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Ministry in Ukraine: Daniel & Priscilla Gollan

by Daniel Gollan

UNCERTAIN, DRAMATIC, changing, unchanging, restricted, unrestricted, and disorganized are all words that spring easily to mind when considering the Ukrainian situation during these times.

Shortly after midnight last night I was preparing to storm through a door. I was psyched up enough to confront and subdue thieves inside our office. We had been expecting an attack all week. It looked like we had finished with waiting. As another worker silently unlocked the door, my Australian fellow missionary, Wayne Zschech, and I darted in.

A quick look around told us that we were too late. Wishing something so doesn't always make it happen. Strangely enough, only a fax machine, a briefcase and a cassette player were stolen. Oh!. And the cord to the electric kettle which rather unfortunately for the thief was lying next to the fax machine. He left the fax machine cord behind. We figure that he had been alerted and escaped with what he could carry. Entrance had been gained through a balcony window.

We felt like many Ukrainians feel about the changes they have seen in their country. They expected a lot more. They were promised a lot more. Democracy had let them down. Pensioners can hardly afford to buy bread., let alone meat. It was better under communism. Democracy was empty.

Recently, I went out on to the ice of the Dnepro River and talked to an icefisherman. He had been out on the ice all day and had caught three small fish which he proudly displayed.

He put his case for a return to communism quite well. He was a pensioner with five people in his family. The pension he received was about 3,000,000 coupons per month. This works out at about twenty dollars. His utilities bill for the apartment is about 4,500,000 coupons. The government will subsidize part of that, but not a significant amount. How was he supposed to live?

The mafia, which he pointedly did not distinguish from ordinary thieves, stand around doing nothing all day. They drive BMW's and Mercedes. The leaders of the country are weak and drunkards. Ten percent of the population are alcoholics. In his view, what the people need is a strong communist leader like a Stalin running the country! Then it would get back to normal again.

In some respects, poverty develops a short memory. Stalin! A murderer responsible for the deaths of over seven million Ukrainians seen as a strong leader for the good of the country who would bring back normalcy?

Generally, the young and the business class are all for democracy. Freedom is wonderful! Many country people and much of the older generation consider that a return to communism might just be good for them. Ignorance is bliss . . . right now! God alone knows the future of this poor beleaguered country. We can only guess at it. Many foreign missions, however, are guessing that we have perhaps two more years of this relative freedom before the doors close again. It will be a sad goodbye to a youthful democracy. Sadly, it will also be, to some extent, a goodbye to the wonderful

religious freedom experienced during these past five years.

The Economy

UKRAINE HAS HAD MANY people speculate about her future. Some have declared that the economy is improving, pointing to the fact that during the past year the inflation of the national currency has slowed to a reasonable figure.

During 1995, we have seen the value of the coupon change from \$1 = K150,000 to \$1 = K190,000. Inflation is still high, but not to the extent that it was two years ago.

The price of bread has changed from K22,000 to K60,000. The price of a metro ticket K5,000 to K20,000. The fine for not punching a ticket on a bus has increased from K50,000 to K400,000. Most people still travel without punching a ticket. Rarely are they called to account for it. I have seen, more times than I can count, a ticket collector ignored by a passenger without a ticket. Basically, the only time someone is forced to pay is when four or five big employees of the public transport system block the doors to the bus and only allow people out if they have a ticket.

Ukrainians are used to change, uncertainty and poverty. They are even used to the high rate of inflation. Will the country stabilize under a democratic government? I'm hardly qualified to make any statement on the subject, but I will. I doubt it!

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Religion

ICAN REMEMBER looking at figures in Operation World showing percentages of Evangelicals, Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Muslims. I used to think that if Evangelicals plus Orthodox were greater than the Roman Catholic percentage listed, then "we" were winning. I laugh now when I remember it. The main religion in Ukraine is the Orthodox religions. It is divided up between Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox.

Generally, the Orthodox religion is dead. Christ is not being preached. When I walk inside one of those magnificent buildings they call cathedrals, I sense a feeling of death. Yes, while marvelling at the opulence and architecture, it feels like a tomb. Candles are burning people are praying to the dead 'saints' depicted in icons, incense is wafting through the dark air and there is a chanting murmur in the background. Many people, on their way to an eternal death, meet in these 'tombs' thinking that they will gain eternal life.

