

## BLOGS and DOCUMENTS

### DRAFT LAW ON MISSIONARY WORK OPENS THE WAY TO SOVIET-STYLE REPRESSION, RELIGIOUS GROUPS SAY

by Paul Goble

*Paul Goble writes a regular blog Window on Eurasia, where this summary of an article in Kommersant appeared on December 2, 2009 ([www.kommersant.ru/doc-y.aspx?DocsID=1284628](http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-y.aspx?DocsID=1284628)).*

A draft law prepared by the Russian justice ministry placing new restrictions on missionary activity not only threatens Protestant and Islamic groups that Moscow opposes but opens the way to Soviet-style restrictions on religious activity and thus must be opposed, religious and human rights activists say.

The Moscow newspaper *Kommersant* reported today that it has in its possession the text of a set of draft changes in the law "On freedom of conscience and religious organizations" and that the changes, which primarily involve missionary activity, have already sparked "protests from religious organizations".

The paper points out that the latest proposed changes have a long history. Roman Lunkin, the director of the Moscow Institute of Religion and Law, said that "the idea of [such] a bill was born in 2000 after the adoption of the conception of national security of the Russian Federation."

That concept paper, Lunkin noted, highlighted what it said was "the need to regulate missionary activity," especially on the part of "foreign missionaries" (generally Protestant Christians) and "Islamic extremist Wahhabis." And in 2006, the government proposed a draft, but it was sent back to the government by the Duma for reworking.

This fall, however, the justice ministry has prepared a new draft, which among other things defines "missionary activity in Russia" for the first time. Missionary work, the draft says, includes "activity 'among persons who are not members, participants or followers of a given religious group with the goal of including them in a religious organization."

Such activities, the draft continues, include both those conducted "by individuals authorized by these organizations directly and publically" or publically with the help of the mass media or other lawful means," a definition sufficiently broad to include almost any contacts between members of one religious group with those outside it if the former talk about their faith.

The justice ministry proposal specifies, *Kommersant* says, that "the right to profess [religious ideas] is given only to leaders of religious organizations or to persons having special trust from the leadership of their church. All others are prohibited from propagandizing religious ideas, even though today for this no permissions are required."

In addition, the draft prohibits any propaganda of a faith "by individuals who have been convicted of spreading inter-ethnic and inter-ethnic hostility or other crimes of an extremist character" and missionary activities near religious places "which belong to another religious group without the written agreement" of the latter.

Moreover, the draft bans proselytism "in government buildings, hospitals, children's homes, and orphanages without the approval of the administration." And perhaps most disturbingly – because of the way it could be applied by the powers that be – the draft prohibits conducting missionary activity among young people without the prior approval of their parents.

In regard to young people, the draft specifies that missionaries "must not invite children

and youths into a religious institution, conduct theological conversations [with them] or give them printed or audio and video materials” on religious subjects, without prior approval from their parents.

Anyone who violates these provisions, the draft law suggests, will be punished with a fine of 2000 to 5000 rubles (60 to 160 US dollars) in the case of individuals and from 5,000 to 7,000 rubles (160 to 230 US dollars) for legal persons such as registered churches for each violation, amounts that could cripple many groups.

Not surprisingly, many religious groups are appalled. The Evangelical Christian-Baptist Church in Moscow has sent a letter to President Dmitry Medvedev saying that the proposed provisions would limit the rights of Christians to follow the injunctions of Christ and lead to repressions. Indeed, Vitaly Vlasenko, the head of the Evangelical Baptist Church’s department for external relations, said, “we have concerns that all this is being done in order to liquidate non-traditional groups in Russia”, that is, all except Russian Orthodox Churches subordinate to the Patriarchate, registered Muslim groups, Jewish groups, and “the traditional” Buddhists.

Nafigulla Ashirov, the co-president of the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR), agrees. The draft, he told *Kommersant*, is “a ban on words.” As a result, if it is adopted, “ordinary citizens, talking about religion on a train, for example, could suffer” because officials could interpret such conversations as missionary activity.

As *Kommersant* noted, the Russian Orthodox Church was more “restrained” in its reaction, perhaps because its leaders assume that the intention of the law is to punish others. But even officials of the Patriarchate indicated that the draft needed to be modified, especially regarding efforts to reach out to young people.

Human and religious rights activists were most outspoken. Lunkin, for example, said that “all the limitations on missionary activity proposed by the Russian justice ministry are a violation of the right to the distribution of an individual’s convictions,” something that as he said “violates the Constitution of the Russian Federation.”

