expense of quality.

For instance, in 1994 there was a debate in the *Christian Herald* newspaper whereby an organization called Eurovangelism wished to disassociate itself from being confused with a mission called Eurovision, which was advertising an evangelistic campaign in terms that Eurovangelism considered to be exaggerations. For example, Eurovision's description of Siberia as a land with "No God, No Bible, No Hope" seemed incompatible with the fact that there were existing churches in many of the very cities and towns targeted by Eurovision's mission. I had not intended to let myself become involved in this debate, but I was drawn in when the editor of the *Christian Herald* asked me to try to give an objective appraisal of Eurovision's claims.

In fact, I had little or no quibble with the basic

(continued on page 8)

The whole population of Russia must be Christian already if one adds together all the numbers of converts claimed by various Western missions in Russia!

Publicity reports produced by evangelists can mislead observers from the Orthodox and Muslim faiths who have begun to regard Protestantism as a threat.

Russian Protestant Church Growth (cont. from page 7)
facts as presented by David Hathaway, the director of Eurovision, in his mission report in the *Christian Herald*. The problem lay more in his style of presentation:

Over 50,000 came forward to receive Christ, over 1,000 documented healings—just those prayed for by myself, not including those prayed for by team members—17 Crusades—17 different cities—55 separate meetings—several new churches planted—approximately 30,000 km traveled—all in 63 days. In every Crusade almost every unbeliever came forward to receive Christ. . . . In Susuman 25 percent of the population came forward to make a decision in two days in the stadium.

David Hathaway's report illustrates the way in which it is possible to give an impression to one's sponsors that they had received value for their money. I have little doubt that the figures are generally accurate regarding some of these smaller Siberian towns where Westerners still have curiosity value. However, what does it mean in reality?

I tried to ascertain the opinions of local Christians in some of these Siberian towns. In Yakutsk they laughed when they read Hathaway's report—one of them commenting that the whole population of Russia must be Christian already if one adds together all the numbers of converts claimed by various Western missions in Russia! The fact is that very often Russians have gone forward in response to evangelistic messages because they feel that the evangelist expects them to do so, or else they feel that it is a "religious" thing to do—rather like the new Russian fashion for wearing a cross around one's neck. Even if they went forward, they have not necessarily become Christians, and in fact relatively few actually end up as church members.

Another Christian wondered why Hathaway should be so specific about the numbers of converts, crusades, and meetings, but so vague about the exact number of the "several" new churches that were said to have been planted. A possible reason for this vagueness was provided by a telephone interview I conducted in Russian with Iida Lukina, a Christian in the southern Siberian city of Neryungri. She said: "Many people repented in the meetings, but no one new has come along to our church as a result of this mission." She thought that some of those who responded might have started to attend the local Orthodox church, as most Russians are unfamiliar with Protestant churches. Even though Iida considered Hathaway's mission to have been "excellent" and "well-organized," her comments about the lack of incorporation of supposed converts into the local church (or at least the Protestant one) are consistent with the patterns reported by Russian pastors elsewhere after other evangelistic campaigns by Western missions in recent years. Indeed there have often been some lasting conversions, but these

form a relatively small proportion of the apparently large numbers who respond at the public rallies. An informed estimate for Moscow reckons that a total of about 2.3 million people in the city are recorded as having made a response at large evangelistic rallies in recent years, but membership in Protestant churches has increased by only about 50 percent—from around 6,000 members to 9,000 or 10,000.

Orthodox Misreading of Protestant Gains

Publicity reports produced by evangelists can mislead observers from the Orthodox and Muslim faiths who have begun to regard Protestantism as a threat. In order to protect the integrity of their traditions and their symbols of ethnic identity, they have appealed to legislators for state protection. Protestants have reacted by viewing such restrictions as forms of persecution or infringements of human rights. Insofar as Hathaway's magazine *Prophetic Vision* often refers to prophecies that the time is short for evangelistic campaigns to be held, it would be an irony if to a certain extent such prophecies might be partially self-fulfilling.

Western Christian Witness at Its Best

These kinds of Western missions are the ones most likely to catch the eye of the general public and of the Orthodox hierarchy, who might be inclined to view Protestants as potentially "stealing their sheep." It is unfortunate that they do not notice the quiet work of various Western Christians living in Russia who have a desire to be servants of the church, whether Orthodox or Protestant. Some of them have deliberately decided to join in with their local Orthodox churches in order to help and encourage the local Orthodox priesthood. Others, motivated by a genuine desire to alleviate human suffering, have been involved in charitable activities such as helping children living on the streets of Moscow. These kinds of inconspicuous but very positive forms of help rarely catch the attention of the public, but at a local grassroots level they have been building forms of cooperation between Western Protestant and Russian Orthodox Christians based on practical deeds rather than discussions about theology. In other cases known to me, Western and Russian churches have entered into the religious equivalent of "twinning" between towns: that is, members from both sides have visited the other church and have each helped or encouraged the other in some way. Sometimes this has resulted in help with practical material needs, but probably more important has been the transnational cross-fertilization that comes from sharing experiences and insights with one another. ♦