Open their eyes, O Lord! The Orthodox church teaches that if you have been baptized into the Orthodox church, then you are saved. Thousands and thousands have been baptized into this church. Many of these honestly believe in the existence of God and with just a little more tending, could be ripe for harvesting. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will send forth labourers to sow, tend, and reap the enormous potential harvest of this country.

Education

MANY MISSIONARIES have used the medium of education to reach the youth of Ukraine. The actual education system is in rather desperate straits, however. Communist text books, full of propaganda and humanism, are still used in the government schools. My Russian teacher has shown me some of them and it makes me mad when I recognize the attitudes and principles young children are subconsciously learning. I have had a number of teachers ask me, "How are we supposed to teach using these?"

In the month of March, a day of prayer and fasting was declared amongst Christians for God's intervention in the direction education in this country seemed to be headed. Part of a new curriculum developed introduces students to occult practices. It seems that Australia isn't the only one who copies the American trend-setting.

I came to Ukraine to work in education. I arrived in August of 1992, one year after Ukraine had declared her independence from the USSR.

For the first two years, I worked with Accelerated Christian Education, a Christian organisation providing a total Bible-based educational curriculum and program for levels kindergarten to grade twelve. Eighteen schools were started during that period, mainly by travelling to a city, hopping a taxi and telling the drive to drive to a school where English was spoken. We would knock on the principal's door and end up showing some slides and arranging to return in the near future to meet with interested parents. It was a mad lifestyle and often times extremely wearying, not to mention dangerous.

Risky Business

DURING THE PAST four years, I have had over ten run-ins with thieves or bandits. On one occasion I had a knife at my neck and on another a gun to my head with the gunman screaming that he was going to kill me.. Paul's thirty-nine stripes were worse than what I received that day, but that thought didn't make the experience any nicer.

The knowledge that God was in total control of the situation, however, and the sure knowledge that I was on my way to heaven if the bullet did enter my brain, quite amazingly and wonderfully

Will the Church Be a Voice in the Wilderness, or Will the Bones of the Dumb Dog Be Bleached?

by Lance A. Box

REVEREND PROFESSOR DOCTOR FRANCIS NIGEL LEE advised me the other evening that the voice in the wilderness of John the Baptist was a voice that was positioned so it could be most effectively heard. The wilderness was a place where the human voice could be amplified, and large crowds could be gathered to hear. The church in the next few months has an opportunity to be a John the Baptist and announce the crown rights of Jesus our Lord in a very prominent place.

On Sunday April 21, South Australian Senator, Nick Minchin, came to Brisbane to gather information that would assist him in setting up a Peoples' Convention in 1997. This is to fulfil the Prime Minister's election promise to take the issue of our Constitution to the people of Australia. When questioned about the timing of the Convention, Senator Minchin affirmed that Mr Howard is committed to fulfilling his promise. To enable the Convention to take place in 1997, it needs to be set up later this year, or at the latest in the early part of next year. It was proposed that the Convention consist of say 100 delegates, of which 50% would be appointed by the government, and the remaining 50% would be elected by the Australian people. The Senator did not have any firm details. His brief was to gather information, find out what people felt, return to Canberra and then begin the task of planning the details.

After the Convention has been held, it is proposed that one of two things take place, either a consensus be reached, and a firm proposal be presented to the Australian people in the form of a Referendum, or a range of alternatives be presented to the people (including the option of continuing with the status quo), in the form of an Indicative Plebiscite. Whatever the outcome, the make-up of the Convention is critical, and the intellectual climate of the populous at the

brought a beautiful peace to my mind and heart.

Lecturing at teachers' conferences, organising conferences for A.C.E. teachers, training teachers and paying assistance visits to the schools were all part of my job description.

Today, after strong pressure from the authorities to close, sixteen of our schools continue to operate even though our official staff have been forbidden to visit them. A.C.E. is still on the black list of cults and subversive societies the education department first published last year.