The ministry may have decided to float this idea now because of public outrage about the murder of Father Daniil Sysoyev, a death that many ascribe to his missionary activity among Muslims. But as a result of the opposition already expressed, the Russian government appears to be backing away from pushing this draft.

The justice ministry itself, for example, told *Kommersant* it would have a written response to all these concerns this week. And Andrey Sebentsov, who oversees religious affairs for the government, even told the paper that the draft would not survive if any of its provisions contradicted the Constitution.

## ABOUT THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE "LOWER" AND "UPPER"

by Viktor Yelenskyy

Literally in the last few days I came across two recently defended dissertations about the "laicization of Christianity" and "secularization of all sides of the social life of modern Ukraine." Interesting that at the same time the newly elected president calls for God's help, the prime minister consecrates his cabinet, the minister of culture drives out spirits from his, and in the country every day an average of two new religious communities and almost 2.5 thousand churches are created, the number of christenings in many oblasts equals to the number of newborns, hierarchs publicly bless representatives of the government and announce their own political and even geopolitical agendas... In Ukraine there is not one public figure who would decisively proclaim himself an atheist, instead about their religious convictions politicians, sportsmen, and show business stars try to outdo one another. What in the world incites researchers to speak about the irreversible course of secularization?

It seems that above all this ineradicable confidence that once everything was different, that our great-grandparents, not even to mention our ancestors, were not only more devout, but also "genuinely" devout. It should be perceived as its own type the necessary alternate of the circumstance that most communities in their evaluation of religiosity believe that the level of their modern religious culture undergoes successive erosion, and that their devoutness declines and is incomparable with that which was demonstrated by earlier generations. Almost every century we see complaints about the decline of the society's morals and nothing like the religious zealotry of the "old days." If to talk about our great-grandparents, then let's turn our attention as an example, one of many similar works, to the work of A. Schmidt "Materials for Geography and Statistics of Russia Compiled by Officers of General Staff. Kherson Province." The author writes that religious enthusiasm of Ukrainians of southern Ukraine in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century died down when superstitions flourished: the Ukrainian believes in the existence of witches, house spirits, the evil eye, is sufficiently certain in the efficacy of fortune telling.

Even more critical remarks we find in the records of bishops and eparchial missionaries. They constantly complained about the peasants, who were forced to go to church on so-called "tsarist days" and who don't go to confession, and about the landowners, who through/due to banquets, hunting, and merriment forget about the higher being.

The American religious sociologist Rodney Stark in his great piece "Secularization: RIP" (1999) produces a large number of eloquent facts and research that attest: Medieval and Early Modern Europe did not know a "Golden Age" of exemplary devoutness. Contemporaries recognize both the absence of interest of regular people to attend church and the attempt of the aristocracy to skip Sunday Mass, and weak knowledge by priests the basics of the faith (one of many examples: in the year 1551 a bishop of the English Gloucester ascertained that of the 311 priests in his eparchy 171 could not name all Ten Commandments and 27 did not know the author of the Lord's Prayer).

Subjective perception – including the perception of mass consciousness – can be very deceptive. A well-known example: when the press gave confirmation about the constant, steady, and rapid fall in the level of religiousness in the post-war French society, the research of sociologists did not allow this to be talked about this so definitely. And on the contrary, in spite of the fact that the majority of residents of all the post-Soviet countries feel that the number of religious persons in their countries is steadily growing, religious practices here remain practically

unchanged.

Now let's recall that what the church was 200 or 300 years ago; it was an obligatory, not an optional, so to say, institute. To enter this world, to start a family, and leave for a world better outside the church was not possible: the church for the resident of the Ukrainian (and, of course, not only Ukrainian) village was a registry office, club, theater, and mass media, and an official state establishment. Let's also recall that for the villager, who in the summer worked six days a week without rest in the field, the hours during Sunday Mass were the only time to rest outside of sleep. Therefore, above all, we have to critically react to the widespread thesis about today's "laicization" of religion. In fact, on the contrary: the church, at least in Europe, last century maybe for the first time acquired the possibility to become just the Church and engage not in life on earth, but in transcendentalism. It is necessary to consider not the fall of religious practice, but, for example, that almost every fifth compatriot at least once a month attends church, which for me is rather impressive.

Consider the modern citizen, who on Sunday is directed to the morning Liturgy, has countless alternatives that his forefather simply did not. Not only the plurality of religious and quasi-religious beliefs, but also the countless amusement possibilities that are available for the person on Sunday morning and a bunch of errands which he didn't finish during the week competes with the traditional church. And notice the absence of rigid social control, which still 100 years ago dictated a person's certain norms of behavior and kept him from acting disapprovingly.

