

Equipping Reliable Leaders in  
Sound Doctrine  
in

Hungary  
Latvia  
Lithuania  
Poland  
Romania  
Russia  
Ukraine

Winter 2007  
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Serving Christ by equipping pastors,  
teachers and lay leaders in Reformed,  
Biblical doctrine in Central and Eastern  
Europe and the former Soviet Union

# NEWSITEMS



## Winter Edition



**bricks-and-mortar:** *adj., something that has a physical presence in the real world.*

### BRICKS AND MORTAR EVANGELISM

By Dr. R. David Ludwick, ITEM  
President

Have you ever wondered how to conduct short-term mission's trips? Have you, or your mission committee, decided on the basis of brochures, flyers, word of mouth from friends or missionaries, random sampling, what form should your short term mission mandate take?

For years I heard the phrase, "Bricks and Mortar" evangelism, what does that mean? It means at least one of two things: That it is really a "Vision" trip seeking as an objective to set aflame the missionary hearts of the people [the evidence of this type short term mission work being successful is noted when one hears from the missionary in their field report numerous first person singular pronouns, "I had a great time"- "I really...;" and quotables like: "My life was changed."

Bricks and mortar evangelism may also mean: building alongside nationals whom one would have the opportunity to evangelize by looking to the right or left and at about 2 pm or 5 pm going to the beach for evangelism and/ or camp fire evangelism. No wonder we love them, even if there is hard work attending.

These missions' efforts are not in themselves indictable if they are administered for the benefit of the nationals AS WELL. Too often the cost is justified by the field reports igniting the flames referred to above in the hearts of the people, whether or not this is the case, is arguable.

PLEASE NOTE I AM NOT IDICTING "VISION TRIPS" OR "BRICKS AND MORTAR."

When one compares the time actually spent on evangelizing, planting per minute seeds, one must count the cost!

Second example: your 9<sup>th</sup> Grade championship soccer team, 24 people, with adults, travels to Kiev, Ukraine for soccer evangelism.

Question: Was adequate preparation made to determine actual needs vs. our wanting to go on a mission trip that would be fun?

Picture Pastor Leonid talking to the US soccer coach, "It is interesting that you think that you are bringing us Jesus Christ, when we have had him for a 1000 years and your entire country is fewer than 400 years old; oh, and by the way, did you know that soccer is our national sport?" Can you imagine what that young man will say while he is lying on his back with our boys standing around him wondering if they hurt him? Is it not difficult to evangelize from that position, and when your team is losing?

On another occasion Pastor Leonid said "You Americans have come to our country and told us that God has a wonderful plan for your life... Spiritual law one, two, three, four..."

"Here is a John track please sign here, we will pray for you."

"Brother David, we are not stupid, we know that you are on holiday."

When we do missions we must do our homework. Do not seek to require adherence to a Western paradigm seeking to impose it on a non-Western culture,- we do not require "a crutch" like "Bricks and Mortar," like soccer or beach evangelism. We know that good, reliable, theological education, passed on from generation to generation will outlive even the bricks and mortar.

If you see any of these characteristics in your missions program, pause for a second, if you will, and look over what I have said above, does it fit? Does it fit the way you want it to?

If "Yes" call us or email us for the rest of the information.

If "No" call us so we can help you organize your mission program.

Evangelism is not accomplished by doing projects only; nor is it by merely the sending of money, nor is it accomplished by great zeal, focus, effort, unless those things are engaged in the culture and not simply used as vehicles for another agenda.

From a Servant's Heart  
October, 2007

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# “CHURCH MERGER, PUTIN’S ACQUISITION”

