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## Mission in Central and Eastern Europe

### A MISSIOLOGIST'S LOOK AT THE FUTURE: A MISSIOLOGICAL MANIFESTO FOR THE 21ST CENTURY – A CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

ANNE-MARIE KOOL

**Despite being born in the context of Europe, the academic discipline of missiology, including that of ecumenism and evangelism is currently “in a fragile state of existence.”<sup>1</sup>**

This article seeks to contribute to the ongoing conversation on the state of the church in mission in Europe with a special focus on Central and Eastern Europe reflecting on future perspectives and challenges in six key areas. These themes originate from an analysis of the images of Europe used in the *Atlas of Global Christianity*.<sup>2</sup> It is based on my personal experience of three decades living and working as a missionary and missiologist in the Eastern part of Europe, but keeping in touch with developments elsewhere in Europe and beyond.

My hope is that this manifesto will

stimulate critical and constructive discussion and result in “acquiring the posture of a missional church”<sup>3</sup> in our European contexts, and a true shift from Western to Global Christianity.

#### ***1. Impact of secular values on Church and mission***

In Central and Eastern Europe a process of ‘business-ization of mission organisations and churches can be observed, similar to worldwide trends, that are increasingly operating on the basis of business principles instead of theological ones.

Emphasis is more on output and results, value for money, quick results, success stories, quantity instead of quality, than on fruits growing in a hidden way, sacrifice and commitment and on long-term transformation powered by the incarnation in Jesus Christ. Churches

CONTINUED INSIDE

## EDITORIAL

### Eastern European Mission

This edition of Vista focuses on mission in Central and, especially, Eastern Europe.

The lead article by missiologist Anne-Marie Kool provides a Central and Eastern European perspective on the future of mission, in her thoughtful, six-part ‘Missiological Manifesto for the 21st Century.’

Daniel Trusiewicz, Mission Coordinator of the European Baptist Federation, reports back from a recent EBF conference in Georgia, with church planting news from Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Latvia.

The Hodoss Institute’s Jon Coody, Alexei Belov and Alexander Negrov share the four key findings of their research into leadership and evangelicals in the Former Soviet Union.

*Kolokol* is a Russian-language Christian newspaper, published in Belarus and circulated throughout the Former Soviet Union. Its deputy editor, Alena Kazlouskaya, explains how it is used to share Christian values and as an evangelistic tool.

This edition of Vista concludes with an article by Vladimir Ubeivolc which explores a new way of being a missional church, specifically in the Eastern European context. He utilises a “Church of / for tomorrow” intergenerational model and argues for the relevance of holistic mission, providing case studies from his own Moldovan experiences. Ubeivolc identifies some of the key obstacles facing missional churches in Eastern Europe – as well as reasons to be hopeful about their future.

**Chris Ducker**

have embraced secular values, eroding her credibility and calling leaders to repentance for conforming more to the world than acting as disciples of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

An additional challenge is the nationalistic fuelled neo-paganism in many countries, a missional encounter denied by some, but considered by others as “the greatest intellectual and practical task” facing the church.<sup>5</sup> The question is: do we live in a ‘Christian’, a secularized or a neo-pagan context? These are related to a huge missiological challenge how in our mission and evangelism to relate gospel and culture, seeking to be faithful to the gospel and relevant to the context at the same time. In Eastern Europe these are rather new conversations in the theological discourse.

As Lesslie Newbigin emphasized back in 1962 (sic!), our missionary methods are too much conformed to the world in which we live.<sup>6</sup> He states that as we believe in the great tradition of the Reformed Churches, the “*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*”, that “reformation is not a thing which is simply done once, but that ... the Church must in every generation be ready to bring its tradition afresh under the light of the Word of God”, missions cannot be an exception to that rule.<sup>7</sup> We need to look afresh “to our chart and compass and to ask how we now use the new winds and the new tides to carry out our sailing orders.”<sup>8</sup> It contains the “costly, but exciting task... of fundamental theological thinking, of Bible study, and of discerning the signs of the times.”<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Ecclesiology and mission

In European Christendom, the church has lived for 1500 years in a position of power. Her calling is now to let go of the pre-occupation with power and the confidence of being in control of our life, our environment, and our destiny, so characteristic of modern culture,<sup>10</sup> accepting a minority position, and to recover the redemptive power of the Gospel message as defined by the cross. Nothing less than a *metanoia* of the church is needed, a re-formation,<sup>11</sup> with an attitude of waiting on God in deep humility.

Across Eastern Europe, new expressions of church are being sought,

but the question is whether the established Christian churches in Europe are willing to surrender their resistance and fear of change, accepting to be transformed into a missional church to impact their own culture as well as serving the rest of the world. In this, non-Western churches have much to teach us.<sup>12</sup>

At a slightly broader level, letting go of power and control is closely linked to a process of de-Westernization of Christianity. After the changes in 1989 a period of euphoria in “East” “West” partnerships was followed by a period of disillusionment, and now by a search for a contextualized paradigm for mission in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup> This would imply a new take on partnerships between “South” and “North”, and between “East” and “West”, with a focus on mutual learning to “Walk humbly with the Lord”<sup>14</sup> and with the “North” or the “West” to be ready to fulfil - only - a role of facilitator, enabler, in truly equal partnerships, ready to learn from the South, or from Churches in Post-Communist Europe, on *their* terms! That would give birth to a framework for a real Global Christianity.