And now let's turn to something else. The post-Soviet societies that went through the experiment of uprooting traditional institutional religiosity and where the participation of religious institutes in the process of socialization for at least three generations was contracted to the minimum, suggesting excessive requirements to the religiosity of their fellow citizens. Indeed, in the scholarly study of religion the five dimensions of religiosity introduced by Charles Glock practically became classical: religious faith, religious experience, religious knowledge, church and ritual practice, and the dimension of ethical results of faith. Around these dimensions is a long scholarly discussion, but maybe only in post-Soviet countries the school Glock is perceived not as an instrument in the instrumentalization of religious manifestations, but as an adequate standard, which has to correspond to the studied bearer of religiosity. In the mass consciousness is embedded the image of a "true believer," who consistently fulfills all the religious instructions, unconditionally believes in the fundamental dogmatic principles of his church, regularly attends divine service, has sound religious knowledge, and demonstrates a high moral behavior. The inaccessibility of such an "ideal type" even in some approximation forms a conception about the "inferiority" of the religiosity of Ukrainians. In reality, if we approach most monks and nuns with such requirements then they could turn out to be "not true believers."

In fact, the integrated index of religiosity of Ukrainians (religious behavior, religious knowledge, individual devotion, religious-institutional attraction), put forth in the coordinates of central and eastern European societies, attests about the "normality" of this religiosity. Ukraine lags behind, certainly, Hungary and Slovakia, not to mention Romania and Poland, but leaves behind Czech Republic, Latvia, Estonia, and Belarus.

Further: with this empirical base, by which operates our modern sociology of religion, to make a conclusion about whether the modernity of religion is being undermined or not is not possible; the concept about linear historic decline of religion is also not confirmed by research. A known example is that the U.S. citizen in 1800 attended church less frequently than he does now. Regarding the past we can talk also about a few waves of "religious returns"; one which began in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and still today to a great extent determines the world's religious

development; this “return” includes a lift in the conservative wave in the world’s Protestantism, fundamentalist waves like in the big (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) and in the national (Sikhism and Judaism) religions, the Muslim Revolution in Iran, a national explosion directed against the ruling regimes, Catholicism in South and Central America, Poland, the Philippines, and in South Africa; the extensive spread of new religious movement in North America and Western Europe, and also the recreation of religion into a significant factor for national and cultural mobilization in post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine.

Nonlinearity of religious behavior is inherent and social, and for individual people. The rigid distinction “believer – non-believer” cannot be considered correctly and suitably for scholarly use. In certain vital situations the person turns to religion or, on the contrary, turns away from it. By certain circumstances entire societies extract from religion a sense, a driving force for its development, symbols, and demarcation markers. Such appeals we see in the English of the 18-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, who separate themselves by their Puritanism from “French frivolity and perversion,” or in the Irish whose national formation was accompanied by a “pious revolution.” On the other hand, societies are able to refuse from religious causes even when religion composed the core of the collective myth and was the main factor that for centuries differentiated a community from others (like this was in the process of forming a modern Turkish nation, for example). The fall of communism, which was accompanied by the erosion of old identities, called forth the appeal to religion as a reliable system of values and national-cultural depository. At the same time, such appeals are able to be changed (and really change) by periods of “religious cooling.”

A person, like once aphoristically indicated the surgeon Mykola Amosov, is not only who he is to the belt, but also that which is lower. We are all, certainly, decayed creations, and we all carry in ourselves the reflection of God’s likeness. That which is “lower,” fights with that which is “higher” and this struggle will last, evidently, for all of human’s history.

**(Source::**

*[http://www.risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert\\_thought/authors\\_columns/vyelenskyi\\_column/35061](http://www.risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert_thought/authors_columns/vyelenskyi_column/35061))*

## INTERVIEW WITH DR. YURII RESHETNIKOV, LEADER OF STATE COMMITTEE ON NATIONALITIES AND RELIGIONS

On March 15, 2010, [www.risu.org.ua](http://www.risu.org.ua) posted the following interview by Taras Antoshevskyy with religion expert Yurii Reshetnikov, as blog with the title (a quotation by Reshetnikov) - "The Ukrainian Community Remains Multi-denominational and Practically All Components of the Religious Network in Ukraine Demonstrate Positive Dynamics in the Growth of Their Religious Organizations". Reshetnikov, initially trained as lawyer, then obtained the Kandidat in Philosophy (akin to PhD) from the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, writing a major history of the Evangelical Christian-Baptists in the Ukraine. He now heads the State Committee on Nationalities and Religions.