By Dr. R. David Ludwick, ITEM President

A few weeks ago, I was sent a copy of a Wall Street Journal article titled “Church Merger, Putin’s Acquisition.” The article was published on the occasion of the commencement to reestablish “Canonical Communion” between the two Russian Orthodox churches. The article went on to say that there was more than religious significance to the event as evidenced by the Russian Politicians: the Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov and the merger’s architect President Vladimir Putin. The media described the event as a step in overcoming Russia’s tragic history. There was far more at issue, including growing suspicion that Putin is building a new network of influence using the church to reach out to Russian Communities all over the world. One example was Patriarch Aleksey II who “Gave short shrift to God but thanked President Putin.” The church merger is only the most recent of his successful attempts to appropriate symbols of Russia’s pre-revolutionary and anti-communist past, along with Soviet ones. Other events include “repatriating” the Danilov Monastery bells from Harvard University and the bodies of white Russian General Anton Denikin and Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovnia and introducing the old Soviet anthem and the Red Army’s flag. The article notes that the Russian Orthodox Church in all of its forms is a key component to that past. The Russian government is being criticized as Putin activates his ready-made network of three hundred and twenty three parishes and twenty monasteries in the US alone; over a million in thirty countries.

The Orthodox Church Abroad existed as an independent entity, challenging Russian Authorities to speak for the “Russian Church.” It continually spoke against the collaboration with the Communist Party and called for a more valuable evaluation of the country’s past with the church abroad being a beacon to some alternatives. [It is anticipated that this will be the next step of the closing of the relationship between the

People of the former Soviet Union and the relationship that they may have established with the Western culture. The process has been secretive and there has been speculation that some American businessmen with Russian ties have helped to push it along.

Questions arise as to how the church will be manipulated/used by the politics which may be taking a turn to the past.] There is little doubt in this author’s mind that the window of opportunity is closing again.

Please prayerfully consider what might be your part in the planting and cultivating of Theological Education Missions in the next five to ten years. We know that Reformed Theological Education is valid through generations and that is what we seek to offer. In the next six to eight months we will seek to raise five hundred thousand dollars and with that we may plant those seeds and cultivate with Him, won’t you help?

Joshua 1:6-9

RDL, November 2007

## TEACHING COVENANT THEOLOGY IN UKRAINE



By Alister Torrens,  
ITEM missionary in  
Ukraine, teaching Covenant Theology  
course at ERSU

The overwhelming majority of my time for the first half of the month was spent in preparation for teaching a course on Covenant Theology for the Certificate program of the Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine. In addition to reviewing some of the standard literature on the topic (Vos, Robertson, Murray), a significant amount of time was spent discovering(!), exploring and trying to resolve in my mind, the disagreements within the conservative Reformed circles on the relation of the Mosaic covenant to the covenant of works, and of both to the covenant of grace. I also invested time in carefully structuring the course material, opting for showing the unity of the Scriptures and how they are brought to culmination in Christ as the overarching goal of the course, and then organizing the material under that into three main (but not equal) sections:

1. One Divine Author (the God who reveals Himself): the Bible as God’s self-revelation; the nature of that revelation;
2. One Big Story (the God who saves): (Creation – Fall-Redemption) the overarching Story – the History of Redemption;
3. One Eternal Covenant (the God who graciously relates to His people): the who, the why, the context, the assurance, and the signs of Salvation.

Joyously, David Ludwick was able to be there for the beginning of the course, and on the second day taught a couple of the classes! To drive home the practicality of the material and help these lay leaders see its immediate relevance to their own ministries, I also taught them the necessity of redemptive-historical preaching and had them preach for me as part of their assessment. There were only three students in attendance for this particular course, but each of them was very keen and active. However, I only realized at the end of the week that I probably had overestimated their acquisition and mastery of the material. With hindsight I think this was in part because they had (as required) read Christ of the Covenants before the lectures, and so when they often seemed comfortably able to answer the questions I put to them and familiar with much of the material I presented, it gave me the (as I now see, false) impression that they already had a good grip of the subject matter. As a result I went through my material at a quicker pace than what would likely be more helpful for them – admittedly, this also left me thinner on the material I had prepared, at certain points, than I wanted. I used my last 90 minutes of lecture time to do an overall review of the course material and on the final exam the students evidenced a reasonable retention of the acquired material.

### Other

As part of my ministry at Church of the Holy Trinity in Kiev, I continued to prepare and teach a lesson on the Confession and Shorter Catechism for the group of present and potential future deacons in the church. This group normally meets every other week, and is led by the pastor. I also preached at the church (two morning services) and I am thankful that many people commented on how they were helped by the message. This was my first time preaching in Russian for a long time, and preparation took the vast majority of my time the previous week.

