

## Research Panorama

### The Church in a postmodern world: Urban missions in the post-soviet context

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According to the analysis of religious beliefs, sociology and statistics during the last decade, **evangelical churches within the former Soviet Union have entered a stage of stagnation and crises.** The growth of churches has ceased and in some denominations the number of believers is slowly reducing, the rate of church planting has slowed, and the number of new students enrolled in theological institutions has diminished. Against this backdrop, the major evangelical denominations have had a tendency in attempting to counter the trend by establishing

authoritarian administrative models in order to save their denomination from collapse. Evangelical leaders have made no serious effort to initiate honest and self-critical reflection of the causes in the decline of missions outreach (especially in relation to the urban context) in the former Soviet Union. **Without a thorough theological and philosophical analysis of the current situation, it is difficult to begin developing effective outreach, plant relevant churches, and train pastors for those churches.**

Over the past 15 years, I have been directly involved in church ministry as youth and assisting pastor, and for the last 14 years in educational ministry as a teacher, dean and finally president of the Lviv Theological Seminary. Having dealt with dozens of pastors and hundreds of students, observing the successes and failures of graduates, and being myself on a personal search for an effective model for church outreach, I have come to the understanding that **there is an urgent need for a broad, contextual, interdisciplinary study of the religious situation in the post-soviet world.** This study should encompass theological, religious, philosophical, cultural, sociological, and psychological aspects. An integral part of such an undertaking would be to conduct a comparative analysis of religious processes in Europe and North America and examining the idea of a missional church that is relevant to globalized, post-modern, multi-faith or no-faith contexts. Theological and sociological challenges in developing the concept of a missional church in the post-soviet world would include a move from a "sending church" to involvement in the Missio Dei, from a consumer oriented approach to emphasis on discipleship, from the stress on individualism to the value of community, from escapism to incarnational presence.

Over the past two years, I have been actively working on this project. In particular studying the experiences of developing minis-

tries in North America and Western Europe. For example, the Emerging church and Seeker-sensitive movements. I have also begun to work on a book entitled "Christianity in the postmodern age: Eastern and Western contexts." Currently, this book is 40% to 50% complete. I have also had some first-hand experiences with new ministry models and have participated in the Euro-summit of Next Level International, a ministry which enthusiastically searches for effective theological and missiological concepts and practices for present-day Europe.

**The project is intended primarily to help those who are interested in renewing theological approaches and practical ways of becoming a missional church in postmodern society.** Therefore, it is expected that the greatest benefits will be to those who already exist as urban churches and groups interested in planting new urban Christian communities.

#### Project objectives:

- **To conduct** a theological, philosophical and cultural **analysis** of the major religious trends in post-Soviet society; its expectations, aspirations, and values
- **To explore the reasons** for the decline of church growth over the past five to seven years and to rethink and give a new definition for what it means for the church to interact with culture. I.e., what is the "Christian" approach to science, art, etc.
- **To develop a strategy** for the church in order to make them more relevant and understandable for contemporary audiences while not denying the Christian status of counterculture;
- **To set up seminars** for pastors, activists and churches who would like to develop ministries in a postmodern and urban setting
- **To motivate** current and future **pastors** and **church planters** for a creative search into new ways of communicating the gospel in our time
- **To establish an educational center** which would become a platform for discussions on current issues of ministry in postmodern society
- To complete my work, "Christianity in the Postmodern age: Eastern and Western contexts"

#### For what audience is this project intended? Who would it benefit?

- **Pastors** who feel a "holy discontent" because their ministries are not bringing the long-desired results and their churches are isolated from society's needs
- **Students** and **graduates** of theological institutions who are seeking for a better understanding of what future ministry will look like for them. Presently, there is a lack of effective models for missions and church planting, especially in urban areas
- **Teachers** of theological schools who are aware that the knowledge that they are sharing with students is inadequate for effective ministry in the context of a contemporary world.



If you would like to support this project, you can complete your payment from <http://e-aaa.info>

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