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Copyright David C. Lewis, *After Atheism: Religion and Ethnicity in Russia and Central Asia* (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2000; New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

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The Number of Orthodox Believers: The Story of a Methodological Forgery

Hegumen Innokenty

The thesis that “the Orthodox population of Russia must constitute, at a minimum, 70–80 million people,” usually cited in sociological studies, refers to those who self-identify themselves as Orthodox. This thesis continues to be promoted by ideologues of what I would designate as political Orthodoxy. The issue of the number of Orthodox believers in Russia has a distinctively political tone. Exaggerations of the number of Orthodox believers is beneficial to certain church leaders who aspire to financial support from the government, and to politicians who want to play the “Orthodox” card, and to some scholars who serve one or the other.

The Number of Practicing Orthodox

The Moscow Patriarchate since 1988 has proclaimed an unchanged formula of the type, “Our church is multinational and numbers in the many millions.” [However] studies of the past seven years conducted by various independent sociological services have consistently indicated a figure of the order of 4.5 percent of the population of Russia who can be characterized as practicing Orthodox. One can get a certain idea of the real number of regular service attendees by looking at indirect data, in particular at the reports of the agencies of internal affairs regarding the number of persons participating in Easter processions of the cross. Thus around Moscow, with its population of ten million, the number of persons attending the central Orthodox divine service in a year [Easter] varies within the range of 110,000 to 150,000, which constitutes (let’s take the maximum) about 1.5 percent of the population.

Russian Church Statistics (cont. from page 16)

drug abuse, promiscuity, prostitution, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Measuring Evangelistic Results by Quality as Well as Quantity

Part of the problem in measuring spiritual harvest may lie in the Western mission community’s penchant for quantification of converts rather than disciples. I believe James F. Engel and William A. Dyrness are correct in arguing that reducing the spread of the gospel “to a measurable objective of maximizing numbers of converts and church members has emasculated Christ’s imperative to make disciples of all nations” (*Changing the Mind of Missions; Where Have We Gone Wrong?* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000], 88). These authors rightly insist, “If we

Equating Faith with Nationality

The “many millions” of the church consists in considering as Orthodox all those who identify (or could identify) themselves as such regardless of religious practice. Simply put, the issue here is the phenomenon well known to students of religion, ethnologists, and political scientists, and typical in a number of countries of post-Christian Europe where identification of confessional affiliation serves as the equivalent of national self-identification. Nevertheless, judging from sociological surveys, it is impossible to rule out that in the conduct of an all-Russian census, approximately half of respondents will include themselves among the Orthodox. This also will include those who view Orthodoxy as an indicator of affiliation with the Russian nation. This expresses itself in Easter and Christmas meals, the baptism of children (without any subsequent religious education), and in funerals with a priest. In Russia the majority of those who call themselves Orthodox show up in church only twice—first when they are carried there as infants for baptism and second when they are carried there for a funeral. ♦

Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Paul Steeves, PDS Russia Religion News (www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews), January 2001, translated from Sobornost, 15 January 2001.

Hegumen Innokenty is a priest in the Russian Orthodox Church.

must have a ‘countdown,’ let’s look at the changes through the eyes of Jesus. There should, for example, be demonstrable declines in dishonesty, immorality, and oppression of the poor by the rich, accompanied by economic lift among the disadvantaged” (*Ibid.*, 165).

Certainly, spiritual renewal can have a salutary effect on a society’s health and moral climate, even its economy. Eighteenth century England revived in the wake of the ministry of John and Charles Wesley and George Whitfield illustrates the point. But as much as we might wish otherwise, the critical mass of devout Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Russian believers is not sufficient—at least to date—to transform post-Soviet society as a whole for the good. Finally, while speaking of morality, it would be prudent in the spirit of Christ’s teachings for Orthodox and Protestants, West and East, to avoid exaggerations of the number of Russian followers of Christ. ♦

In Russia the majority of those who call themselves Orthodox show up in church only twice—first when they are carried there as infants for baptism and second when they are carried there for a funeral.

Mark Elliott is editor of the East-West Church & Ministry Report.

Lowest Church Attendance Rates in Europe

Kimmo Kääriäinen

Attendance at divine services seemed to be very popular in the former Soviet Union after the [1988 Eastern Slavic Christian] Millennium celebrations, at least judging by the crowded churches. During the first half of the 1990s, the pictures broadcast on TV about Russia's religious life gave the impression of a religious renaissance, as the churches seemed to be too small for the great masses of people who wanted to attend divine services. However, the mass media naturally visited churches where something special was taking place and that were, therefore, packed with people. In fact, if we look at the results of various surveys since the early 1990s we see that attendance at religious services has remained at a very low level. In the surveys between 1991 and 1999 depicted below it is possible to see the changes that have taken place since the last year of the Communist regime.