A notice was also sent to all educational authorities two years ago ordering them to have nothing to do with one Daniel Gollan. It felt like I had a "Wanted" notice out with my name on it. Interesting feeling, that!

I had met a wonderful young lady in Ukraine. In August, Priscilla Bible agreed to marry me. We were married in December that same year. We had a ceremony first in Australia with my family, and then again here in Ukraine with Priscilla's family and our friends.

Soon after we returned from our honeymoon, we were told that our visas would be cancelled if we continued to take an active part in assisting the A.C.E. schools. The directors of the program decided that all foreign aid should cease until an agreement had been reached with the educational department.

A New Work

IT DID NOT TAKE us long to recognize that God wanted us in a different ministry. It was obvious that the great need was in discipling new Christians and training church leaders. If you were to right now leave your current work and go into something very different, which you know only a little about, then you would probably start to feel like I felt. I had a couple of 'connections', I attended a church, I knew the Lord, and that was about it. Where were we to start?

Soon after we began asking this question, we received an invitation by the non-denominational church we have been attending to lead the youth group. After we accepted that position, we recognized the need for some serious discipleship to be conducted among the members of the church. They were enthusiastic for God and desired to live holy lives, but had received very little practi-

cal instruction on how to actually live holy lives.

I began to meet with a group of eight people for an hour and a half each Saturday afternoon. At these meetings we discussed the Lordship of Christ in our lives. It has been a most rewarding time for them and for me.

Eight weeks ago we started teaching a Navigators course among some of the young people in the church. This twelve week course, teaching some of the basic disciplines of the Christian life, has managed to get a wonderful name for itself. If we had time, we could probably start another three groups right now!

Most exciting of all, however, we have begun a home fellowship meeting at which we discuss how we can apply the sermon we heard on Sunday to our lives. We study the Word of God and share our struggles and needs, and then pray for each other.

Amazingly, this group has tripled in size in just seven weeks. Non-Christians have attended and are coming back. Over half of the twenty people who attend travel for over an hour to get here. It is a blessing indeed to observe the enthusiasm these people have for prayer and for living lives that truly please God. This gathering seems to be meeting a real need in the lives of the people attending.

We plan to form two new groups in the near future so that the groups can keep on growing. The need is for God to provide new leaders for these groups if He wants it to happen. Right now, we have just one twenty year-old who could lead a group. It is God's business. We trust in Him to provide.

Within three weeks of the writing of these words, we plan to start an evangelistic Bible study. We don't know much about how to lead one, but we have a number of non-Christian friends who are interested. Three young Christians from the youth group will attend also. They will bring some of their friends as well. We are excited at what God may do through it, not only in the lives of the non-Christians, but also in the lives of the Christians.

We are currently seeking the Lord's will concerning whether we should start reaching out to the many towns and villages around about Kiev. It would be a big undertaking, requiring a lot of travelling. We do not have a car and the public transport system between Kiev and these town is unreliable and we would use up

time of a referendum/plebiscite will determine Australia's course in history for a long time.

I believe in the sovereignty of God, but He holds human agencies accountable, and He deals with men and nations covenantally. Our Constitution begins with the prayer "... humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God..." We, as a nation, have not fully followed in the ways of our Lord and King, but we have enjoyed His blessing. Would we continue to do so if even the last vestiges of our Christian heritage were rooted out of our political system by a Peoples' Convention stacked with unbelieving men and women?

I believe that the Christian scholars who have been seeking to rethink political praxis in the light of God's Law and Gospel, need to be forward in making themselves available to this Peoples' Convention. Sometime in 1997, the Convention may meet for a period of time in Canberra (a week or two), or it may meet as a series of working parties in the capital cities around the nation. However it meets, Christian scholars should position themselves so that they will qualify to be appointed to the Convention, or gather popular support so that they will be elected to the Convention. They need to be writing to Senator Minchin, requesting that they be told the parameters relating to the criteria for appointment, and the procedure for election to the Convention. In addition, an army of Christian workers needs to be raised who will man the polling booths, and hand out material that will educate the masses. Shepherds of God's flock need to be preaching sermons that will focus the thoughts of God's people upon the nature of God's blueprint for a National Constitution (His Law). The praying and intercessory arms of the church need to be rallying and holding prayer meetings evoking God's wisdom for the Christian scholars and decision-makers in the Convention.