## 3. Issues of otherness and the reconciling role of Churches

One of the burning issues all over Europe is undoubtedly that of “otherness” and exclusion, especially in Eastern Europe with regard to the 10-12 million Roma (Gypsies), but also with regard to e.g. migrants and other minorities.

According to a recent study the stereotyped image of the impoverished gypsies that was created and repeated over the centuries defines the attitude of exclusion of millions of Europeans.<sup>15</sup> Stereotyped images also play an important role in the way migrants are depicted. Because of the strong tendencies of exclusion, in the society at large, the emergence of reconciling communities is needed. The role of pastors is to empower their local congregations to grow into open, welcoming, reconciling and missional communities, that embody and radiate the love of Christ to “indigenous”,

“strangers” and “minorities” alike. Focusing on the future(s) of Pentecostalism in Europe, Raymond Pfister calls for a “spirituality of reconciliation” to face the challenges brought about by the “damaging effects of cultural and religious clashes”. The work of the Holy Spirit in reconciliation as the reconciling Spirit enables such a reconciling community to come to existence, defining the ministry of the Spirit as a ministry of reconciliation. Pfister observes that God’s reconciling initiative in Christ extends to social reconciliation as well as individual.<sup>16</sup>

## 4. Myth and reality of migrants as “outsiders” reaching out to the “insiders” in “reverse mission”

In the Communist period “migrant” African students served as “underground” missionaries in the Eastern European countries, an unknown story that needs to be told! Many African Churches come to Europe in “reverse mission”, like one of the largest Churches in Eastern Europe founded in 1994 by an African, Sunday Adelaja pastor of Embassy of God in Kiev, Ukraine.<sup>17</sup> Some

seek to reach “insiders” as “outsiders”, some care only for their own ethnic group, some are bringing renewal, but reality is often more complex.

Migration experiences in Central and Eastern Europe differ significantly from those in Western Europe.<sup>18</sup> For many countries in the Central and Eastern part of Europe the influx of migrants is a rather new phenomenon, causing similar distancing attitudes based on negative stereotyped images as vis-à-vis the “others”, the Roma, with whom they have co-existed for centuries.<sup>19</sup> These attitudes are often fuelled by a lack of adequate information and by historical factors.

The challenge of promoting mutual learning between local and migrant churches starts with deconstructing the stereotyped images of the migrants. Efforts to give migrants a face, by creating informal safe spaces for story-telling, could serve as a first step. The role of theological education

**“promoting mutual learning between local and migrant churches starts with deconstructing stereotypes of migrants”**

in teaching (future) pastors to develop innovative non-formal and informal training programs and to create places for drinking “three cups of tea”<sup>20</sup> in their congregations in which both migrants and “indigenous” people participate, is crucial and can help overcoming the wide-spread fear for these “unknown others” that are endangering the future of our “Christian continent”, as the majority belong to a religion, Islam, that has been stereotyped strongly through IS.

In addition, both indigenous and migrant communities face the quest of becoming inclusive communities reaching out to each other and joining hands in meeting each other’s needs, and shaping the missional work of the church.<sup>21</sup> The question is how can this be lived out, in mutually strengthening each other, and learning from each other. What theological clarification processes are important in such a local partnership? Which prejudices need to be overcome? Where is repentance and reconciliation needed?

### 5. The Roma at Europe's periphery: an unknown "revival"?

The religious landscape of Europe is changing significantly, also with a surprising growth of independent churches. Many of Europe’s “outcasts”, the Roma, belong to the Charismatic-Pentecostal tradition. The Hungarian theologian Ferenc Szűcs stated more than a decade ago that involvement in reaching out to the Roma may have a renewal effect on the church, because it compels the church to reflect on issues of Gospel and Culture. It requires them to reflect on how to translate the Gospel in the mind-set of the Roma, whose culture is so far off from the Reformed Church. He anticipates that this would at least “stir up the dead-waters of our *Volkskirche*” (civil church), because it is the greatest mission challenge we face. If the churches do not involve themselves, this social bomb is going to go off right in our midst, and the consequences are unforeseeable.<sup>22</sup>

Collaborative, relevant research is needed to find key Roma local figures that have played and play a role in the growth of Roma Christianity. We need to get to know them, writing up their life story, and honour their lives. Giving Roma Christianity a face, making steps



Roma men worshipping at a conference in Hungary. Photograph by Ryan Portnoy for The Good Story

towards getting to know Roma Church history, will not only be beneficial in teaching the Roma Churches, but also to help the majority society to move from image to reality. In this process a key notion should be: Nothing about us without us.

### 6. Role of missiological education in revitalizing and transforming the Eastern European Churches and societies

The Churches of Eastern Europe are in great need for leaders, who are agents of transformation and innovation and well-equipped to deal with the burning issues of their contexts, like the churches’ response to otherness and exclusion, nationalism and ethnicity, revitalization of the churches into missional communities as well as communicating the Gospel in a relevant way to the de-churched (nominal) and un-churched people and radiating reconciliation in church and society. A renewed focus on developing urban transformational leaders, both pastors and professionals, in the Post-communist

context is also needed because of wide-spread corruption, a negative view of work as a shadow of the communist past, and a strong dichotomy between “Sunday” and “the other six days of the week”. It implies for the power of the Gospel to become manifest in urban settings, through the training of professionals to see their work through a theological lens, to connect Christian values to their workplace, as well as empowering and equipping pastors for church planting and church renewal with the urban realities of their large cities taken into consideration.