Percentages of Russian Population in Attendance at Divine Services

	1991	1993	1996	1999
At least once a month	6	7	6	7
Several times a year	8	10	20	21
Once a year or less	27	21	25	21
Never	59	62	48	49

Attending divine services at least once a month is a widely accepted international criterion for regular church attendance. In Russia the rate has remained at a very low level, being one of the lowest in Europe. Since 1991 the number of functioning churches and the number of clergy have notably increased. Furthermore, the percentage of people believing in God has also notably increased. However, none of this seems to have had any influence on the regular attendance of divine services.

It is, however, possible to identify certain changes that indicate that attendance at religious services has slightly increased in Russia in the first half of the 1990s. Firstly, the percentage of Russians who sometimes attend divine services had increased by 1996. Furthermore, the percentage of Russians who never attend divine services had decreased. But it remains true that half of the population (49 percent) never attend religious services. ♦

Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from Kimmo Kääriäinen, "Is a Shared Religion Possible in Russia?" in Beyond the Mainstream: The Emergence of Religious Pluralism in Finland, Estonia, and Russia, ed. Jeffrey Kaplan (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2000), 347-59.

Kimmo Kääriäinen is a professor at the University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland.

If we look at the results of various surveys since the early 1990s we see that attendance at religious services has remained at a very low level.

Letter to the Editor

I read with interest Anne-Marie Kool's article, "Are Western Ministries Serious About Partnership with Hungary's Historic Churches?" [*East-West Church & Ministry Report* 8 (Fall 2000)]. Having arrived in Hungary at about the same time as Dr. Kool in 1989, I can only admire her restraint and generosity in describing the approach taken by many mission groups in Hungary and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. I found myself nodding in agreement with Dr. Kool's assessment of the mission strategy and practice of North American and other Western agencies operating in the region. It has been a trend of many mission groups to not want to "waste time" in incarnational mission, which would require their personnel to learn the language, understand the culture, and learn what Hungarian and other Central and East European churches are already doing to witness and disciple people in their own countries. It is simpler, though far less effective and even damaging, for these groups to dump their "pre-packaged programs" on the established Protestant

churches, or even to totally ignore the national churches and their leaders, writing them off as ignorant, ineffective, or as Dr. Kool suggests, "dead." In their zeal to unload what they do understand from their own cultures, these newly arrived missionaries just do not make a serious effort to learn about and understand the historic Protestant churches and their existing or projected ministries.

Often in vain I tried to encourage recently arrived missionaries, not only from parachurch groups but from denominational agencies as well, to spend time getting to know Hungarian Christians and their churches before deciding for them what they needed. So many of the strategies and programs designed in North America and other Western countries just do not meet the greatest spiritual needs of the people in Central and Eastern Europe. Mission personnel must first be accepted and trusted by the nationals with whom they serve before they earn the right to help them grow indigenous churches. There are no shortcuts. Mission personnel must be willing to pay the price of cultural

adaptation and acceptance before becoming legitimate change agents. Planting and developing churches can be done by missionaries with the Lord's guidance, but it is done most effectively by those willing to plant their lives and learn the language, the culture, and the way witness, evangelism, and discipleship are done in the context of the host society. Too many want to work "in parallel with" (another way of saying "we'll do our thing and you do yours"), but not "in partnership with" the historic Hungarian churches. And that, in my opinion, is a serious missiological error and a great tragedy we are seeing in many countries today. So I would like to thank Dr. Kool for her article. I can only hope that mission agency leadership and personnel will take note of her concerns and advocate and practice a mission strategy based on an incarnational approach to doing mission. ♦

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Russia's Population Meltdown

Murray Feshbach

In his first annual presidential address to the Russian people [July 2000], President Vladimir Putin listed the 16 "most acute problems facing our country." Number one on the list, topping even the country's dire economic condition and the diminishing effectiveness of its political institutions, was the declining size of Russia's population. Putin put the matter plainly. The Russian population is shrinking by 750,000 every year, and (thanks to a large excess of deaths over births) looks likely to continue dropping for years to come. If the trend is not altered, he warned, "the very survival of the nation will be endangered."

- By 2050, I believe, Russia's population will shrink by one-third, from roughly 145 million today to about 100 million, a blow that even a stable, prosperous country would have difficulty sustaining.
- Russian women now bear little more than half the number of children needed to sustain the population at current levels. In absolute terms, the number of annual births has dropped by half since reaching a high of 2.5 million in 1983.
- Attitudes toward childbearing have changed for the worse. An estimated two-thirds of all pregnancies now end in abortions.
- The ranks of eligible parents, especially fathers, are being thinned by tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, alcoholism, drug abuse, and other causes. Fifteen to 20 percent of all Russian families experience infertility.
- Perhaps 40 percent of the nation's hospitals and clinics do not have hot water or sewage.
- Seventy-five percent or more of pregnant women suffer a serious pathology during their pregnancy, such as sepsis, toxemia, or anemia.
- Leading Russian pediatrician Aleksandr Baranov estimates that only five to ten percent of all Russian children are healthy.
- In the United States, a boy who lives to age 16 has an 88 to 90 percent chance of living to age 60. His Russian counterpart has only a 58–60 percent chance. And those chances are shrinking.
- Vadim Pokrovskiy, Russia's leading HIV/AIDS epidemiologist, estimates there will be five to ten million deaths [from AIDS] in the years after 2015. Most of the victims will be 15 to 29 years old, and most will be males.
- The U.S. HIV incidence rate was 16.7 new cases per 100,000 population in 1998. The Baltic port city of Kaliningrad and its surrounding region hold the unhappy distinction of recording the highest official rate of HIV increase [in Russia], at 76.9 new cases per 100,000. Moscow, however, is currently overtaking this rate.
- Sexually transmitted diseases have seen incredible rates of increase during the past decade. The causes can be traced to the explosion of

