

5-2020

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Recommended Citation

Elliott, Mark R. (2020) "Increasing State Restrictions on Russian Protestant Seminaries," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 40 : Iss. 4 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss4/2>

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INCREASING STATE RESTRICTIONS ON RUSSIAN PROTESTANT SEMINARIES

By Mark R. Elliott

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Introduction

Ivan Smirnov, I will call him, is originally from one of the western republics of the former Soviet Union, but presently studies in a provincial Russian Protestant seminary that authorities have attempted to close. Ivan believes it is providential his training has been able to continue: “Our God in His infinite grace has allowed our school to go on as an institution of higher education.” So far, courts have ruled three times that the Russian Ministry of Education and Science “did not have any credible evidence which would give warrant to the state to shut us down.” At one point the seminary’s license was revoked but later reinstated, for which Ivan is thankful: “Praise the Lord for His mercy and protection!”

This young seminarian comes from a believing family: “My grandmother was threatened with drowning for her faith back in the early days of Communism.” Later, “my father was not allowed to continue studies” even though he was an excellent student. Ivan relates he “chose to follow Christ at the age of 15,” and since the end of Communist Party rule he has had the opportunity to openly serve in his church and pursue a theological education. He considers his life busy but blessed: “I am currently serving in the counseling ministry in my local church as well as preach and lead a small group.” In seminary he has specialized in the study of the Old Testament and Hebrew, “so naturally the OT books of the Bible have had an impact on me.”

Ivan is aware of growing outside pressures on his church and his seminary: “There are some challenges from authorities in the life of the evangelical congregations...connected to the...[2016] anti-missionary [Yarovaya] law which has restricted the work of missionaries outside of the church premises.” As for his seminary, to date the difficulties have been felt “mostly in the Academic Dean’s office.” Students carry on with their studies, although interspersed with periodic “updates about the current status of the legal process.... The vast majority of...students come motivated to gain proficiency and get equipped in a particular area of ministry. The question of a diploma (accreditation, licensure, etc.) is secondary.”¹ Increasing state pressures upon Protestant seminaries to which “Ivan Smirnov” refers, is the subject of the present paper.

Summary of Statutes Affecting Protestant Seminaries

Russian Federation statutes applicable to the country’s Protestant seminaries are of two types: 1) broad-stroke legislation that regulates church-state relations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and 2) laws regulating higher (tertiary) education. The first category includes the 1990 Law “On Freedom of Conscience,” whose generous provisions were radically eviscerated in 1997 and 2016 legislation,² and the 2012 NGO Foreign Agent Law.³ The second category includes a 1992 statute legalizing private higher education,⁴ a 2004 presidential decree establishing the Federal Service for Supervision of Education and Science (Rosobrnadzor);⁵ a 2008 law “On Changes...Concerning Licensing and Accreditation of Professional Religious Schools,”⁶ and a 2012 Federal Law “On Education.”⁷

Notes:

¹ “Ivan Smirnov,” emails to author, 9 and 12 January 2020.

² Elizaveta Potapova and Stefan Trines, “Education in the Russian Federation,” *World Education News + Reviews*, 6 June 2017; <https://wenr.wes.org/2017/06/education-in-the-russian-federation>.

³ “Russia: Four Years of Putin’s Foreign Agents’ Law to Shackle and Silence NGOs,” Amnesty International, 18 November 2016; <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/russia-four-years-of-putins-foreign-agents-law-to-shackle-and-silence-ngos/>.

⁴ Dmitry A. Suspitsin, “Between the State and the Market: Sources of Sponsorship and Legitimacy in Russian Nonstate Higher Education” in *Private Higher Education in Post-Communist Europe: In Search of Legitimacy*. ed. by Snejana Slantcheva and Daniel C. Levy (London: Macmillan Palgrave, 2017), 157 and 160-61.

⁵ Decree No. 314, 9 March 2004, “On the System and Structure of Federal Executive Authorities;” https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/rus_e/WTACCRUS50_LEG_1.pdf. See also Konstantin Petrenko and Perry L. Glanzer, “The Recent Emergence of Private Christian Colleges and Universities in Russia: Historical Reasons and Contemporary Developments,” *Christian Higher Education* 4 (2005), 95.

⁶ “Putin Signs into Law a Bill on State Accreditation of Religious Schools,” *Interfax*, 29 February 2008.

⁷ No. 273-FZ. See Sergey Chervonenko, “Proverka ot Rosobrnadzora: itogi i mysli [Verification from Rosobrnadzor; Results and Thoughts], 23 August 2019; medium.com/@chervonenko/proverka-ot-rosobrnadzora-itogi-i-mysli-b340a766ffc7; Potopova and Trines, “Education,” 8; https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail%3Fp_lang%Den26p_isn%3D93529.