Alister Torrens

## SPIRITUAL PULSE OF LITHUANIA

By Andre Bouravnev, M. Div, ITEM Media Director

What do the following US household names such as Charles Bronson (actor), Joseph Weber (an eminent physicist), Aaron Copland (composer), Sara Lee (Sara Lee Foods), as well as the mother of Pope John Paul II have in common? They are all people of Lithuanian descent. Lithuania is a country with rich culture, famous for its amber, spectacular wood carvings and great basketball team Zalgiris.

### Population and Religion

Lithuania has a population of 3.48 million, of which 2.33 million (66.9%) is urban and 1.15 million (33.1%) rural. Ethnic Lithuanians make up 83.45 % of the population, Poles – 6.77 %, Russians – 6.33%, Belarusians – 1.23%. Average density of population is 30 persons per square mile and 50 in the capital city of Vilnius.

Religiously speaking the majority of the population is Roman Catholic (79%). In addition, Lithuania has long established communities of Orthodox Christians (4.1%), Old Believers (0.8%), Evangelical Lutherans (0.6%), Reformed Evangelicals (0.2%), Jewish, and Karaites. There are also smaller "new" religious groups among them Protestant Christians, Adventists, Muslims and Eastern and New Age religions. All recognized religions are equally treated under the law as no state religion exists in Lithuania, but groups must be registered through a governmental process that does not recognize all religions.

### Historical highlights

Before accepting Christianity, Lithuanians practiced paganism, which remained a folk religion for several hundred years after Christianization, which took place in 1387. Lithuania was the last country in Europe to be converted to Christianity. In 1569, a common Statehood of Lithuania and Poland was set up. Soon thereafter Lithuania fell under the power of Tsarist Russia, but in 1918, it proclaimed its independence. During that time the Lithuanian constitution guaranteed the church the right to register marriages, births, and deaths. Religious education in public schools was compulsory, although there was no state religion. In 1940, when the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania, it lost a great part of its population to mass deportations to Siberia and forced migration to the West. Soviet authorities not only totally separated churches from the state but also from individual support. In 1990, Lithuania declared the restoration of the Lithuanian nation. The newly elected parliament guaranteed compensation for the losses suffered under the Soviet rule. The constitution of 1992 guarantees "freedom of thought, religion, and conscience." In 2004, Lithuania joined NATO and the European Union.

Generally, Lithuanian society is highly secularized, although, as in many post-communist countries, younger people are searching for some sort of spiritual fulfillment.

Catholics are the oldest continuously surviving religious institution which has played a dominant role in the development of Lithuanian society, especially during the long stretches of time when Lithuanians had no state of their own. During Russian imperial occupation it was forbidden to publish Lithuanian books in the Latin alphabet, and parishes smuggled books from Germany. Under the Soviet rule, the church served as a focal point of resistance and dissident activities.

Protestants also have contributed significantly to Lithuania's cultural development. The first book printed in Lithuanian was a Lutheran catechism, published in 1547. Protestant Lithuanians published many books of national awakening. Later, both Lutheran and Reformed Christians supplied political leadership out of proportion to their numbers in the population.

### Persecution under the Soviet Rule

In the 1930s, religion flourished in Lithuania; 95% of the citizens were Catholic, the rest being divided between Protestant, Jewish, and Russian Orthodox faiths, with freedom to worship open to all. Clergy were exempted from military service and received a small salary from the state government. In 1940, the Soviet Union annexed the country and attempted to destroy the presence of religion. Ministers and the religious community were persecuted, churches were desecrated, and the teaching of religion by the church was forbidden. Salaries and pensions were denied to clergymen, the sacraments of Marriage and Baptism, Communion and Confirmation were forbidden and declared superstitious. Many were imprisoned, exiled to Siberia and murdered for their religious work. Church buildings were confiscated, turned into warehouses, their beautiful interiors stripped bare, works of religious art, some dating back to the XV century—destroyed. The Cathedral in Vilnius became a picture gallery; St. Casimir's Church was turned into a Museum of Atheism; in Kaunas, the Benedictine Church stored old books, and St. Francis Xavier Church was a bookstore at first, and later, a gymnasium. Adults who continued to practice their religion lost their jobs. The teaching of religion in schools was banned.