**“relatively little is known about dynamic and innovative initiatives in mission and evangelism in Eastern Europe”**

Jason Ferenczi’s vision for theological education in the FSU is relevant for the whole of Europe, to “develop leaders who can articulate a Christian worldview in the context of extremely pluralistic societies in a way that answers the deep spiritual questions of a highly educated population.”<sup>23</sup>

In a sense it is not so difficult to state that our missional curriculum must be theologically solid, spiritually sound, face current realities and be contextually relevant, with priority given to dealing with migration issues and ethnic minorities and that we need to stimulate research on mission and evangelism related issues. However, the Eastern European reality and paradox is that the current academic and church climate does not favour allowing space for developing such a curriculum and such research, despite the current challenges of Europe and European Christianity.

In some countries national accrediting agencies would not allow for such space, like in the Czech Republic. In other countries a Christendom paradigm persists, therefore the need for such changes are considered not necessary. In many countries there is a strong gap between mission theory and mission praxis. A dominating pragmatic bias and dominance of quantitative factors in church and mission do not favour the slow and often costly production of contextual textbooks on mission- and evangelism-related topics and the financing of the research needed for

it. Translating a book from English is often considered more efficient. That is also true in Central and Eastern Europe. It is much easier to raise funds for short-term projects that are easily quantifiable, for emergency aid or for church-planting projects, with a more or less clear output.

The result is that relatively little is known about dynamic and innovative initiatives in mission and evangelism taking place in the Eastern part of Europe. Those who have the experience, skills and qualifications to research and write up these mission



practices to draw out the lessons for the own context, correct the existing images of European Christianity and enrich European and global Christianity, are overloaded in their ministries, and do not have the quality time and no access to the relevant e-resources, that are so easily available in the university libraries in the West.

Therefore, in a situation with “fragile structures” for missiological education, we need to develop innovative structures which facilitate international and interdenominational learning communities and networks, for missiological education and missional formation for people from different backgrounds, including migrants, where different cultural and theological perspectives from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from around the world are brought together for both the student body and faculty. Safe spaces for this process of acquiring knowledge and facilitating learning processes to take place in Eastern Europe are needed. The Osijek Doctoral Colloquium, initiated last year, seeks to offer such a safe space.

My hope is that a practice of drinking “three cups of coffee” in one of the many coffee places around Central and Eastern Europe with asking questions in relation to the themes offered in this missiological manifesto, will stir up a process that will result in “acquiring the posture of a missional church”<sup>24</sup> in our own Central and Eastern European contexts, and in a true shift from Western to Global Christianity by taking away Western philosophy induced hindrances for the advance of the Gospel.

### Anne-Marie Kool

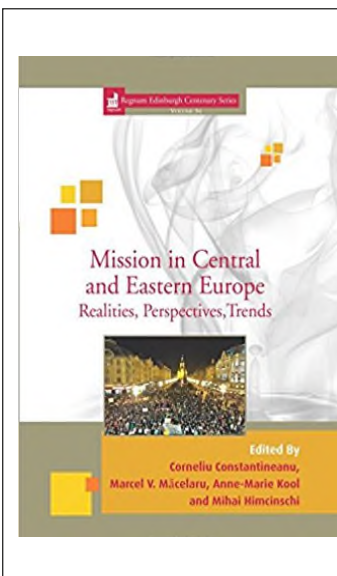
Anne-Marie Kool (Hungary/Croatia/Netherlands) is Professor of Missiology and Director of the Osijek Institute for Mission Studies under the responsibility of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia, with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe. She serves as Vice-President of the Central and Eastern European Association for Mission Studies. Since she arrived in Hungary 30 years ago, she has been affiliated with several institutions of higher education, teaching and researching on church and mission

related topics and supervising master and doctoral students in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. Her PhD researched the Hungarian Protestant foreign mission movement. More recently, she has been researching Roma Gypsy (Christian) communities in Central and Eastern Europe.

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2. Anne-Marie Kool, "Re-Visiting Mission in Europe through Contemporary Image-Formation: A Missiological Manifesto for the 21st Century," in *Fuller Theological Seminary: 50th Anniversary Celebration and 2015 Missiology Lectures* (Pasadena, CA: 2015)
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This article is an abbreviated and modified version of Anne-Marie Kool's chapter "A Missiologist's Look at the Future: A Missiological Manifesto for the 21st Century" in *Mission in Central and Eastern Europe: Realities, Perspectives, Trends*, edited by Corneliu Constantineanu, Mihai Himcinschi, Anne-Marie Kool and Marcel Măcelaru, Oxford: Regnum, 2016.

This volume is part of the Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series and brings together significant contributions from over thirty theologians, missiologists and practitioners from Central and Eastern Europe. It explores the complex missiological thinking and praxis of CEE, highlights concrete missiological endeavours and points to the challenges and opportunities for mission in this part of the world.

The purpose of the European Baptist Federation “is to strengthen and draw together Baptists in Europe and the Middle East on the basis of their Christian witness and distinctive convictions, to encourage and inspire them in faith and fellowship and shared responsibility, and to seek in all its endeavours to fulfil the will of Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour.” It stretches from Portugal to Eastern Russia, and includes Baptists in Eurasia and the Middle and Near East.

Fulfilling its purpose, a recent EBF Mission Partnership conference in Georgia sought to ‘encourage, and inspire in ministry’ a group of indigenous church planters from Eastern Europe. The following are highlights of some of their work around the region.