If the church is silent at this time, supporters of a godless republic will ensure that the silence is institutionally entrenched. We will either be a voice in a prominent place ushering in the crown rights of our Lord Jesus, or we will be dumb dogs whose bones are bleached — either way, the wilderness is our appointed destination.

a lot of valuable time. But these people are not hearing the gospel explained and are not seeing it lived out. Because of the experience we had recently in a town, I believe that an evangelistic-church planting ministry in these places could bring great honour to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and be of great benefit to the people. We seek His will.

In June, we had our first child. It was kind of scary to hold in my arms a soul I have brought into this world. I have had fleeting concerns about the effect the Chernobyl accident may have on this little one. God knows best. And I rest in that knowledge.

On the subject of Chernobyl, it does not seem to have affected greatly the lives of most Ukrainians. Some cities still have large public radiation clocks that show how much radiation is in the air. It isn't high. Many people shun the banks and waters of the Dnepro River. At the same time, many people crowd the beaches and swim in the river. So, life goes on and people don't seem to be suffering too greatly right now. I have a friend who used to be a card-holding communist party member who was ordered to help clean up after the accident. He was exposed to a lot of radiation and the vodka he was told to drink to protect him did not do any good. He fears for his health. I have been told and believe that only time will tell how much damage "Wormwood" did to the people of Ukraine. Interestingly, the word Chernobyl, when translated into English, is "Wormwood".

The Future

HOW IS THE CHURCH in Ukraine today? There are a number of non-denominational churches that have sprung up since 1991 that are attracting large numbers of young people. Many are charismatic, with perhaps only half of those taking a temperate stand on the issue of the sign gifts. Generally, these non-denominational churches are more

evangelistic than the Baptist and Pentecostal denominations and also have a more accepting attitude to people from the world.

Youth With a Mission, Intervarsity, and some other ministries aimed at university students are having an effective ministry. Many young people, particularly in the foreign language institutes, have been led to Christ through these ministries. Discipleship is being carried on successfully. Soon, I have a meeting with one of the Intervarsity leaders at which we will discuss how we can successfully assimilate their converts into the organised church. I look forward to it knowing that it is an important meeting.

A number of foreign missionaries have started churches. A common problem they face is that national leaders seem to be few and far between. These churches have attracted the youth, particularly the university student age group. They often distribute containers of humanitarian aid to orphanages, hospitals and the needy.

I hope to help in this ministry at an orphanage in which a friend located about thirty kilometres south of Kiev. There is a possibility that this will initiate an opportunity for further contact in the future. It is our prayer.

To a large degree, the old national denominations are still coming to terms with freedom and change. Membership in the Baptist church is currently numbered at 113,000, with 10,000 of those being new members! Sadly, many new believers have been turned off by the adherence to custom and tradition practised in the established Baptist churches. The Baptists are not alone in this. Even so, within many of the churches, you can find a living, vibrantly active, enthusiastic core of men and women.

A number have been trained by western missionaries while attending Bible institutes. Thousands have been disciplined and taught through Abraham Bible's ministry of training and discipling

church leaders. Eight hundred of them are continuing the cycle and are now discipling others. These student/disciples currently number about seven thousand.

During the last four years they have started over one hundred and thirty new churches! Some have been sent as missionaries to the Far East. These men and women are the future of the established church in Ukraine. God is using them and they are excited about it!

Conclusion

IF THE LORD has blessed you financially and you feel you would like to give to some people who really need help, these Ukrainian leaders would definitely be worth it. If you would like to know more about their work and lives, write to the Ukrainian address below and I will see to it that you receive more information.

What is God doing in Ukraine? Much! We rejoice in that which has already been accomplished. We are excited about what the future may hold for the church in this country and for our part in God's purposes here.

If you would be interested in receiving our newsletter so that you can support through prayer our ministry in Ukraine, contact us through:

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FACS now has its own Internet address. You're welcome to contact us at

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