pornography and promiscuity; to the growth of prostitution, notably among 10- to 14-year-old girls; and especially to drug abuse involving shared needles and syringes. In 1997 the Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated that the market for illegal drugs was around \$7 billion, 600 times greater than in 1991.

- An estimated 20 million Russians—roughly one-seventh of the population—are alcoholics. Russia's annual death toll from alcohol poisoning alone may have risen to 35,000 in 2000, as compared with 300 in the United States in the late 1990s.
- Smoking is a habit among an estimated 70 percent of Russian males and one-third of females, and multinational tobacco companies aim to increase their sales in the country. The World Health Organization estimates that some 14 percent of all deaths in 1990 in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were traceable to smoking-related illnesses; it expects that number to rise to 22 percent by 2020.
- Last year President Putin abolished Russia's main environmental agency, the State Committee on Environment, and transferred its responsibilities to the Ministry of Natural Resources, which is in the business of developing the country's oil and mineral reserves.
- Seven hundred "major" accidents and spills (defined as those involving 25,000 barrels of oil or more) occur every year in Russia, spreading a variety of toxic chemicals. As Victor Ivanovich Danilov-Danilyan, the former head of the State Committee on Environment, notes, these losses are equivalent to about 25 Exxon Valdez spills per month!
- In Krasnoural'sk, a city in the Urals that produces car batteries, Russian and American researchers have found that 76.5 percent of the children are mentally retarded. Lead is the cause.
- Heart disease exacts a toll, in age-standardized death rates more than twice that in the United States and Western Europe. The death rate from such disease per 100,000 population is currently 736.1 in Russia, 267.7 in Belgium, 317.2 in the United Kingdom, and 307.2 in the United States. ♦

Edited excerpt reprinted with permission from The Wilson Quarterly 25 (Winter 2001): 15–21.

Editor's Note: The untold human suffering that Murray Feshbach's statistics represent should move Christians to recall Jesus' admonition that a cup of water given to the thirsty is a cup of water given to Him. "We must come to realize," writes Filipino InterVarsity leader Isabelo Magalit, "that unless our love is demonstrated in practical terms, our gospel of love will eventually sound hollow and unconvincing." Source: Paul R. Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg, A Global History of Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 453.

By 2050, I believe, Russia's population will shrink by one-third, from roughly 145 million today to about 100 million.

Murray Feshbach, former branch chief at the U.S. Bureau of the Census and research professor at Georgetown University, is a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, Washington, DC. He is the author most recently of *Ecological Disaster: Cleaning Up the Hidden Legacy of the Soviet Regime (1995)*.

Two Leading Christian Liberal Arts Institutions in the Former Soviet Union Celebrate 2001 Landmarks

Against formidable political, economic, and bureaucratic odds, both the Russian-American Christian University and Lithuanian Christian College have quickly proven their value by graduating students who can help transform their nations.

On 4 March 2001 **Lithuanian Christian College** (LCC), Klaipeda, Lithuania, commemorated its tenth anniversary. Guests included American ambassador to Lithuania John Tefft, Canadian ambassador Peter L. McKellar, and Lithuanian Ministry of Education official E. Kaspariuniene. Some 500 guests, including students and their parents, alumni, and church representatives, gathered for the occasion, which was reported on national TV and radio. LCC, accredited as a higher education institute by the Ministry of Science and Education of Lithuania, was established in 1991 on the initiative of the Lithuanian Christian Fund and the DeFehr Foundation of Canada. It has an enrollment of 827, with 343 bachelor of arts students, 184 enrolled in a Summer Language Institute, and 300 in a Community English Program. LCC, which offers majors in business administration, English, psychology/counseling, sociology/conflict mediation, and theology, has held classes at its new campus on the north side of Klaipeda since August 1999.

The Russian-American Christian University (RACU), a private, faith-based university that has been operating in Moscow for five years, held its first graduation exercise on 19 May 2001. Nineteen students received undergraduate degrees in business-economics or social work. All graduates are bilingual

(Russian and English), competent in computer technologies, and have been trained in democratic and free market values and institutions. RACU currently enrolls 110 fulltime undergraduate students, with an anticipated enrollment of 135 for 2001/02. Majors are offered in business/economics, social work, and English. Courses are taught in Russian and English by 40 full- and part-time Russian and American faculty. In spring 2002 the university will begin construction of a five-story, 54,000 square foot facility on land recently purchased on the north side of Moscow near Babushkinskaya Metro.