#### Latvia

Kaspars Sterns, the mission director in the Baptist Union of Latvia talked about the new vision being implemented in this union which aims at the planting of gospel centred, multipliable and missional churches. While discipleship should result in church planting and everyone can be involved in this work, not everyone can be a church planter. They have therefore developed an assessment tool to help identify the right person to church plant.

The tool covers several areas: the character and calling from God that is confirmed by other people (in case of a marriage both spouses must agree), knowledge and competence in church planting, vision casting (good vision attracts people) and team building (equipping leaders), emotional intelligence (how to deal with a crisis) and overcoming obstacles.

The training for church planting in Latvia is provided through M4 Learning Communities, which are already running in several countries of Europe:

**“church planters... need to be more creative and apply different methods of outreach than they used in the past”**



Mission conference organized by EBF and partners, in Tbilisi, Georgia. The conference attracted indigenous church planters from Eastern Europe, with the aims of training, sharing experiences and fellowship

Norway, Latvia, Estonia, Czech Rep and Romania and is currently being introduced to Poland and Russia.

Oskars works in Oleine, a dormitory town for Riga. Oskars concentrates on building relationships with people and leads seminars for married couples as well as children’s summer camps. The group organizes a service once a month in a culture house and a Bible study twice a month in private homes. They also do regular evenings for men and occasionally the family weekends.

Nauris works in Roja on the Latvian coast. There are 6 members of the mission team and the vision is to establish a Baptist congregation by 2020.

The first steps in church planting work have been: research, building relationships and influencing locals. The research has shown that a new church is needed and the team started to build relationships with local people through running a meat shop and participating in the town festivals. They influence others mainly by Christian values: family, mission, service etc. The Latvian church planters reach out mainly to the secularized people.

#### Armenia

Hagop is an Armenian Kurd from Aleppo, Syria who has fled from the war

and now lives in Yerevan. In Aleppo he led a Christian ministry and many people became Christians. But the war badly affected this work and people began emigrating to Armenia, Lebanon or Western Europe. Now the borders are closed and he is leading a similar ministry among Syrian migrants in Yerevan.

Tengiz is a Yezidi that works with 13 Yezidi families in his home but the needs are much greater as there are at least 60 thousand Yezidi people living in Armenia.

Vasily has been leading a church plant for the past 2 years. The vision to start a new congregation has been born in the traditional Baptist Church “Hope” which understands the need to multiply congregations as the Baptists in Western Belarus are scarce. There are at least 50 people involved in this work, most of them young and full of positive spiritual energy.

#### Georgia

Giorgi was appointed 2 years ago to lead a church plant with 5 people. They have met regularly in a private house and the group has grown to 25 people. Now they pray for even bigger revival.

Eduard is an Ossetian refugee who leads inductive Bible studies among local people – he reports that the group has been significantly increasing.

## Moldova

Genadie from Moldova, after completing his theological education in Chişinău, was sent to a small town of Bardar and began inviting people to get involved in the inductive Bible studies. Every summer he also organizes sport camps with youth and children. Thanks to this ministry during the last 4 years the local people have started to respect the Baptists. At least 100 people are involved in sport activities and weekly Bible studies and 3 new groups have been started in neighbouring villages.

## Ukraine

Pavlo works in a district of Kiev. There are great social needs and the mission

team developed a vision to reach out to youth. Many local schools are open for Christian activities among the young people. The newest initiative is a youth club with some sport activities that draw over 50 teenagers every Friday. This new planted congregation has 34 members.

Sasha is planting a new fellowship in Ternopil, western Ukraine. The vision is to make disciples of Christ among students. Three families comprise the team and are accountable to each other as they meet weekly. The team can see that God is opening new doors, especially to work with youth and children. They organised a Bible day in a local school and a team member who is

a soccer trainer organised floorball games for teenagers. They also do some social ministry.

It is clear that the initial openness of people for the gospel has been decreasing in the respective countries during the last decade. The church planters may be still prosperous in their work but need to be more creative and apply different methods of outreach than they used in the past.

**Daniel Trusiewicz,  
Mission Coordinator,  
European Baptist Federation**

## EVANGELICALS AND THE PHENOMENON OF LEADERSHIP IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

ALEXEI BELOV, JON COODY & ALEXANDER NEGROV

**Leadership theory and practice is essential to effective Christian mission, yet as a multi-faceted, culturally conditioned phenomenon, it is often underestimated and lacking in critical examination. Indeed, greater cultural understanding can be crucial for effective cross-cultural leadership, as secular theorists such as Geert Hofstede have shown.**

However, research among Christian communities is often lacking. To help meet this need, Hodos Institute and the Graduate School of Leadership (GSL) at St. Petersburg Christian University carried out extensive research in 2015-16 among evangelical youth (ages 13-29) and youth leaders across 13 countries of Eurasia (former Soviet Union - FSU). The results of this study can be helpful for mission leaders and missionaries in the FSU, as well as in Eastern Europe.

In the first phase of the project, 245 interviews were conducted with youth leaders. Respondents represented 13 countries of Eurasia, including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and others. Following the interview phase, an

online questionnaire was developed based upon the information collected in interviews. Nearly 2,500 evangelical believers from across the FSU completed the questionnaire, and in total, nearly 3,000 people contributed their thoughts through various means. In the final stage, around 150 youth participated in focus groups in Central Asia, and 30 experienced youth leaders participated in a consultation in St. Petersburg, all for the purpose of

**“Leadership theory and practice in mission is often underestimated and lacking in critical examination”**

refining results and gaining further feedback. Material from this project and resulting practical recommendations for leadership formation among evangelicals in Eurasia is presented in detail in four books published in Russian. These books (see *right*) are also available in PDF format, and can be downloaded at <http://www.hodosinstitute.com/publications>.

