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## **"YAROVOY LAW" STRUCK THE PROTESTANTS: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE HISTORIAN OF RELIGIONS, ELENA GLAVATSKAYA**

Elena Glavatskaya is a professor of history at Ural Federal University in Yekaterinburg, Russia. She has defended her Kandidatskaya dissertation in 1992 and her Doktorskaia dissertation in 2005 at the university. She has also led several research projects focused on the religious landscape of the Urals and Siberia and is currently leading the research project, "Ethno-religious and demographic dynamics in mountainous Eurasia around 1900," supported by the Russian Science Foundation. Her latest articles are "Nobody Pressed Hard, and People Listened to the Message of the Kingdom," "Jehovah's Witnesses» of the Sverdlovsk Oblast: a historical and anthropological research," published in *Quaestio Rossica*, and "Religious Landscape in Post-revolutionary Russia. The Case of Ekaterinburg," published in *Transilvanian Review*. She also serves as an advisory editor for *Occasional Papers in Religion in Eastern Europe*. She was interviewed by Sergey Belyaev, a representative of the information agency "Politsovet.ru" in January 2018.

In July 2016, Russia adopted the so-called "Yarovoi law"— a group of "anti-terrorist" laws that set new prohibitions on various spheres of society. These restrictions affected religious life; administrative responsibility was imposed for violating the regulations of missionary activity (Article 5.26 of the Administrative Code of the Russian Federation). The authors of the law indicated this item was directed against the preachers of radical Islam. However, over the past year and a half, the responsibility under Art. 5.26 CoAO of the Russian Federation mainly involved Protestants of the evangelical movements (Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals, Methodists). In particular, on three occasions in 2017, the penalty for violating this article was imposed on the community of Pentecostals in Nizhny Tagil.

Elena Glavatskaya, a professor at Ural Federal University with a doctoral in historical sciences and a specialist in the history of religions in the Urals, discussed with the information agency "Politsovet" how the "law of Yarovaya" affected the Protestant communities.

- *Elena Mihailovna, to begin, it would be desirable to understand what does the evangelical movement represent as a whole?*

- As a member of the academic community, when we talk about religion, be it Protestants or any other religious group, I prefer to use the term "religious denomination."

- *What does it mean?*

- This term means historically-formed religious movements, communities or groups. That is— all the great variety that hardly lends itself to rigid classification. In itself, the term "religious denomination" is neutral, it does not carry a negative meaning in advance, and does not offend anyone. Regardless of whether this or that group is the religion of the majority or minority—they are all denominations that satisfy the spiritual needs of a certain part of the population in a certain historical period. In this regard, all religious trends are absolutely equal.

- *Is there a significant difference between such branches of Protestants as Lutherans, and for example, Baptists or Pentecostals?*

- The origins of the variety of Protestant churches lie in the sixteenth century and have one root—the Holy Scripture of all Christians—the Bible and the Gospel. The need for the reformation of the Catholic Church was understood by many deeply religious people. They were not satisfied with the organization of the church, its leadership and their answers to important questions it offered on behalf of the whole church. Preachers among the most active and

educated priests, who sought and found in the text of the Holy Scripture other answers than from those society received, became leaders of new religious communities. The difference between them was the time of their creation (there is a time span of almost 400 years between the famous theses of Martin Luther and the appearance of Pentecostals), details of their interpretation of the Holy Scripture and their historical destinies. Many Protestant trends disappeared at the turn of the –sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, as their supporters were physically destroyed by the authorities. Others were able to become state religions (Lutheranism is the state religion in Scandinavian countries). Since the foundation of the Protestant Churches is the Gospel (hence why the common name is evangelical), the differences in the details of specific practices have not always been easy to discern. For example, it is almost impossible to separate the Baptists and Evangelical Christians who appeared in the Urals at the beginning of the twentieth century. People followed the leader and often moved from one group to another.

### **The Emergence of Evangelicals in Yekaterinburg**

*- How long ago did the evangelical communities in the Urals exist and how did their first representatives come to be here?*

- Initially, there were not many of them. Most often, representatives of evangelical movements found themselves in the Urals as a result of exile. According to the census of 1897, in the Perm province, which included the Yekaterinburg county, there were about a dozen Baptists: ten women and two men. Evangelical communities were concentrated in the western provinces of the Russian Empire but the events at the beginning of the twentieth century influenced their

numbers and distribution. The catalyst was the manifesto of 1905, when freedom of religion was declared, and then the February Revolution of 1917, which abolished all restrictions on religious grounds.