Church-State and NGO Legislation

As regards church-state legislation, the 1990 Law On Freedom of Conscience made provision for religious expression to an extent never before realized in Russian history and rarely achieved by any state worldwide.⁸ In the law's wake Russian Protestants, whose last Bible school Soviet authorities had closed in 1929, energetically, even frantically, launched numerous pastoral training programs with the help of coreligionists from abroad.⁹ The number increased from a handful in 1992 to 71 in 1999. (For the entire former Soviet Union the number of Protestant theological institutions increased from approximately 40 in 1992 to 137 in 1999.)¹⁰

1997 Duma legislation "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations Act," signed by President Boris Yeltsin, reversed the trend, introducing major impediments to the free exercise of religion.¹¹ However, two factors temporarily ameliorated some of the harshest restrictions imposed by this statute. First, uneven and sometimes haphazard enforcement was the rule in a state in which arbitrary administrative practice has always counted for more than the letter of the law. Second, Russia's Constitutional Court nullified some of the law's most repressive provisions.¹²

In contrast, 2016 legislation "On Combatting Terrorism" (No. 374-FZ), popularly known as the Yarovaya Law after the Duma deputy who introduced the bill, more aggressively infringes upon the rights of non-Orthodox religious adherents. Styled as an anti-terrorist measure, it in reality significantly curtails foreign and domestic missionary efforts very broadly defined and sharply undermines freedom of assembly and speech for all of Russia's non-Orthodox believers. President Vladimir Putin's much greater control over Russian courts, compared to Yeltsin, has

⁸ Mark Elliott, "New Opportunities, New Demands in the Old Red Empire," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28 (January 1992): 32-39.

⁹ Mark Elliott, "Protestant Theological Education in the Former Soviet Union," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18 (January 1994): 14.

¹⁰ *Spravochnik bogoslovskie uchebnye zavedeniya v stranakh SNG i Baltii* (Moscow: Assotsiatsiya "Dukhovnoe Vozrozhdenie," 199). See also Hunter Baker, "Russian Seminaries' Enrollment Woes," *Christianity Today* online, 8 November 2007.

¹¹ <https://www.global-regulation.com/translation/russia/2941574/on-freedom-of-conscience-and-religious-association-act.html>.

¹² Mark Elliott, "New Restrictive Law on Religion in Russia," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 5 (Summer 1997): 1-2; Lauren Homer, "Human Rights Lawyer Criticizes New Russian Religion Law," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 5 (Summer 1997): 2-3; "Commentary on the New Russian Law on Religion," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 5 (Summer 1997): 3-5; Mark Elliott, "The New Russian Law on Religion: What Is the Fallout for Evangelicals?" *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 5 (Fall 1997): 4-5.

also added teeth to Yarovaya restrictions upon minority faiths. In such a climate, Protestant seminaries were bound to suffer. According to one American respondent who previously taught in a Protestant seminary, the 2016 Yarovaya legislation had an immediate chilling effect upon widespread utilization of U.S. faculty in theological programs. Returning to Russia in early 2017, this individual was interrogated by an FSB agent for over an hour, one line of questioning centering on why Americans were needed as seminary instructors.¹³

Lastly, on the macro level, 2012 NGO legislation amounted to a fundamental assault on Russian civil society. Not surprisingly, branding private entities that receive financial support from abroad with the pejorative label of “foreign agent” led to the closure or reduced effectiveness of many Russian NGOs.¹⁴ Religious bodies, including Protestant seminaries, which to this day receive Western and South Korean financial assistance, are exempt from the “foreign agent” moniker. Nevertheless, state-controlled media have crafted a hostile public perception of these pastoral training programs based in part on their ties abroad. As a result, they live in fear that their official status might yet be tarnished with the “foreign agent” brush.

Higher Education Legislation

A review of educational legislation affecting Protestant seminaries begins with the Duma’s legalization of private higher education in 1992.¹⁵ The number of such institutions subsequently increased in just over a decade from 78 in 1993-94 to 409 in 2004-05, while private higher education enrollment increased in the same years from 70,000 to over one million, or roughly 15 percent of total tertiary enrollment.¹⁶

¹³ Maria Kravchenko, “Inventing Extremists: The Impact of Russian Anti-Extremism Policies on Freedom of Religion or Belief,” United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, January 2018; <https://www.uscirf.gov/reports-briefs/special-reports/inventing-extremists-the-impact-russian-anti-extremism-policies>; Alexei Markevich, “Mission of Russian Christian Education,” E. Stanley Jones School of World Missions and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary, 6 May 2019; Anonymous, email to author, 10 February 2020.