What emerged from the research were the following primary observations:

### **I. Leadership is in the process of redefinition**

When asked the open-ended question – What is leadership? – a majority of respondents answered beginning with: “It is a person whom others follow, or a person who influences others.” The





emphasis on a single figure as leader was evident across the research sample, and overall there was a lack of attention to notions such as followership and collaborative leadership. Also notable was a strong emphasis on positional leadership, which leads younger believers to believe that they have no opportunity to exercise leadership without a position of authority.

Language also plays an important role in the redefining of leadership. Often indigenous terms have their own cultural baggage, and borrowing the English term can also be problematic. One youth leader from Kyrgyzstan commented that in the Kyrgyz language, there is no equivalent word to 'leadership.' In Russian, the English loan word has been widely adopted (*liderstvo*), but as in other Eurasian countries, the term often carries a pejorative meaning, conjuring thoughts of autocracy, pride and abuse of power. Some older church leaders reject the term 'leader,' saying that they need servants, not leaders.

## 2. Mentoring and leadership formation are needed and desired among young Christians throughout Eurasia

Most evangelical Christians in Eurasia acknowledge that mentoring is important, but they also note the deficit of established and wise mentoring practices in evangelical communities. Mentoring is often reduced to or substituted with "instruction," often long lectures or sermons. The younger generation of evangelicals is looking for mentoring that is not reduced to prohibitions, restrictions or dictates from older leaders, but rather mentoring through good examples, relationships of trust, and teamwork. They want to see principles and values lived out in authentic relationships of collaboration.

Respondents also noted that young people are often seen as simply implementers. One youth leader in the study confessed, "We are not forming [young leaders], we use them...and this is a tragedy!" Young people shared that

often they hear appeals to serve, minister, take responsibility, etc., yet often the necessary conditions are not in place for their participation.

## 3. The dramatic socio-political changes following the breakup of the Soviet Union have led to significant generational differences in regards to understandings of leadership

Among respondents the younger generation sees leadership more horizontally, while the older generation is still rooted in a vertical mindset. Paradoxically, however, while young people desire more teamwork and collaboration, they still want a visible, strong leader.

**"Cross-cultural leadership is a school from which you never graduate"**

Misunderstanding between generations is also prevalent. For example, while the majority of older generation claimed that young people view leadership as popularity (charisma), less than 1% of younger respondents confirmed this stereotype.

## 4. Leadership and mission are often disassociated in both theory and practice

The majority of respondents indicated that good Christian leadership practice is needed both inside and outside the church, but they indicated that church-based leadership training is mostly concentrated upon ministry within the church. At the root of this issue is a truncated definition of mission. For example, while young people spend the majority of their time at studies or work,

they most often demonstrate leadership only in the church context. Their work or study context is not seen as an arena for Christian leadership, other than simply for evangelism.

For the betterment of mission collaboration and partnership in Eurasia, it is important to note that leadership formation programs, particularly those funded by Western partners, often lack critical evaluation and analysis. Respondents reported that events and resources are funded without sufficient thought given to assessment of effectiveness or appropriateness.

We reiterate that cross-cultural understanding of the phenomenon of leadership is crucial in Christian mission, and further studies are needed, not only in Eurasia. Cultures are never static, and the need for learning is ongoing. As one mission leader has said, "Cross-cultural leadership is a school from which you never graduate."<sup>1</sup> We hope that the results of this study will provide missionaries and leaders with much-needed understanding of the Eurasian context. Moreover, we hope that it will stimulate further study and critical thinking among those involved in missions in Eurasia and Eastern Europe.

**Alexei Belov, Jon Coody and Alexander Negrov**

For more information on the Hodos Institute, visit [www.hodosinstitute.com](http://www.hodosinstitute.com) or email [anegrov@hodosinstitute.com](mailto:anegrov@hodosinstitute.com)

### Endnote

1. Joshua Bogunjoko, as quoted by James E. Plueddemann in *Leading Across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church*, (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 31.



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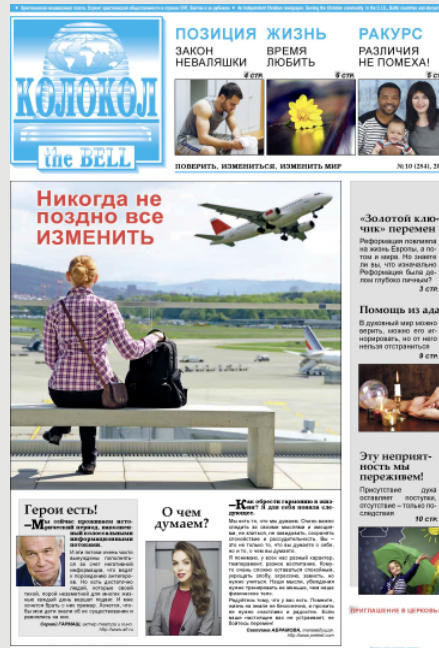
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Established in 1993 in Belarus, the Russian-language newspaper *Kolokol* (*The Bell*) has a vision to reach beyond the church with the Good News of Christ, in particular places where Christians may not be allowed to freely share the Gospel.

The paper aims to bring Christian values to modern society through telling the truth about God, Christianity and the Christian life. It 'answers thorny questions and tells real stories' as well as explaining 'biblical principles and reasoning' and represents 'evangelists, Bible schools and Christian companions for people.'