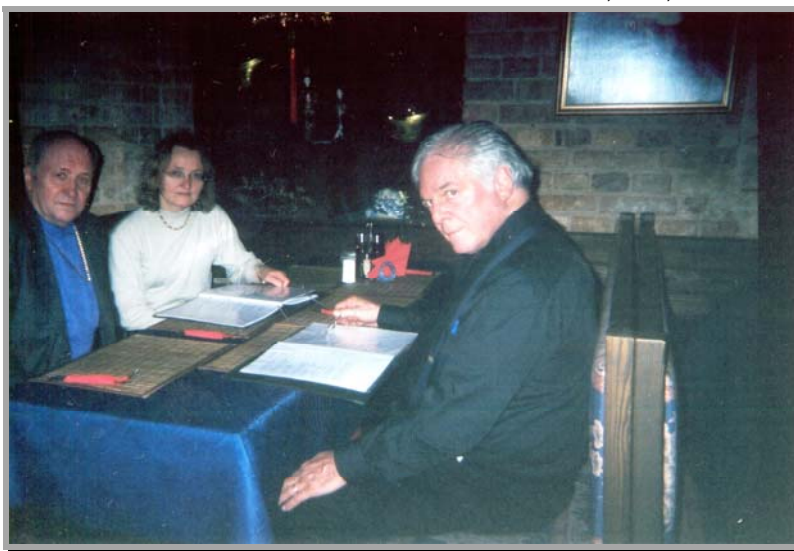
### After Communism

In the outset of democracy the increased importance of religion met with popular support, and with it came the realization that social prosperity and religious values are two sides of the same coin. Nevertheless, having re-established its independence over a decade ago, Lithuania is very different from the early expectations. Having adopted Western values and its own religious heritage, religion became the traditional decor of life often devoid of vital force to change and strong personal commitment.

### Religious Freedom

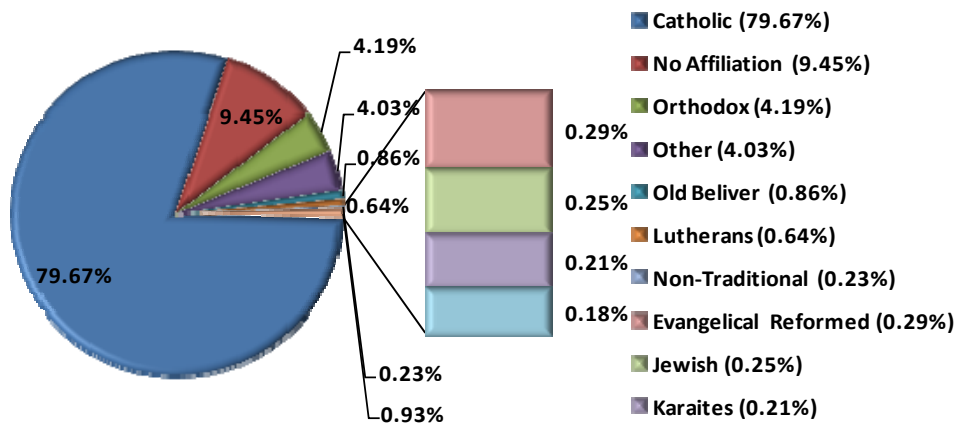
The Government at all levels seeks to protect religious freedoms and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private forces. The Constitution provides that a person's freedom to profess and propagate his or her religion or faith "may be subject only to those limitations prescribed by law and only when such restrictions are necessary to protect the safety of society, public order, a person's health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others." The Criminal Code protects religious freedom as well, prohibiting discrimination based on religion, interference with religious ceremonies and inciting religious hatred is punishable by imprisonment.