¹⁴ Katherin Machalek, “Factsheet: Russia’s NGO Laws,” Freedom House, [2013]; <https://freedomhouse.org>.

¹⁵ Potapova and Trines, “Education;” and Daria Platonova and Dmitry Semyonov, “Russia: The Institutional Landscape of Russian Higher Education” in *25 Years of Transformations of Higher Education Systems in Post-Soviet Countries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-52980-6-13; p. 345.

¹⁶ Dmitry A. Suspitsin, “Private Higher Education in Russia: The Quest for Legitimacy,” Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2007; Suspitsyn, “Between the State and the Market,” 160-61; Anthony W. Morgan and Nadezhda V. Kulikova, “Reform and Adaptation in Russian Higher Education, An Institutional Perspective,” *European Education* 39 (Fall 2007): 42; Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 15; and Platonova and Semyonov, “Russia,” 345.

For a host of reasons the state came to view this growth of private institutions as uncontrolled and problematic, as it also deemed the increase in the total number of higher educational programs, private and public, to 1,071 by 2007.¹⁷ State responses have included the presidential decree of 2004 and legislation in 2008 and 2012 previously noted. Rosobrnadzor, the federal higher education regulatory agency established in 2004, found its authority greatly enhanced by means of the 2008 and 2012 statutes. Konstantin Petrenko and Perry Glanzer (Baylor University) note that “The centralized nature of Russian higher education and the influence that the Ministry of Education exerts over a school’s curriculum would be surprising to anyone in the West.”¹⁸

With Putin publicly mandating improved quality and increased competitiveness in higher education, Rosobrnadzor was charged with responsibility for close scrutiny of the performance of all post-secondary institutions.¹⁹ By the 2015-16 school year the number of universities and institutes stood at 896, down 175 in a decade.²⁰ In 2014-17 alone Rosobrnadzor revoked 58 educational licenses, terminated the accreditation of 125 institutions, and ordered a halt to admissions in an additional 68 universities. Seventy of these programs reopened after correcting Rosobrnadzor citations, but the trajectory of tightened, potentially lethal oversight was clear.²¹ In 2015 Minister of Education and Science Dmitry Livanov referred to the process as a “clean-up” of higher education. His goal was a 40 percent reduction in the number of public universities and an 80 percent reduction in their branch campuses.²² The outcome has been the state’s ongoing merger of “inefficient” universities and the closure, to date, of roughly half of all branch campuses.²³

Livanov also specifically targeted non-public institutions: “We want to reduce private universities which provide low quality education.”²⁴ Even before Livanov’s tenure, his predecessor as Minister of Education and Science, Andrei Fursenko (2004-12), had publicly stated a goal of “a

¹⁷ Morgan and Kulikova, “Reform,” 57; and Suspitsyn, “Private Higher Education,” 1.

¹⁸ Petrenko and Glanzer, “The Recent Emergence,” 92.

¹⁹ Andrei Kortunov, “Russian Higher Education,” *Social Research* 76 (Spring 2009): 215-16. For the Rosobrnadzor website see obrnadzor.gov.ru/ru/.

²⁰ Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 15.

²¹ “Russia’s Higher Education Institutions are Disappearing,” khodorkovsky.com/russias-higher-education-institutions-disappearing.

²² “Russia’s Higher Education.”

²³ Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 5.

²⁴ “Russia’s Higher Education.” See also Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 4.

maximum 50 universities and 150 to 200 institutes of higher education.”²⁵ Rector Gennadi Pshenichny of Kuban Evangelical Christian University deems a 2015 Rosobrnadzor “audit” of non-state schools as “in reality...a state-sanctioned lever to decrease the number of private institutions of higher learning and funnel the students into state-sponsored/state sanctioned schools.”²⁶

Factors Behind Increasing Oversight: Quality Control

In analyzing factors behind increasing state oversight of post-secondary education commentators frequently cite the need for greater quality control. This explanation is the case not only with Putin and the Russian Ministry of Education and Science, but even with some Protestant theological educators. Aleksandr Spichak, academic dean of the Protestant Trinity Video Seminary in Kursk, writes, “Many secular universities are closed down...because many of them were just selling diplomas, and the government does want to improve the quality of higher education and get rid of fake institutions.”²⁷ Sergey Chervonenko, administrator at the interdenominational Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary, notes, “In the period of the 90s, there was no order in the country....There was no regulation of educational activities, so a great many educational institutions appeared that were distributing diplomas.”²⁸