*Question — What are the special features of the official statistics of religious organizations from January 1 of this year? Which confessions are developing the quickest, what new ones are appearing?*

**Reshetnikov:** On January 1, 2010, the religious network of Ukraine counted 35,184 religious organizations. In particular, 18,000 Orthodox religious organizations, of which the UOC-MP makes up 12,082, the UOC-KP – 4,415, the UAOC – 1,234, 3,765 religious institutions are part of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and 1,079 are part of the Roman Catholic Church.

Also in Ukraine there are more than 8,400 Protestant organizations. In addition, there are 297 Jewish institutions and 1,182 Muslim ones.

In the year 2009 the religious network increased by 719 religious organizations, the biggest growth was found in the Orthodox Church: the UOC-MP increased its structure by 256 religious organizations, the UOC-KP by 159, the UAOC by 14. The UGCC increased its network by 33 religious organizations. The number of Protestant religious organizations increased by 150 bodies; however, the number of Charismatic communities did not increase in the last year. I will also note the growth of Muslim organizations by 33 bodies, and not only in Crimea but throughout the territory of Ukraine.

*Question — Why, in your opinion, is there this sort of development of various denominations?*

**Reshetnikov:** It seems to me that today's special features in the growth of various confessions in Ukraine are tied in with many factors. These include the traditional religious mentality of our people (Orthodox and Greek Catholic), the use of new methods of work with various sections of the population by Orthodox churches that before were only used by Protestant religious communities, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's increased emphasis on missionary work, and the decrease in help to Protestant communities from faithful abroad due to the crisis. But along with that I would like to stress that the Ukrainian community remains multi-denominational and practically all components of the religious network in Ukraine demonstrate positive dynamics in the growth of their religious organizations.

*Question — There exist certain myths about the denominational composition in Ukraine, in particular, about the influence of religious "sects." What is the true state of the presence of new religious movements in Ukraine? Particularly, are organizations registered (like, for example, Scientology) which in many European countries are either prohibited or registered not as religious organizations?*

**Reshetnikov:** In reality, the thesis about the "influence of sects" is exaggerated. The statistics

fairly unambiguously demonstrate that new religious movements make up an insignificant percentage of the religious network, in which dominates first and foremost the Orthodox Churches and other religious communities traditional for Ukraine (Greek and Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim). We also don't observe tendencies of active growth in the number of religious organizations that belong to the new religious movements.

Currently in Ukraine religious organizations whose activity could harm the interests of the state or the citizens are not registered. We carefully study the experience in other countries.

As for the Church of Scientology, currently its centers are not registered in Ukraine as religious organizations, though we have information about their activity as civic organizations in a few cities.

*Question — What misunderstandings occur most frequently during registration of organizations, what are the reasons for refusal to register?*

**Reshetnikov:** The Law of Ukraine on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations rather clearly defines the possible reasons for refusal to register religious organizations. The law reads that "the registration of a status (statute) of a religious organization can be refused if its status (statute) or activity violates the current legislation." The State Committee on Nationalities and Religions along with other registration bodies designated by the legislation abide by the law when making decisions about the registration of specific religious communities.

*Question — Were there cases where organizations were unregistered and why?*

**Reshetnikov:** In the last year, as far as I know, there were no such cases. Today a matter is being discussed about the possibility of stopping the activity of specific religious organizations due to certain doubts about the responsibility of their activity before the current legislation. But I want to stress that the decision about such questions is not made by the registration office but exclusively by court, as is foreseen in the current law.

*Question — Were there court cases or grievances regarding registration?*

**Reshetnikov:** Yes, such incidents occur. Here I am referring to the attempt of the so-called "Orthodox synod of the UGCC" to legalize its status in Ukraine by registering [as] "Ukrainian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church." They appealed our actions to the court. Today this matter is under judicial review.

*Question — What do you foresee in the development of the religious map of Ukraine?*

**Reshetnikov:** It looks as though the positive dynamics of growth in the number of religious organizations in Ukraine will continue in the near future. By this I mean not the appearance of new religious trends, but rather the growth in the number of religious organizations in the structures of Ukraine's traditional confessions. Along with this, I don't see any reason to expect such significant levels of growth in the religious sphere as occurred in the late 90s of last century.