An important factor that influenced the development of evangelical communities was the First World War. During their stay in the western territories, Russian soldiers had a chance to get acquainted with Protestant churches, their teachings and practices. This concerned prisoners of war in particular, who were supported by representatives of evangelical churches, since social work happened to be one of the main features of these denominations. The "Salvation Army" movement played a particularly big role, especially in 1917, when the support of Russian prisoners of war by the state was reduced to a minimum. Subsequently, the "Salvation Army" contributed to the return of our soldiers from the German captivity home to Russia.

*- And through the prisoners of war, the evangelical movement spread in the Urals?*

- Among other things. In addition, war and revolution gave impetus to active population migration. As a result, a large number of people appeared in Yekaterinburg, who could relay, in detail, about new religious movements. The attractive part of these new movements for the Uralians, who were tired of the war, was the idea of pacifism—the complete denial of violence and the refusal to participate in military operations and military service. There was also the idea of universal equality and brotherhood, hard work, charity and self-improvement. Then there was last, but not least, the determined refusal to drink alcohol and smoke. These ideas and clear sermons were especially attractive to young people and women. Many called the 1920s the "golden age" of Protestantism in Russia. However, this did not last long. Starting in 1928, the

government began to harshly persecute the evangelical movement. There was no alternative to ideology in the USSR.

*- What was the increase in membership of the community of evangelical movements in this "golden time"?*

- In the city itself, up to several hundred. In any case, it was a drop in the sea of people, given that the population of Sverdlovsk in 1926 was 140,000, more than 80 percent of whom professed Orthodoxy. During the Soviet era, Protestants continued to stay in the Urals as a result of the deportation of former *kulaks* (rich farmers) during the complete collectivization and mass deportations from Western Ukraine and the Baltic republics after the accession to the USSR of new western territories in 1939. Then, during the Great Patriotic War, the Germans from the Volga region were forcibly relocated to the Sverdlovsk region, among which were Lutherans, Baptists, Mennonites, and Evangelical Christians. In conditions which involved forced relocation, heavy physical labor and separation of families, religious feelings increased. This also affected those who were formerly far from the faith. There were so-called "barrack communities", whose members celebrated Christmas, Easter and other Christian holidays. All they could do under those conditions was to support and encourage each other, to sing religious hymns.

*- As it is known, in 1943, religious organizations were granted relief. Were Protestants affected by it?*

- No, as far as I know, changes in politics have only affected religions for the majority population of the area: Orthodoxy and Islam. In the postwar period, a new offensive against Protestants began. Baptist preachers and Pentecostals, who were absolutely law-abiding citizens, fell under repression at that time. For conducting preaching activities or for trumped-up charges of espionage, they were sent to camps for five to ten years and longer.

*- Since when did the revival of evangelical movements begin in the Urals?*

- Throughout the country, particularly in the Sverdlovsk region, religious revival, in all its variants, began in the 1980s, which included evangelical churches. In the development of the evangelical movement, an important role was played by ethnic Germans from among the migrants who came to the Urals, and their descendants. For them, the revival of religion meant the revival and maintenance of ethnic self-awareness, which was extremely important in the conditions of the collapse of the Soviet Union. After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the opening of the borders, local communities were able to establish contacts with foreign Protestants. Those, in turn, sent missionaries and pastors, and helped build churches and revive religious life in the Urals.

### **Attitude towards religious minorities is deteriorating**

*- How many in the Sverdlovsk region today are members of the evangelical movements?*

- It is unfortunately impossible to establish an exact number. First, many communities arise and then disintegrate. In addition, not all of them are registered. Some were not able to achieve this,

others do not see the need for it, believing that religious activities are their own business. Secondly, in 2016 to 2017, evangelical movements suffered a significant blow from the local authorities, which complicated the process of scientific research on the activities of these communities, and their composition and strength. Making a broad estimate, I can assume that in the Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg) region, there are up to several hundred communities and groups of various Protestant denominations, which comprise of up to several thousands of believers. Again—a drop in the sea, given that there are more than four million people in the region.