The early post-Soviet period was indeed rife with for-profit as well as nonprofit programs of uneven quality, popularly characterized as “diploma mills.”²⁹ Professor Olga Zaprometova, holder of two earned doctorates and former dean of the Pentecostal Eurasian Theological Seminary, has taught and currently teaches biblical studies at a number of Moscow’s Protestant and Orthodox seminaries. Her opinion is that “the Lord is using these [Rosobrnadzor] visits to improve the educational level of Protestant seminaries.” She adds that professors need to teach only in their fields of expertise, that faculty need to be engaged in professional growth and development, that administrators need assistance in honing their competencies, and that future pastors need instruction in proper command of the Russian language. When asked if increasing

²⁵ “Russian Education Minister Calls for Pruning Vast State Higher-Education System,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 25 July 2008.

²⁶ Gennadi Pshenichny, email to author, 1 November 2019.

²⁷ Aleksandr Spichak, email to author, 11 December 2019.

²⁸ Sergey Chervonenko, email to author, 23 August 2019.

²⁹ John A. Bernbaum, *Opening the Red Door: The Inside Story of Russia’s First Christian Liberal Arts University* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 190.

state oversight of higher education, including Protestant seminaries, was part of an overall government strategy to bring all sectors of Russian society under closer supervision, Zaprometova responded,

I am not so sure about it, but it is a wise strategy, because there is no supervision of the Christian schools by church officials (board members, etc.), plus quite often board members are not qualified enough for this ministry, they do not have higher education or got it recently, even online or from the same Christian school, there are almost no Ph.D.s among church supervisors, and without supervision, especially in the academy, the quality of Christian education is drastically going down!³⁰

Factors Behind Increasing Oversight: Demographics

In addition to improved quality as a motivation for audits, other factors appear to be at play behind Rosobrnadzor's strict accounting of higher education in general and Protestant seminaries in particular. First, demographics come to bear on the issue.³¹ A 2005 estimate projected a Russian population decline from 144.1 million in 2004 to 50 to 100 million by 2050.³² As this population shortfall relates to education, between 2000/01 and 2014/15 the number of secondary school graduates fell from 1.46 million to 701,400, with a resulting drop in tertiary enrollment from 7.5 million to 4.2 million students between 2008/09 and 2014/15.³³ The projected decrease in higher education enrollments— “by as much as 56 percent between 2008 and 2021”—undoubtedly contributes to state measures to reduce the number of institutions—and associated costs—of higher education.³⁴ Thus, cuts in tertiary education expenditures and school mergers and closures stem in part from budgetary pressures. Educational funding has also been compromised by falling tax revenues due to declining oil and gas prices and Western sanctions triggered by Russian annexation of Crimea and its military intervention in eastern Ukraine.³⁵

One consequence of Russia's demographic decline is heightened competition for higher education enrollment and lobbying by public institutions to reduce competition from their private

³⁰ Olga Zaprometova, email to author, 9 October 2019.

³¹ Vladimir A. Geroimenko, Grigori A. Kliucharev, and W. John Morgan, “Private Higher Education in Russia: Capacity for Innovation and Investment,” *European Journal of Education; Research, Development and Policy* 47 (No. 1, 2012); <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-3425.2011.01509.x>; Perry L. Glanzer and Konstantin Petrenko, “Private Christian Colleges and Universities in the Former Soviet Union,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 14 (Spring 2006): 11; and Petrenko and Glanzer, “Recent Emergence,” 93.

³² Morgan and Kulikova, “Reform,” 55. See also “Russia's Natural Population Decline to Hit 11-Year Record in 2019,” *Moscow Times*, 13 December 2019.

³³ Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 4. See also Kortunov, “Russian Higher Education,” 214.

³⁴ Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 3. See also Kortunov, “Russian Higher Education,” 213.

³⁵ Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 2-4. See also Kortunov, “Russian Higher Education,” 208.

counterparts.³⁶ And as noted, the state has obliged by making life more difficult for non-public universities and institutes.