There is no state religion. However, some religious groups enjoy benefits not available to others, including government funding, the right to teach religion in public schools, and the right to register marriages. The law enables all registered religious groups to own property for prayer houses, homes, and other uses, and permits construction of facilities necessary for their activities. The Constitution recognizes "traditional" churches and religious organizations, as well as other churches and religious organizations, provided that they have a basis in society and their teaching and rituals do not contravene morality or the law. Government authorities acknowledge as traditional only those religious groups that can trace their presence in the country back at least 300 years and enumerates nine traditional religious communities: Roman Catholics, Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed Churchgoers, Orthodox Christians (Moscow Patriarchate), Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites.



Pastor Algimantas and his wife Zita, an ER Pediatrics surgeon, discussing the future of Reformed Church in Lithuania during a meeting with Dr. R. David Ludwick in Vilnius, Lithuania

## Denominational Representation



### LITHUANIA *(continued from page 3)*

"Traditional" religious communities and associations may register marriages, establish subsidiary institutions and joint private/public schools, provide religious instruction in public schools, and are eligible to receive government assistance. Their highest religious leaders are eligible to apply for diplomatic passports, their clergy and theological students are exempt from military service, and they may provide military chaplains. The Ministry of Justice does not require traditional religious communities and associations to register their bylaws. Traditional religious communities do not have to pay social and health insurance for clergy and other employees, and they are not subject to a value added tax on basic utilities. The law stipulates that the Government may grant state recognition to "non-traditional" religious communities that have societal support and have been registered in the country for at least 25 years. Nonetheless, nontraditional religions do receive some privileges from the Government, but not to the extent that traditional religious groups do. The Baptists are the only state-recognized "non-traditional" religion. They are entitled to perform marriages and do not have to pay social security and health care taxes for clergy and other employees. However, the Baptists do not receive the annual subsidies, tax exemptions, or exemptions from military service granted to "traditional" communities.

Following the restoration of the country's independence, the Government began returning religious communities' property confiscated by Nazis and Soviets. The law grants all religious communities equal opportunity to reacquire property once used for religious services and other activities. Some claims are still pending resolution.

The Constitution establishes public educational institutions as secular. However the Laws on Education permit and fund public school religious instruction only in "traditional" and state-recognized religious beliefs.

In practice parents can choose either religious instruction or secular ethics classes for their children. Schools decide which of the traditional religious groups will be represented in curriculums by requests from parents for children up to age 14 (after that, the pupil decides). The number of wholly private religious schools is relatively low. There are approximately 25 schools with ties to Catholic and Jewish groups, although students of different religious groups often attended these schools. All accredited private schools (religious and nonreligious) receive funding from the Ministry of Education and Science through a voucher system. Private Roman Catholic schools receive additional funds from the government to cover operational costs.

In 2007, public schools provided religious education to 272,912 Roman Catholics, 3,804 Russian Orthodox, 762 Evangelical Lutherans, 343 Greek Catholics, 225 Jewish students, 115 Evangelical Reformed Lutherans, 15 Old Believers, and 6 Muslims. A total of 222,233 students studied ethics.

#### Traditional Religions

Various surveys indicate high levels of confidence in the dominant Catholic Church. Alongside the media, the Church is the most reliable social institution. And yet all attempts of traditional religions to be a moral compass have had little impact on society. Many are more concerned with restitution of property than religious matters. Faith met the free society with great want in educated leaders and superficial knowledge of basic Christian doctrine. In addition, allying themselves with the civil power in favor of special privileges and economic incentives is still a more popular tactic of the traditional churches than the fostering of values of freedom and responsibility.

Roman Catholicism remains dominant and influential. According to a recent census, approximately 79% confess to be Catholic. As of April 2007, there are 685 registered Roman Catholic communities and associations (such as parishes, schools, and monasteries, including two seminaries). There is a small Greek Catholic community estimated 300 members.

There are other Christian confessions that boast long history in Lithuania. The Eastern Orthodox Church under jurisdiction of Moscow Patriarch, the second largest religious group, has approximately 140,000 members, with 52 communities. Old Believers, who came to escape persecution during czarist Russia, number 27,000 and have 62 registered communities.

With the Reformation, Evangelical Reformed Churches and Lutherans quickly spread in Lithuania. An estimated 20,000 Lutherans belong to 59 communities. The Evangelical Reformed community has approximately 7,000 members in 17 communities.