"As we look to the future, we are very excited about the potential of our graduates to help build a 'New Russia,'" says RACU founder and president, Dr. John Bernbaum. "RACU's mission is to equip young Russians to be future leaders of their nation and to be vital influences in the marketplace. As business people and social workers, they will provide leadership in their communities, in their local churches, and in their nation." ♦

Sources: Web sites for Lithuanian Christian College (www.lcbc.org) and the Russian-American Christian University (www.racu.org); correspondence from James Mininger (LCC) and Susan Clark (RACU); Elizabeth Wolfe, "Christian University Celebrates First Graduation," *Moscow Times*, 22 May 2001.

Russia and Lithuania on the Mend

Mark Elliott

Contrary to Jeffrey Tayler's recent doomsday account of post-Soviet demise ("Russia Is Finished," *Atlantic Monthly* 287 [May 2001], 35-52), and Murray Feshbach's equally bleak article in this issue, Russia today actually shows encouraging signs of hope and renewal—for those willing to search. Without denying the accuracy of Tayler's and Feshbach's evidence for Russia's current "Time of Troubles," at least Christians in the former Soviet Union still have cause for hope, and work and pray with conviction for their country's economic and moral renewal.

Two Christian liberal arts programs, one in Moscow, Russia, and one in Klaipeda, Lithuania, underscore what can be done with faith and determination to take concrete steps toward moral transformation in post-Soviet times. Against formidable political, economic,

and bureaucratic odds, both the Russian-American Christian University and Lithuanian Christian College have quickly proven their value by graduating students who can help transform their nations. Hard working, morally and spiritually grounded, and competent in computer skills and English, these graduates exude confidence and belie prophets of doom by insisting that their homelands are not finished. Snapshot portraits of two 2001 graduates of the Russian-American Christian University illustrate the case.

Anna Yakunina is the daughter of Fr. Gleb Yakunin, a well-known Soviet dissident who spent eight of Anna's childhood years in prison. An Orthodox priest, he was jailed for fighting for religious rights in Soviet Russia. Like her father, Anna recognizes the social ills that still bind her people—homelessness, drug addiction, abuse, and orphaned children. She sees herself making a difference with Russian orphans. With her degree in social work, her goal is to help Russia develop successful adoption programs that

will place more Russian children in responsible, loving homes.

Vladimir Sokolov is a 27-year-old business and economics graduate who has made extreme sacrifices to build a better life for himself and his family. The son of a military officer and a Russian Navy veteran, he has worked as a fitter for elevators, a Protestant pastor, and a Moscow street vendor just to feed his family. For years he dreamed of studying business at a university, but never imagined he would have such a chance. Then Vladimir learned of the Russian-American Christian University. Confident that this was his calling, but unable to make ends meet for his family and go to school, Vladimir's wife and daughter temporarily left Moscow to live with family while he completed his education. Now a RACU graduate, Vladimir is reunited with his family and works as an accountant for Sovintel, a Russian-American telecommunications company. He hopes someday to run his own business. ♦

Tarkovsky's *The Stalker*: A Christian Allegory Set in the "Evil Empire"

Gregory Halvorsen Schreck

Editor's Note: For Professor Schreck's previous article on "Andrei Tarkovsky: The Redemptive Vision of a Soviet Filmmaker" and two additional articles on spiritual insights in film as a witness to post-Soviet intellectuals, see East-West Church & Ministry Report 9 (Winter 2001), 8-13.

Andrei Tarkovsky's last film made in the Soviet Union, *The Stalker* (1977), illustrates the difficulty of properly interpreting his work, and rightly understood, underscores his Christian perception of life and struggle. It is a strange movie, starkly conceived with spare images and a slow pace that can make the viewing experience excruciating. Based on the science-fiction novella *A Roadside Picnic*, the script approved by censors included a clear indictment of the United States and, seemingly, of capitalism. Yet the finished film, with obvious religious overtones, and with a protagonist who looks like a political prisoner right out of the Gulag, infuriated Soviet authorities. *The Stalker* turned out to be a condemnation of materialism, both East and West, and ultimately caused Tarkovsky to leave the Soviet Union to finish his career in exile.

A Filmmaker Working Out His Faith

Tarkovsky said his films were "about one thing: the extreme manifestation of faith." *The Stalker* seems to be especially close to the artist's own life of faith. A close reading of Tarkovsky's diary during its production makes it obvious that the filmmaker was working out his own faith in fear and trembling. He wrote, "The artist seeks to destroy the stability by which society lives, for the sake of drawing closer to the ideal. Society seeks stability, the artist, infinity."

Near the center of the film, the Stalker recites the story from Luke's Gospel in which two disciples meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus. This occurs in Luke's narrative three days after Jesus died, on the day he rose from the dead. In the story, neither of the disciples recognizes Jesus when they see him, even though they had been intimate friends for years. In the film, when the Stalker finishes telling the Emmaus story, he asks, "Are you awake?" The question invites the characters and the viewer to reflect on the story. The viewer wonders *why* Jesus was unrecognized for so long by his disciples. Viewers may also wonder why they too miss Jesus repeatedly.

