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Editorial (Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe: Volume 19, Number 5)

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EDITORIAL

By the end of the 1960s, the ecumenical world had reached the point of giving broad affirmation to a commitment to Christian mission on six continents, to seeking a 'common witness' that avoided proselytization (in its negative meaning) and to take a more differentiated view of newer religious movements that did not quite fit established patterns. At the end of this century, however, numerous spokespersons for Eastern Orthodoxy have been protesting what they claim is shameless proselytism by Protestants and Catholics, and seeking new legal protections. Indeed the Russian legislation on religion of 1997, variations of which other countries in the region have been following or considering, is generally viewed as 'anti-missionary' legislation. That includes the notion that new religious movements - imported or indigenous - represent a danger to society.

This issue offers the results of further research and reflection to help think through the issues and to sort out impressionistic claims from careful scholarship. Many of the essays in a book edited by John Witte, jr. of Emory University and Michael Bourdeaux of Keston College [see review this issue] emerged from a larger project funded by the Pew Foundation, to examine the problem of proselytism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Other essays will appear in future publications. In this issue and a later one we are able to offer several articles that concentrate on the Ukraine.

The article by Ploky provides a review of the impact of two changing models of Ukrainian nation-building on church state relations, and examines the notions of freedom of conscience that underlie it. It provides a different perspective for understanding what is at stake in the conflicts between or among several Orthodox and Uniate Churches claiming Ukrainianism. Secondly, whether the reader will follow the way Filipovich groups Christian and other religions as New Religious Movements (NRMs) matters less than the extensive and valuable information about such groups that she provides.

It should be clear to our readers that the issues surrounding proselytism are complex, and will not go away either easily or quickly. They call for more attention to specific contexts, and to notice the diversity of approaches to Christian renewal evident among leaders within not only Orthodoxy but also within the other Christian confessions and the reasons for them. In a sense, the end of this decade of mission activism invites stocktaking.

Walter Sawatsky

***PLAN TO ATTEND CAREE CONFERENCE AT THE INTER-CHURCH
CENTER, RIVERSIDE AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY, MARCH 10-11, 2000.***

Details coming in CAREE communicator and following issue of REE.