Groups of Karaites and Tartars were brought to Lithuania as personal security of dukes in 1397. These groups maintain their cultural and religious identity even today. Karaites speak a Turkic-based language and use the Hebrew alphabet. Their religion is based exclusively on the Old Testament and they are recognized as a distinct ethnic group. The seven Sunni Muslim communities maintain about 2,700 members.

Jews, who were persecuted in medieval Europe, also found shelter in Lithuania, having found good conditions for fostering their culture and faith. The Jewish community numbers approximately 4,000.

#### Non-traditional religions

The first period of de-sovietization established numerous new religious groups with society's positive reaction. The variety was thought to be a significant mark of democracy, though the positive attitude has disappeared in recent years, due to a change in the conception of the role of religion—it is a private matter which cannot influence one's public life. Therefore, if religion commits one to something it is not a healthy religion but rather fanaticism. The role of non-traditional groups is small and passive.

When one is to speak of "religious movements" in Lithuania, there are about 60 different non-traditional movements. They embrace more than 300 religious communities and groups. The population percentage involved in these religious communities (and this does not include all the smaller esoteric groups) is about 0.46 % of the population. The most numerous of these are the Full Gospel Word of Faith Movement, Pentecostals/Charismatics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and the New Apostolic Church.

#### Christian and Christian origin groups

The general decrease of the appeal of non-traditional religions during the last six years may not have affected so much the appeal of the native origin groups of esoteric nature, and the groups that do not display the communal structure. New Age type teachings are being spread by people who usually shun the label of religion and have quite a large client cult or audience cult type followings. With a significant percentage of Lithuanian Catholics holding beliefs mixed with eastern origin, popularized by the esoteric teachings, as reincarnation, it is hardly surprising.

## LITHUANIA *(continued from page 4)*

There are quite a number of Christian and Christian origin groups in Lithuania. Those are the largest non-traditional religious movements. One of the largest and most publicized is the Word of Faith church movement, which has counterparts in other parts of the world, but it has evolved independently of the similar phenomena in Sweden (Word of Life church movement), US (prosperity theology), and Latvia (New Generation churches). Though at first the movement followed closely the theology of the Swedish Word of Life movement, currently it is harder to attribute to any specific category; the movement refers to itself as a Christian charismatic non-denominational Church.

The first Word of Faith church started in 1988 and grew dramatically, increasing to 5,000 members in 1992. The next few years were followed by a tide of a negative publicity about the movement: blaming it for the suicides of a few members, financial exploitation of the members, etc. The negative publicity decreased the appeal of the movement, and raised the public awareness of new religiosity. The authenticity of charges against the movement were questioned; however, the coming years saw gradual decrease in membership of the movement – the number of adherents in 1998 was about 2600, with about 56 communities, the largest of those being about 800 members.

The movement of New Apostolic Church is perhaps the biggest non-traditional movement in Lithuania, which in part is due to the high degree of adaptation to Lithuanian culture. The movement's first communities were founded by German missionaries in 1991, are still very dependent on the missionary resources, but have also spread throughout Lithuania with 45 communities and about 4,000 people attending religious services. The number of people attending services has not been decreasing.

Jehovah Witnesses are another large Christian origin movement in Lithuania, far outnumbering the Mormon community (3,400 and 2,500 in weekly attendance respectively). The Jehovah Witnesses are currently quite a controversial movement, due to their position on blood transfusions often discussed.

By far the most controversial Christian origin group is the Unification movement, having at most 50 active members. It is well known in Lithuania because of its public campaigns "Pure Love" and street fundraising. Media attention to the movement's activities is very high, and the unwillingness of members to tell people who they are during street fundraising is quite striking.

Baptists and Pentecostals are strong Christian movements in Lithuania, with Adventists following close.