The Emmaus story suggests the limits of rational reasoning. The process of Christian faith may be aided to a point by patient searching and careful analysis. But ultimately, passion and true recognition are stirred by poetic ritual. The story demonstrates two ways of knowing, from the head and from the heart. Jesus chose to be known by his spiritual

substance, rather than by his physical appearance. Like Jesus, Tarkovsky uses the temporal journey of *The Stalker* to guide the viewer toward sacred symbolism that speaks beyond the spectacle and purely intellectual recognition.

The Stalker was made in Estonia in a ruined, dreary, uninhabited landscape littered with dilapidated military machinery and hauntingly overgrown structures leaking water at every turn. This setting is referred to as "The Zone." The characters, Writer (representing culture, the arts, emotions) and Professor (representing science, technology, rationalism) come here on a search from an unnamed city in a military industrial wasteland. It is said that in The Zone is a Room where all the desires of those who reach it are satisfied. It is carefully guarded by fences, watchtowers, and military police. Since The Zone is illegal, tricky, and unpredictable, travelers hire guides, called stalkers, to show them the way in and out. The Zone seems to be a region suffering from a nuclear accident, either military or industrial.

The Stalker is not a suspenseful adventure thriller. Packaged as science fiction, the film lacks the slick futuristic appearance one expects from that genre. In fact, it seems to be, rather, a contemporary allegory. This is undoubtedly one of the ambiguities in the film that infuriated Soviet film authorities. As the railroad car stops in The Zone, the film shifts from black and white to color. Three cruciform telephone poles fill the frame, symbolically marking the passage. The characters in *The Stalker* are approaching God with reverence and humility. To make this understood, the issue remains hidden. The timing of revelation is up to God. In this way God makes the most of the process. In the Emmaus story Jesus conceals his identity to make the most of his presence. The astonishment experienced by the disciples upon recognition deepens the meaning of their encounter. Tarkovsky mimics Jesus' method here. Instead of quick, efficient movement, the approach is poetic and ritualized. The process in the film, like the process in the Emmaus story, becomes as important as the result. The danger of Writer's direct approach is that discovery would be merely obvious. The outcome would be trite, even spectacular, but not vital. By contrast, the Stalker's humble approach allows God to transform characters (and viewers) through the journey.

Near the center of the film the camera focuses on a dark pool of water at the bottom of a well where the Stalker says a prayer:

May everything come true. May they believe.
May they laugh at their passions. For that

(continued on page 14)

Tarkovsky said his films were "about one thing: the extreme manifestation of faith."

The environmental disaster of The Zone reflects the shadow of an arrogant, blind faith in technology.

Tarkovsky's *The Stalker*: (cont. from page 13)

which they call passion is not really the energy of the soul, but merely friction between the soul and the outer world. But mostly may they have hope and may they become as helpless as children. For weakness is great and strength is worthless.

Faith Couched in Symbols

In the narrative water is symbolic of baptism, cleansing, birth, rebirth, and satisfied thirst. Tarkovsky photographs water and makes its substance present until it lives in a new way. The water alludes to the living water in the Gospel of John and is metaphorical on numerous levels. Under the water the viewer sees gold coins, a hypodermic needle, a rusted machine gun, and a painting of Christ by Jan Van Eyck from the Ghent altarpiece. The underwater objects symbolize the values of modern society: financial wealth, medicine (drugs, anesthesia), military strength (violence), and religion. The signs of worldly security come before the image Christ. However, the water has rendered them useless. The objects are out of circulation, worthless outside their human context. Moreover, the water breaks down even the machine gun's steel over time and dissolves its substance. All these things will pass away. Tarkovsky connects certainty and security manifest in a definitive, somewhat closed logic, with hardness, with materialism. That which becomes hard is unreceptive to love, to faith, to spiritual realities, to God. The contrasting metaphor to hardness is water, that which is most yielding, most malleable, "softest."

The soundtrack that overlays the water sequence provides more substance to its meaning. Spare electronic music plays as the voice of Monkey, the Stalker's daughter, recites a text from Revelation 8:7-11:

The first angel blew his trumpet; and there came hail and fire mingled with blood, and this was hurled upon the earth. A third of the earth was burnt, a third of the trees were burnt, all the green grass was burnt.

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The second angel blew his trumpet; and what looked like a great blazing mountain was hurled into the sea. A third of the sea was turned to blood, a third of the living creatures in it died, a third of the ships on it floundered.

The third angel blew his trumpet; and a great star shot from the sky, flaming like a torch; and it fell on a third of the rivers and springs. The name of the star was Wormwood; and a third of the water turned to wormwood, people in great numbers died of the water because it had been poisoned.