About 4000 copies of *Kolokol* are circulated each edition, including to people in hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centres for people with alcohol and drug addictions, and prisons. Readers' responses have come not just from Russia and Belarus but also from Ukraine, Lithuania, Belgium, France and as far away as the USA and Japan.

Belarus holds the 2nd place in Europe in the number of prisoners per capita (306 prisoners for every 100 000 people). Russia ranks 1st (447 prisoners per 100 000 people). After the adoption of "Yarovaya law", it has been more difficult for evangelists to visit Russian prisons. But there is no problem with sending a Christian



Recent front page of *Kolokol* ('The Bell')

newspaper to the prisoners! Testimonies on the website show the difference hearing the Gospel through *Kolokol* makes to people's lives:

*"I am writing to you from the colony of a special regime, where I serve a sentence for my sins and grave crimes. But there is no bond for the Word of God, and here Christ saves the lost souls of man and brings them back to a new life. I am 37 years old, and unfortunately, most of my life I spent in hostility with God. In my heart there was nothing but a chilling absolute emptiness, which, however hard I tried to fill out the wild life, I could not do it. Now I*

*am with the Lord for 5 years. And all this time He consoled, strengthened, opened my eyes to my life and helped me to reform. But I just do not have enough communication with wise, hard faith Christians. Reading your newspaper, I like a church in the sermon, where there is also the Word of God, and communication with brothers and sisters."*

The paper reaches many villages in Belarus and Russia where there is little access to the internet – but is also used to influence key people within cities. Churches are encouraged to sign up strategic leaders in business and banking, education and the municipality.

Church members are also encouraged to use *Kolokol* in personal evangelism or special events such as family festivals. A newspaper has longevity and as such, *Kolokol* tells people about God – even after the event. But more importantly, it is used to bring hope and salvation:

*"You give to people, and some ask 'give me more, let my friend read.' Our ministers visit the tuberculosis hospital. The wards are absolutely hopeless, from where the living are not discharged. There they just snatched the newspaper's like hot cakes. After all, they have no one left, and no hope. Only Jesus remains."*

**Alena Kazlouskaya**  
Deputy Editor, *Kolokol*

Find out more at <http://kolokol.net>



*Kolokol* newspaper's circulation includes nursing homes (above left) and prisons (above right)



**‘How to be a church and how to do mission?’ These are the most difficult questions which pastors, theologians and practitioners have tried to resolve over the centuries. In Soviet-era Eastern Europe<sup>1</sup> Evangelical churches did not discuss mission, yet the topic of mission now features at many conferences across post-Soviet Eastern Europe.**

This article combines missiological reflection with a case study of Light to the World church (LTTW) and Beginning of Life (BoL) NGO.

### The Church of and for tomorrow

Very often, when we talk about Church, we ground our discussion in Scripture, church history, doctrinal confessions, or possibly in classical eschatological terms.<sup>2</sup> I acknowledge the importance of biblical studies, yet at the same time, I think we have a serious gap between the Bible, church history, and eternity. Practically, we struggle to think and act in the perspective of the coming future, or tomorrow.

Of course, there are many theologians and leaders who deal with ‘tomorrow’ as a reality, but most of them are not from Eastern Europe. One issue for Eastern European churches is the division between theological discussions and the Church’s practice. Theology and mission are not discussed together. I think one of the reasons is that our theologians are not answering society’s contemporary questions but are answering challenges from the past.

So, what is the church of, or for, tomorrow? We need to consider the local church, not only from a historical perspective, but also from its role in serving contemporary society with a focus on the future. The church cannot withdraw from active life, justifying its absence because of its tradition or quietist theology, and still remain an important player in society. At the same time, simply echoing the world’s methods of combating problems is not a satisfactory way of undertaking mission.

**Our theologians are not answering society’s contemporary questions but are answering challenges from the past**



### The church of tomorrow

The church of tomorrow is involved in being a church and shaping theology from the perspective of the future. The Church uses its spiritual gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and prophecy for understanding its identity in contemporary life from the perspective of tomorrow. The Church also uses natural gifts of analytical thinking to predict impending issues and problems. ‘Missional church is, on a deep level, about theological imagination – a different way to see and experience life in the church and the world.’<sup>3</sup>

It is impossible to shape its identity without a missional worldview. The *missio Dei* is essential to such a church. When discussing the *missio Dei*, a trinitarian foundation is necessary, but, more than this, *shalom* becomes the final goal for God’s mission<sup>4</sup> and an intermediate goal for every Church. *Shalom* should result during and from the Church’s mission (John 14:27). In this sense *shalom* becomes both a goal and a method. ‘*Shalom* suggests a restoration of relationship between all peoples, as well as reconciliation between humanity and God. It also suggests the restoration of the earth and our relationship to the land.’<sup>5</sup>

Trinitarian foundations and *shalom* frame a holistic approach to mission. The church of tomorrow still locates itself in the Bible and the Christian

tradition. At the same time, in addressing contemporary issues, the most important question should be not: ‘What did our precursors teach on this issue?’ but ‘How it will affect our successors?’ The church of tomorrow should be able to foresee coming problems in the Church, as well as in society at large.