*- How does the relationship of evangelical communities evolve with other faiths and the local population?*

- In my opinion, it is predictable. Everything depends on the leadership of the diocese and the position of the local authorities. According to our research and observations, attitudes toward representatives of religious minorities, with the exception of Lutherans and Catholics, have been systematically deteriorating since 2004. The situation was especially aggravated in 2016. By the way, sociologists conducted a study in 2004 on how the active coverage of the judicial process against a religious organization in the media affects the attitude of the population towards it. It turned out that regardless of the final decision of the court, even if no crime was found, the negative attitude towards the religious group sharply increases, after having been glorified in the media. Thus, the more frequently Protestants are accused of crime, the more negatively intense their situation becomes in regards to their activities, even if the court fully cleared them.

### **The Law Hits the Defenseless**



*- When the "law of Yarovoy" was adopted, its authors said that it was directed against radical Islam. In your opinion, why does it often affect Protestants?*

- In my opinion, this law has become a kind of trap: state bodies have a great desire to apply it, but in relation to radical Islam, it is very difficult to do this for a number of reasons. For example, you need to know the language in which sermons are preached and the literature is printed. And in the evangelical denominations, all activities are conducted in Russian. As a result, because of the zeal of the administrative apparatus, instead of a real search for threats, imitation of the work takes place. This, in turn, leads to the division of society. Protestant searches, book seizures, detentions, and so on, unnerve the law-abiding citizens. This also takes the authorities' attention away from the groups whose activities the law meant to limit. And, the image of the country greatly suffers.

*- Is it possible that the evangelical communities have been chosen for inspections because of their small number and insecurity?*

- I'm absolutely sure that it was for this reason that they were hit. After all, in the whole history of its existence, not one of these religious denominations has taken part in extremist, and more so terrorist activities. On the contrary, they try to cooperate with the state, they try to work where the state has not yet managed to establish services. All these inspections and courts negatively affect, among other things, charity work, organized by Baptists, Pentecostals and other communities.

- *According to the Protestants themselves, the reason for their persecution under Article 5.26 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation is a prejudiced attitude towards them by state bodies. How justified is this opinion?*

- It seems to me that the persecution of evangelists should not be viewed as part of a modern state policy. Rather, it is a personal initiative by local authorities. Part of the administrative apparatus is actively demonstrating its adherence to Orthodoxy, although officially, religion is separated from the state. Therefore, the personal beliefs of a government representative and unilaterally formed ideas about the history and activities of specific religious denominations may well influence his or her prejudiced attitude towards them.

- *What can be the basis for religious knowledge by government officials?*

- As a rule, the basis for their beliefs, alas, are publications created outside the academic community.

- *Can it be related to a private opinion by the clergyman of the dominant religion, which was expressed publicly?*

- Yes, among other things, this could affect the personal beliefs of the executor of the law. As a result, the very law regulating the religious sphere of life can be applied to the wrong address. So there are situations when they confiscate the Bible and other Christian literature, and religious denominations are mistakenly accused of extremism.

*- But personal convictions are not enough for a court to punish a religious organization. After all, examinations are being conducted.*

- It is so, but, unfortunately, the principle of selecting experts commissioned by authorities for the court cases, when expertise on religious matters is required, leaves much to be desired. To do this, not just any "religious scholars" should be involved, but the experts recognized by the academic community, who have publications on new religious movements in peer-reviewed academic journals. We have such experts in the region and in the district (UFD), but they have never been contacted for cases involving Protestants.

*- In November last year, Senator Yelena Mizulina announced the preparation of the so-called anti-sectarian law. According to her, more than 500 religious organizations will fall under its supervision. Given its history, with an article on missionary activity, can denominations such as Evangelical Christians suffer?*

- I would start with the fact that such a bill, alas, will bring harm to the whole society, regardless of religious affiliation. Such initiatives destroy the process of the formation of civil society and unity in the country. They strike at its international image. Such a bill will inevitably harm the numerically dominant religions in Russia (as was the case with the article about insulting the feelings of believers). Representatives of a few religious denominations, such as Evangelical Christians, will, of course, also suffer. And so the question arises, why do we, the Russians, have to suffer? I repeat: the number of evangelical denominations in the country is a drop in the

bucket, and history does not know of any examples of their participation in terrorist activities.

Translated from Russian by Mikhail Sergeev