The Zone is, at best, the result of an environmental disaster no longer fit for human habitation. Its effects reach deep into the character of the future, mutating imminent possibilities for basic survival. This mutation is symbolized by the Stalker's daughter, who was born without the capacity to walk as a result of her father's exposure to The Zone. The text from Revelation, as used by Tarkovsky, hints at the possibility of nuclear disaster. Its coupling with the images of water and Wormwood suggests an unprecedented human perversion of divine metaphors: water has the possibility of losing its ability to nourish and cleanse because of human carelessness. The environmental disaster of The Zone reflects the shadow of an arrogant, blind faith in technology. For the first time the possibility exists for humanity to initiate an apocalypse preempting the natural, divine order.

The scene ends looking down at the water where a fish swims among three pieces of a bomb. Blood covers the surface and fills the frame. The blood and the fish, traditional symbols of Christ, define the room as a Christian space. The water of baptism covers the pieces of a nuclear bomb, offering redemption, even from the hopelessness that the weapon of destruction symbolizes. The Stalker's wife comes to greet him, comfort him, and finally take him home. Her unconditional love in spite of numerous disappointments takes on a divine character by the end of the film. Like the father in the Prodigal Son narrative, she comes to accept her husband back, forgiving his many failures. This ultimately reflects the character of a loving God and becomes the ultimate divine metaphor in the film. ♦

Letter to the Editor

I have been an East-West Church & Ministry Report subscriber for the last five years or so. It's an excellent periodical, indispensable for cutting edge ministry in this region of the world. I am also an administrator and faculty member of the Church Ministries Institute in Odessa. We have an upcoming board meeting for which I would like to ask permission to reprint several articles from the latest edition related to theological education. I

found these articles to be very helpful in crystallizing some of the major issues in theological education here and would really like to be able to dialogue with other board members about them, after they have had an opportunity to read them.

Scott Carter
Church Ministries Institute
Odessa, Ukraine

Editor's Note: Permission granted.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Sharyl Corrado, compiler

Absolutnie Fantastyczne—Wydawnictwa chrześcijańskie

<http://www.af.com.pl/wzmacniacz.html> (in Polish)

This pentecostal/charismatic publisher in Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poland, produces a magazine and distributes Bibles, Christian books, videos, and tracts. Titles can be searched and ordered online. Books available include titles by Józef Kajfosz of Krakow, Poland, as well as such authors as Watchman Nee, Derek Prince, Kenneth Hagin, Yonggi Cho, Andrew Murray, and others.



Christian Camping International/Russia

<http://www.ccirussia.org> (in Russian and English)

Seeking to train and equip Christian camping leaders, CCI/Russia publishes resource and training materials on Christian camping in Russian, Latvian, and Georgian, and offers seminars for Christian camp directors.



Doukhobor Homepage

<http://www.doukhobor-homepage.com/>

This private Canadian Web site compiles information on the Doukhobors (or Dukhobors), literally “spirit-wrestlers,” a religious sectarian movement active in Imperial Russia since the mid-1700s. Severely persecuted, they were given permission in 1897 to emigrate to Canada, where they remain active to this day. Provides information on Doukhobor history, culture, and religious beliefs, as well as a bibliography of published sources and a directory of Doukhobor organizations. A similar, although less detailed, Web site on the Molokan sectarian movement can be found at <http://gecko.gc.maricopa.edu/clubs/russian/molokan>.



In Your Pocket City Travel Guides to Central and Eastern Europe

<http://www.inyourpocket.com/>

This commercial site provides extremely helpful, free online travel guides to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and the city of Kaliningrad. Provides information on the history, currency, customs, calendar, and economy of each country, as well as guides to major cities, contact information for government officials, and information for travelers.



International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights

<http://www.ihf-hr.org/>

The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, a group of nongovernmental, not-for-profit organizations seeking to protect human rights in Europe, North America, and the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, gathers, analyzes, and disseminates information on human rights conditions in its regions. Recent studies on “Women’s Rights in the Former Soviet Union and Central and South-Eastern Europe,” “Torture and Inhuman

Treatment or Punishment,” “Religious Discrimination and Related Violations,” and annual regional reports, are available free of charge online as well as in print.



Rostovskaia Tserkov Khrista Spasitelia [Rostov Church of Christ the Savior]

<http://church.jeo.ru/> (in Russian)

The Web site of this Pentecostal Church in Rostov-na-Donu, Russia, provides a catalog of Russian-language Christian Internet resources, including links to online Bibles, Christian educational institutions, publishers and literature distributors, churches, Christian organizations, music, and the arts. Links appear to be updated regularly.



Russkoe Pravoslavie [Russian Orthodoxy]

<http://www.ortho-rus.ru/> (in Russian)

This official Web site of the Russian Orthodox Church is difficult to navigate but provides much extremely valuable information, such as contact information for church officials, monasteries, dioceses, and educational institutions; information on the saints, the history of the church, church news, and current events; and available print and Internet resources.



Yakov Krotov’s Library

<http://www.krotov.org> (in Russian and English)

Moscow church historian and journalist Yakov Krotov maintains a Web site that since 25 January 2001 has provided daily news about Christianity in Russia. By selecting “more” in the site’s introductory paragraph, one may access links to information on Russian church history, art, saints, Bible studies, and Russian current affairs. Krotov’s site also includes essays on Russian economics, politics, and church history.