### The church for tomorrow

The church for tomorrow is the practical response to the theological and prophetic reflections arising out of the discussion above. Because its essence and theology are shaped together with the coming generation, young people must be active players in the conversation. ‘A Community theology invites listening and becomes open to being surprised by God’s purposes rather than our good intentions.’<sup>6</sup> ‘Leaders are responsible not for monopolizing theological discourse in the congregation but for leading and equipping people in the practice of theological imagination for interpreting the Word and making sense of their daily lives in the world.’<sup>7</sup>

New generations are both the object and subject of mission. When we think about the role of young people, it does not mean that older generations should be neglected. It means that they should not dominate any more. The church for tomorrow creates an environment for peaceful cooperation for different generations, open to their values, preferences and methods.

In the church for tomorrow, all



Porțile Orașului (The Gates of the City), Chișinău

generations are equal in theological dialogue and mission. Therefore, the church for tomorrow unites all generations in its reflections, shaping of theology, and its mission.

## 2. Missional community in Eastern Europe

What does it mean to be 'missional' in Eastern Europe? Eastern European evangelical churches are known by their activism in evangelism, church planting, and their Bible schools with a variety of theological programmes. The missional church is currently only discussed in a small number of theological circles. Consequently the idea of the missional church faces considerable resistance from denominational leaders, local pastors, as well as theologians.

I understand missional church to be a local congregation of believers, open to the triune God, who realize their mission through the Holy Spirit, and who have covenanted among themselves. Missional church assumes the *missio Dei*, that its mission is holistic, and that this involves prophetic

presence, witness/evangelism, and social action.<sup>8</sup> 'A missional church is formed by the Spirit of God at work in the ordinary people of God in a local context.'<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, it is very important to rethink the obstacles and the prospects for missional communities in Eastern Europe.

### Obstacles for missional churches in Eastern Europe

#### *The Mennonites' influence*

It is hard to overestimate the role of Mennonites in spreading the Gospel in southern Ukraine and Moldova. Their mission was through 'witness', where words were secondary to a Gospel-shaped lifestyle. As Shenk reminds us: "Mennonites became known as 'the quiet in the land'."<sup>10</sup> German peasants and artisans, whose life was attractive for Moldovans, established the first non-Orthodox communities in Moldova. From the very beginning,

**In Eastern Europe, missional church is currently only discussed in a small number of theological circles... and faces considerable resistance**

Moldovans were not evangelized verbally; rather, the Gospel was shown to them. A hundred years have passed since then, but this quietist approach is still passed down from generation to generation.

#### *Historical background*

Christians in the Soviet Union suffered from persecution and restrictions. During the Soviet era, Christians were excluded from an active societal life. Evangelism and public worship were prohibited. Churches were silenced and obligated to listen to the 'state's prophetic voice' directed at them. All social action was forbidden because the Soviet state argued that there were no poor people under socialism.

#### *Inertia of Eastern Europe's people*

Moldova and Ukraine emerged over several centuries of imperial struggle between the Russian, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Polish-Lithuanian, Prussian, and Soviet empires. Even

today we are impacted by the geopolitics of the USA, EU and Russia. For generations, people in Eastern European countries could not make their own decisions, because their freedom was limited and this created a passive attitude to any kind of initiative. 'Communism never found a way to motivate people to work hard. It appears that people are lazy... by default...'<sup>11</sup>

Christians tend to share this mentality. They wonder why traditional forms of mission, used for many years, should be changed for the future. People are generally very active when problems touch their family, but when they are

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involved in bigger processes, they believe that somebody from outside should come and resolve their problems.

#### *Competing theologies and missiologies from the West*

When the Soviet Union collapsed, western mission agencies and denominations swarmed into Eastern Europe. Some of them offered their services; some came with their vision, theology and financial support. Most evangelicals were open to, but naïve, in relations with their western brothers.<sup>12</sup> They were glad to have any kind of theological school, church building, or conference. Many western organizations did not coordinate their activities and competitive attitudes were widespread. In the 21st century, the situation has changed because local leaders, more aware of the alternative approaches, have become more selective. In situations where people in churches faced real poverty, and where churches were interested in raising money for different projects, it was very hard to be objective when determining motives. Money from the West frequently dictated vision.

A missional approach is different in its methodology of discipleship. No western theological school with a missional vision, has yet arrived in Eastern Europe with professors, programme, vision and money. There are many traditional theological schools which arrive with all manner of other resources and consequently it is very hard for church leaders to take the risk of adopting a missional approach.

#### **Prospects for missional churches in Eastern Europe**

The hope for missional communities in Eastern Europe rests on solid foundations.

#### *Availability of numerous active leaders*

Many pastors and leaders are dissatisfied with the current situation and understand the need for change. They are already active in different areas of society and church. Not all of them have profound theological foundations, but

they are open and enthusiastic. Speaking at Moldovan and Ukrainian conferences, I meet many leaders who long for access to missional resources in their Slavic languages.

#### *Emerging, local theologies of mission*

There have been several attempts by local missiologists and practitioners of holistic mission to provide resources.

These include:

*Mission in the Former Soviet Union* (edited by Peter Penner, 2005); *Forum 20, twenty years of religious freedom and active mission: Results, problems, perspectives of Evangelical churches in post-Soviet society* (Rahuba et al, 2011, in Russian); *Evangelical mission in the Eastern European Orthodox contexts: Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine* (edited by Malancea and Ubeivolc, 2013). More recent titles include; *New Horizons of Mission* (edited by Penner, in Russian) and *Grey Areas of Evangelical Ecclesiology* (Ubeivolc, in Russian/Romanian). All of them demonstrate a growing interest in the theological rethinking of mission from a trinitarian, missional point of view.

