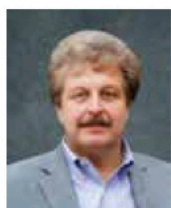


# HOPE FOR A NEW REFORMATION

Young professional leaders in the former Soviet Union rise up to spread the Gospel

by **Sergey Rakhuba**



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I will never forget that cold December day in 1991 on Red Square in Moscow, standing in a crowd of thousands as we breathlessly watched a historic moment unfold before our eyes. The red flag that had served as the symbol of the enormous Soviet empire was being lowered from the Kremlin. It was now useless—the empire had fallen. There was enormous uncertainty in the country back then, a combination of massive challenges and unprecedented opportunities.

Immediately after its fall, the Soviet Union was replaced by social and political chaos and spiritual emptiness. But nearly a year later, Billy Graham came to Moscow for a Crusade in October 1992 and was met by hundreds of thousands of spiritually hungry people. The imperial capital was no longer covered in propaganda posters speaking of Lenin and socialist happiness, but rather with messages of spiritual renewal, hope and new life in Christ.

Billy Graham's opportunity to preach then in the largest sports arena in Moscow was a sign that something

unbelievable was happening in the country. Thousands of young Christians, emerging from the “underground,” breathed the air of new opportunities and traveled from every corner of the fallen empire to Moscow to serve as volunteers at the evangelistic Crusade.

One of my colleagues, Michael Cherenkov, was a teenager back then in a Christian family in the underground church. He traveled from faraway Donetsk, Ukraine, in order to see that unbelievable miracle: In the center of Moscow, not far from the Kremlin, the most famous evangelist in history was present to preach the Gospel. And everyone who wished could freely obtain a copy of the Bible, which was formerly forbidden. Wonderfully, it seemed, a revival had started, which promised reformation and renewal.

A few days later, enraptured by what he had seen and inspired by the unbelievable success of the first mass evangelization effort since the fall of the Soviet Union, Michael returned to his gray mining town in industrial eastern Ukraine. There, still under the influence of Billy Graham's

message, feeling the promptings of God's call and seeing a colossal need in society, Michael made a decision. He would answer God's call to be a preacher, an evangelist and a catalyst for reformation and renewal in the post-Soviet sphere.

But soon everything began to change again. State atheism was replaced by formal religiosity.

Today, the majority of the population of post-Soviet republics are religious—either Orthodox or Muslim—but few have opened a Bible. Therefore, they vainly follow superstition or government-approved religion.

This situation is very similar to the situation in Europe that gave birth to the Protestant Reformation, which was led by Martin Luther. As in the 1500s, people have lived a thousand years in the Christian tradition, yet do not know God, are not familiar with the Bible and do not have a personal faith.

Last year's 500th anniversary of the Reformation provided an excellent opportunity to remind people in the former Soviet Union of the importance and authority of Scripture and salvation by faith.

Another important new opportunity for reaching society with the Gospel is also connected to the heritage of the Reformation—missions in the marketplace. For evangelicals, the home and the workplace are holy places, where we are called to worship and glorify God. Working is about more than earning a living; it is about responding to God's call to serve Him and other people, to not only believe, but to live and work by faith.

We know from history that the Reformation took place in waves. In the 19th century, an evangelical revival came to the



salons of the capital elite, and in the south of the Russian Empire it came to the poorest peasants. Today, the time has come for a new Reformation, and the agents of change this time will be educated and committed young Christian professional leaders.

Today, thousands of young Christians have received excellent educations, which they could not have dreamed of in Soviet times. Back then, Christians could not enroll in institutions of higher education and were blocked from all influential positions in society. This is the first generation since the fall of the USSR to receive the opportunity to get a higher education and to occupy positions of influence in the professional world.

Today, young Christians have an education and they have motivation. That makes this a key moment in the history of the post-Soviet region, when a critical mass of young believers can bring Gospel truths and values to their professional spheres—medicine, law, education, journalism, politics and beyond.


In response to this unique opportunity, there is an effort in 12 countries of the former Soviet Union and also in Mongolia to focus on preparing and equipping the next generation of young Christian leaders to serve in their societies. We are equipping these young leaders—the future of their countries—with the strategy, knowledge, leadership skills and tools for effective evangelism at every level of society. That which the church cannot do as an institution, thousands of individuals, united in their professional and Christian callings to holistic mission for Christ and His Kingdom, can do.

We believe in the future of Christianity in this geographically vast and culturally diverse region, and in the future of Christian missions in Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

I am unbelievably glad that today, even as the Russian government once more sets up roadblocks for the proclamation of the Gospel, I can serve together with the same young man and now my close colleague, Michael

Cherenkov, who traveled to faraway Moscow nearly 26 years ago to listen to the encouraging and revival-inspiring message of Billy Graham. Michael is a powerful voice calling the young generation of Christians to effective preaching of the Gospel in modern society in the post-Soviet countries of Eurasia.

These young leaders have firmly seized the baton of evangelism and with a new breath of air are overcoming modern challenges to bring the transformative power of the Gospel to their countries.

So let us praise God that the Reformation continues!  ©2018

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