### Eastern and oriental origin groups

One of the first Eastern origin groups in Lithuania was the Society for Krishna Conscience. The first adherents appeared in Lithuania in early 1980's, though persecuted a lot by the Soviet regime. The movement and its ideas spread mainly among artists at first. Today the Society for Krishna Conscience counts 3,400 members and 12 communities, being the largest eastern origin group in Lithuania. The other movement to gain much favorable attention even in the Soviet years was the Sathya Say Baba movement, impressing the public by promotion of peace and unity of all religions. The movement is often perceived as inter-religious, and the people involved usually identify themselves as Catholic. There are a few Buddhist groups and Zen communities in the country – Kwan Um Zen, Tibetan Buddhist, Karma Kagyu communities. Eastern type movements seem to be keeping their numbers – the number of the adherents in the Buddhist communities currently is higher than 200, with about 7 communities established.

Osho meditation centers, following the Rajneesh teachings is another movement, drawing a lot from Eastern sources. There are three centers and 100 adherents of the movement. The Ministry of Justice has refused to register Osho meditation centre "Ojas" in Vilnius, motivating its decision on the grounds that "Ojas" does not conform to the model of religious community described in the Law on religious communities and associations, and has some questionable requirements for those who participate.

The Oriental origin Baha'i movement numbers about 100 adherents and 6 communities, none registered yet.

### Neo-pagan groups

The pagan religion of Lithuania contains many interesting Gods - including a god of Beer and a god of Marijuana. There are two types of neo-pagan groups in Lithuania. The first one is Romuva, started by Jonas Trinkūnas in 1967. It is aiming at regenerating ancient pagan beliefs and religious practices of Lithuania. According to the movement, the pagan gods of Lithuania are alive and well. Furthermore, the influence has now spread to America. The symbol of Romuva is a stylized oak tree, representing the axis mundi, or "world tree," known in Lithuanian mythology as "tree of life." In Soviet times, this movement was presenting itself as a cultural society, fostering Lithuanian folklore and history, but after the 1990 it re-emphasized its religious nature.

The movement has three communities and 100 adherents. Although small, it has a very positive public image. The beliefs of Romuva are quite difficult to describe – the "holy" is found in "dama" (Lithuanian for "harmony"), which should be the highest aspiration of the people of all faiths. Romuva claims it does not negate other religions. This claim is perhaps best understood in light of very flexible doctrinal formulations with the emphasis of the experience of the "holy" in songs and folk festivals, inherited from ancient times. Though gods are often mentioned, sometimes one can get an impression that they are literally understood as mental projections of some immanent spirit in nature and human beings.

The other self-professedly pagan group, Society of Lithuanian pagan faiths "the Old Sorcerer", combines concepts from science and different religions to create a teaching that many consider gibberish. The group has tried to register as a religious community at the Ministry of Justice, but so far with little success.

### Spiritualist/psychic, esoteric groups

The Church of Scientology is perhaps the best-known of the Spiritualist/psychic groups in Lithuania. There is no branch of the Church of Scientology itself, but there is a Dianetics Center registered as a social organization in Vilnius. The Center started its activities in 1995, and since then has become one of the most controversial religious organizations in Lithuania, drawing criticism both from the society, religious studies specialists and the government. The newly set up government commission, aiming at the coordination of the activities of government institutions in implementing the recommendation of the Council of Europe "Illegal Activities of Sects" in its August 22, 2000 meeting decided to prepare publicly available materials on the Church of Scientology along the lines of the Council of Europe recommendations. This would be a move without a precedent in Lithuania's recent history.

Other well known but more mainline group in Lithuania is the Parapsychology Academy in Vilnius, with a branch in Kaunas, consulting people with different problems and publishing a lot of materials of esoteric nature, including a monthly magazine. There are quite a number of smaller societies like that. Those also shun being described as religious, rather trying to describe their beliefs in scientific language. The society of Rerich, working closely with a Lithuanian origin society of Vydūnas

*Rev. Algimantas recognizes that with religious freedoms comes the responsibility to guard God's people from false teachings, and the only way to do this is through sound biblical teaching and preaching (on photo: a church service in the Reformed community in Papilys, Lithuania)*



# LITHUANIA *(continued from page 5)*

should also be mentioned, though those would also avoid being labeled religious.

## Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In April 2006, the Government allocated \$1,310,000 (3,279,000 litas) to traditional religious communities for capital costs associated with houses of worship, schools, and other facilities. No other religious communities received this type of support, but funds from municipal or other government sources may be available for their use. The state additionally funds social security and health care contributions for spiritual leaders of traditional and state-recognized religious communities. Other religious communities must pay for these benefits on behalf of their spiritual leaders.

For the fifth consecutive year, Parliament deferred granting "state-recognized religion" status to the United Methodist Church of Lithuania, the Seventh-day Adventists and the Pentecostals.

As of this moment there were no substantiated reports of major active religious intolerance or persecution. However, there have been reports of vandalism and some members of religious minorities occasionally were targets of acts of intolerance, such as insults. Anti-Semitic attitudes have been steadily growing but are currently curbed by the government.

All in all, the state continues to engage in efforts to foster religious tolerance and understanding.

## Closing observations

Undoubtedly we are living in the times of changes - the contemporary world is full of contradictions in the different aspects of its social reality. The sphere of religion might be called one of the most varied in forms. The prognosis about the retreat of religion to the periphery of the social reality shows few signs of being fulfilled. Furthermore, religious interest has re-emerged, both within the traditional form and a few innovative forms.

Religious situation of Lithuania in the context of Western world is distinguished by its unique central location, with ties to the West and to the East of Europe. Historically, it is a Christian country, with almost 600 years of Christianity. It is also unique in the timing of our efforts to plant the seeds of new Reformed foundation that has been systematically undermined during the Communist era and now by the powerful influence of European secularism, materialism and individualism on the one hand, and spiritualism of shallow theology and cultic legalistic simplicity on the other.

Although the majority of Lithuanians declare religious affiliation, the European Value research conducted in recent years revealed that 76 percent of population believed in life after death, 43 percent believed in reincarnation, 79 percent believed in telepathy, 33 percent were reading horoscopes every week. Researchers of religion distinguish different forms of nonofficial religion - variety of superstitious and magical beliefs and practices, beliefs in paranormal occurrences, (i.e.

events outside the usual range of experiences). "Occult" practices should also be attributed to the sphere of nonofficial religion. Various secret organizations like freemasons, Rosicrucian's order and cabbalistic groups are to be considered a part of nonofficial religion, too. In these groups mystery and awe surround the esoteric knowledge protected by the secret society and its protection promotes solidarity of the group. The other element of esoteric culture that might be found in nonofficial religion is astrology.

In the early 1980's most of the elements of nonofficial religion received a new boost in the Western society facing the coming new millennium. With the reference to the message of coming of new era the new movement was called "New Age". Its syncretism has questioned former typologies of new religiosity. There are still debates about its definitions; because it hardly corresponds to what we are used to call a new religious movement, the term of sect or cult doesn't fit in this case either.

Presented with this awareness of spiritual battleground in Lithuania, one should no longer remain complacent regarding our mission of sound biblical teaching and theological education. When the opportunity is there, it is there not because it just happened to be there on its own, but because it has been ordained so. In light of this, now that you are more familiar with it, hear the call to be used by Him as He has been preparing you all these years. There is not only one way to do missions. Prayers, financial support, teaching trips, spreading the word of mission efforts are only some of the many different ways in which you can participate and extend your helping hand to brothers and

sisters in Christ to show our unity in Christ, to let them know that they are not alone in their work of building the Church on a solid foundation. Although, Lithuania today is open to Christianity, it has not been easy for Christians there. With religious freedom come competitive and money driven cults and religious groups snatching away the sheep. One of the major shortcomings is lack of theologically educated Christian leadership. Many Reformed communities are in great need of pastors and teachers. For this reason ITEM is involved in the mission of training national Christian leaders by establishing a theological school there and providing professors and funds to make a long lasting impact on Christian community and society at large.

*"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."* 1 Cor. 3:6-9

**Andre Bouravnev, October 2007**

Source Materials Used: [www.nationmaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com); History of Christianity in Lithuania from Wikipedia; Religion and the Churches in Modern Lithuania; [www.send.org/lithuania](http://www.send.org/lithuania); International Religious Freedom Report, Winter 2007; [www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/)

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