Worldwide Faith News

<http://www.wfn.org> (in English, French, German, and Spanish)

This comprehensive database (1997–) offers official news releases and other documents, primarily from mainline Protestant and ecumenical sources. It indexes more than 14,000 documents, including numerous full texts from the United Methodist News Service, Lutheran World Information, Episcopal News Service, and more limited coverage from Adventist, Presbyterian, Church of the Brethren, and other sources. Its search engine offers the opportunity to focus on different areas of the world, such as the former Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. ◆

Sharyl Corrado is a doctoral student in Russian history at the University of Illinois, Urbana, IL.

Making Sense of Russian Church Statistics

Mark Elliott

Orthodox hierarchs may sometimes exaggerate the size of their flock in an attempt to augment their political influence. And Western and Russian Protestants may sometimes exaggerate the success of their church growth projects for the benefit of Western donors and grassroots constituencies.

Figures That Don't Compute

The size of the Christian community in Russia today eludes easy calculation. The new edition of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* edited by David Barrett, George Kurian, and Todd Johnson suggests that 76 million people in some sense identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, and that in Russia "Protestants," "Anglicans," "Evangelicals," and "Pentecostals/Charismatics" collectively number 8,668,300. (See chart on page 4.) But these figures, Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson themselves note, encompass large numbers of nominal believers who, in many cases, claim religious affiliation simply as a cultural or national marker.

This issue's articles by David Lewis, Hegumen Innokenty, and Kimmo Kääriäinen suggest as well that many Orthodox and Protestant estimates typically inflate the number of active Russian believers by a wide margin. Orthodox hierarchs may sometimes exaggerate the size of their flock in an attempt to augment their political influence. And Western and Russian Protestants may sometimes exaggerate the success of their church growth projects for the benefit of Western donors and grassroots constituencies.

The commonplace Orthodox presumption that *Russian* and *Orthodox* are synonyms hardly squares with ample public survey data documenting that Russians now live in a highly secularized society. At the same time, Perry Glanzer and David Lewis point out in this issue that dramatic evangelical reports of large numbers of new Russian converts in the 1990s do not compute with modest increases in evangelical church membership and attendance in the same period.

Second Thoughts on a Post-Soviet Evangelical Revival

In mid-May 2001 I sat in a pastry shop on Moscow's October Square with a longtime Russian friend who shared his opinion that in 1995 Moscow had some 300 Protestant churches, but today, only 100. If this startling decline is in fact the case, how much of the loss is due to 1) new restrictions in the 1997 law on religion that hamper Protestant life; 2) the growing anti-Western climate (with Protestants seen as a foreign element); 3) undisciplined new believers departing through the back doors of churches as others enter through the front; 4) Russian Protestant emigration to the West; 5) a possible fall off in recent years in Western mission efforts in the former Soviet Union; and 6) a percentage of converts from evangelical ministries making their way into Orthodox churches? And is modest Protestant growth in Moscow—and in Tatarstan according to David Lewis—a pattern across Russia, soaring church growth pronouncements notwithstanding? (See also Mark Elliott, "Hit and Run Evangelism Wrong Move in Former Communist World," *News Network International*, 28 February 1992.)

No Widespread Moral Transformation To Date

In June 2001 I had a phone conversation with a representative of a Western mission that has engaged in extensive evangelistic work in the former Soviet Union over the past decade. I was informed that many thousands of house churches were planted in the 1990s as a result of this ministry's outreach. The CEO of the mission, I was told, now reasons that as a result of the dramatic increase in the number of Russian believers since the fall of Communism, there must be various social indicators pointing toward a regeneration of Russian society. I had to play devil's advocate in this conversation in the interest of a realistic perspective on Russia today. It would appear that both the CEO's premise and his conclusion are wide of the mark. In this issue David Lewis contends that Protestants number one to three percent of the Russian population at most, and Russian society today is in the midst of a profound psychological and demographic crisis, with a wide array of social indicators sadly but clearly indicating the exact opposite of regeneration. In this issue Murray Feshbach's recitation of the causes of "Russia's Population Meltdown" unfortunately enumerates all manner of health problems exacerbated by millions of regrettable individual moral choices. As a consequence, Russia is experiencing alarming increases in rates of alcoholism, alcohol poisoning,

EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT, published quarterly by the Global Center, seeks to encourage Western Christian ministry in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that is effective, culturally relevant, and cooperative. It also serves as a forum for the exploration of a variety of issues relating to Christianity's presence in Europe's formerly Marxist states. Letters to the editor are welcomed. Subscription rates are \$44.95 per year (U.S. and Canada); \$54.95 (international); and \$19.95 (E-mail). **Reprint and photocopy policy:** 1) Quantity photocopies or reprints of up to three articles from a single issue may be distributed or reprinted with no royalty charge. 2) Written permission is to be secured for each distribution or reprinting. 3) The following statement is to be carried on each photocopied article reproduced and each article reprinted: **Reproduced (or Reprinted) with permission of EAST-WEST CHURCH & MINISTRY REPORT.**

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