#### *Networking*

Contact with international missional communities and missiologists helps to shape local and regional theologies of mission. Today Eastern Europe has become a region with open doors. Ukrainian, Moldovan and Romanian laws ensure the religious freedoms that permit missional churches to be established.

### **3. A case study from Chişinău**

There is a risk of criticizing existing forms of the Church without suggesting alternative models. What would these look like in Moldova? This article outlines several options. Of course, these examples are not perfect, but they demonstrate that missiological innovation can transform missional practice and local congregations.

*Light to the World* church was planted in 1994 by Evangelical-Baptists following an evangelistic crusade organized by the Billy Graham Association. In the 1990s, the church was active in evangelism and discipleship. From 2003 the church's mission began to develop: it became more contextual, flexible, and open to holistic and missional approaches. From 2012, the church adopted a holistic approach to mission, and together with *Beginning of Life* formed a 'Church of / for tomorrow' model. There are four different clusters in church; each of them leads services in their own style and form. Every Sunday there are around 300 people attending the different clusters.

*Beginning of Life* was established in 2000 alongside *LTTW* church as a nongovernmental organization with a goal to fulfil God's mission in areas where doors were closed to evangelical churches. BoL runs three programmes: 1) 'Place of Change' for teenagers, a holistic outreach programme where Christian teenagers play one of the most important roles. 2) 'Way to Success' aims to prepare high school students for independent



Moldovan capital Chişinău (Kishinev)

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

life, teaching life skills, critical thinking, professional orientation and character development from a Christian perspective. 3) 'Metamorphosis' serves people who have suffered from social injustice. This programme includes an early learning centre for mothers and kids; a humanitarian aid centre; a rehabilitation centre for victims of human trafficking and exploitation; a prevention centre for social orphans; and some small businesses with a goal to provide jobs for the most vulnerable women.

My research interviews with key people from the NGO helped me to identify aspects of the 'Church of / for tomorrow' model:

- Equality of different levels of involvement into life of whole community / society as well as in the lives of certain individuals.
- Consistency – when people or churches face different problems, they see only the upper part of the iceberg, but missional community takes responsibility for identifying the deeper roots of a problem and finds ways to resolve it.
- Flexibility – ability to change programmes as necessary and leave one's comfort zone.
- Leadership adequacy – leaders are selected and trained according to their gifts and readiness, which leads to lack of autocracy. Different leaders are responsible for decisions in their area.
- Freedom in choosing forms for each project and cluster.
- Readiness to serve people outside the church, as well inside.
- Ability to see children and youth as equal parts of the church and helping them develop their potential.

Thinking about the development of the Church of / for tomorrow, we need to bear in mind that the Church of / for tomorrow involves clusters working together because shared vision and relationships unite them. McNeal, describing Mike Breen's English missional community, underlines the fact that 'people began to prefer larger gatherings for mission even more than their small group experiences and started to hang out more in the clusters. Identity began forming around these mid-sized groups,... a sort of extended family. The communities began reproducing.'<sup>13</sup>

There are risks, which leaders should recognise: every cluster can easily become an independent church; competition between clusters can become a problem; different theologies can undermine unity.

At the same time, there are benefits, which are unlikely to be seen in other church models in Eastern Europe: an acceptance of people from different sub-cultures and language groups; involvement in ministry of larger numbers of church members; transformation in society, changes in individual lives, and ongoing church development.

It is too early to say that this model of church and mission is the best. However, it is clear that it has sound theological foundations, genuine relevance, and a promising future.

**Vladimir Ubeivolc**

Dr Vladimir Ubeivolc is director and co-founder of Beginning of Life NGO in Moldova. For many years he taught Ethics and Missiology in universities in Moldova and Russia, leading and speaking in conferences in former Soviet bloc countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. He holds a PhD in Contextual Missiology and is the author of numerous articles on holistic mission, human trafficking and social justice.

## Endnotes

1. By "Eastern Europe" I have first in mind contemporary geopolitical divisions. Such countries as Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus are on the radar of my research. At the same time Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia and Armenia have a lot in common with the first group. Some conclusions could also include Russia.
2. E. Voegelin, 'Representation and truth' in *The collective works of Eric Voegelin*, v.5 (University of Missouri, 1952), 176.
3. C. Van Gelder & D. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 147.
4. J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 212.
5. M. Frost, *The Road to Missional* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 104.
6. A. Roxburgh & M.S. Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 92-93.
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8. V. Ubeivolc, 'Mission of Evangelical churches in Moldova. End of the twentieth to the first decade of the twenty-first century' in Malancea M. & Ubeivolc V. (eds.) *Evangelical Mission in the Eastern European Orthodox Contexts* (Chişinău: Universitatea Divitia Gratiae, 2013), 130-137.
9. *Introducing the Missional Church*, 122.
10. W. Shenk, 'Forging Theology of Mission from an Anabaptist Perspective', in *Mission Insight* 13 (2000).
11. *The Curtain Rises: Oral Histories of the Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2004), 204.
12. W. Sawatsky gives an excellent description what happened in the 1990s in his article 'Return of mission and evangelization in the CIS (1980s – present)' in Sawatsky W. & Penner P. (eds.) *Mission in the Former Soviet Union* (Neufeld, 2005), 94-119.
13. *Missional Communities: The rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (Jossey-Bass, 2011), 40.

**Vista**

**Editorial Team: Darrell Jackson,  
Jim Memory, Jo Appleton  
& Chris Ducker**

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Redcliffe College  
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