Factors Behind Increasing Oversight: The Predictable Goal of an Authoritarian State

In 2019-20 Protestant educators and leaders gave responses to the following survey question:

Is increasing Russian state oversight of private educational institutions, including Protestant seminaries, a justifiable effort to standardize higher education and ensure quality [or] part of an overall government strategy to bring all sectors of Russian society under closer state supervision?³⁷

Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary's Sergey Chervonenko answered, "Rosobrnadzor checks, in my humble opinion, are part of a program aimed at strengthening control over education." Yet he views this oversight positively because thereby "Religious universities have the opportunity to stand on a par with state universities."³⁸ The leader of one Protestant denomination related a "tough but successful" Rosobrnadzor inspection of his church's seminary, but did not consider it to be discrimination against non-Orthodox. Rather, he viewed it as part of the "overall trend in all sectors of society to have more [state] control."³⁹ Similarly, but less positively, Roman Lunkin, a scholar of religion in the Russian Academy of Sciences, contends, "The Russian state's policy on religious education has become a mirror image of its sweeping control over all social initiatives and non-governmental organizations."⁴⁰

Several personal observations are in order. First, it bears noting that authoritarianism has been a characteristic of the Russian state for centuries—under tsars, commissars, and now Putin. As regards Russian higher education today, sources are uniform in recognizing growing state involvement. Judging whether or not this increased oversight is for good or ill is where disagreements occur. Certainly, quality control has its place. However, augmented control does not necessarily guarantee quality. To the contrary, as coming case studies will attest, rigorous

³⁶ Kortunov, "Russian Higher Education," 208 and 216; Morgan and Kulikova, "Reform," 56.

³⁷ Mark R. Elliott, emails to Russian Protestant educators and leaders, 8 and 29 October 2019; 4 and 8 December 2019; 9 February 2020.

³⁸ Sergey Chervonenko, email to author, 23 August 2019.

³⁹ Anonymous, email to author, 25 October 2019.

⁴⁰ Roman Lunkin, "Theology for a Select Few: Soviet Déjà Vu for Russia's Protestants?" *East-West Church Review* 27 (No. 3, 2019): 11.

oversight can actually undermine quality through personal bias, arbitrariness, and corruption, faults greater controls ironically are meant to reduce.

One consequence of increasing supervision of higher education that the state, no doubt, finds especially useful is the greater ease it affords it in controlling the tertiary sector. Authoritarian rule in Russia has a longstanding penchant for consolidation for the sake of “efficiency.” Two examples may illustrate the point. In 1944 Stalin required the merger of the Evangelical Christian and Baptist denominations to facilitate the streamlining of Kremlin directives to Protestants through a single, centralized administrative structure. Second, in 2007 Putin managed the improbable absorption of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) into the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate, the very body that ROCA had anathematized for decades as a pawn of the Soviet state. It may be argued that Putin engineered this merger for much the same reason that Stalin created the Evangelical Christian-Baptist Union: for ease of control, in this latter case, to better coordinate the utilization of Russian Orthodox/Kremlin soft power abroad.

Factors Behind Increasing Oversight: Fighting Corruption

A commendable aspiration of Rosobrnadzor has been its fight against corruption in higher education. Transparency International’s most recent Corruption Perceptions Index (2019) ranks Russia 137th out of 180 countries, a drop from its 131st place out of 176 countries in 2017.⁴¹ Corruption has been a widely recognized feature of Russian life for centuries under both tsars and commissars. The tsarist era is replete with accounts depicting bribery and corruption as both corrosive and commonplace, including *Journey for Our Time* by French memoirist the Marquis de Custine (1839); *The History of a Town* (1870) and *The Golovlyov Family* (1876) by satirist Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin; and most famously, *The Inspector General* (1836) and *Dead Souls* (1842) by Nikolai Gogol. Study of the massive scale of extra-legal economic activity in the Soviet era is associated especially with the pioneering work of Gregory Grossman, beginning in the 1970s.⁴² In

⁴¹ [transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/corruption_perceptions_index_2019](https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/corruption_perceptions_index_2019). On current state efforts to combat corruption in higher education see “Protivodeistvie korruptsii,” obrnadzor.gov.ru.

⁴² “The Second Economy of the USSR,” *Problems of Communism* 26 (No. 5, 1977): 25-40. Among the subsequent legions of studies of corruption in the Soviet Union see Konstantin M. Simis, *USSR: The Corrupt Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982); William A. Clark, *Crime and Punishment in Soviet Officialdom; Combatting Corruption in the Political Elite, 1965-1990* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993); Louise L. Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society; The Evolution of State Control* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Stephen Lovell, Aleena Ledeneva, and Andrei Rogachevskii, *Bribery and Blat in Russia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); James Heinzen, *The Art of the Bribe; Corruption under Stalin, 1943-1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

the post-Soviet era, some argue, corruption has reached colossal proportions beyond anything ever before endured in Russia. Since 1991 the nation's assets have been plundered for private gain on a massive scale by a consortium of mafia, state officials, past and present security service operatives, and newly minted billionaire oligarchs.⁴³

Corrupt practices in higher education, ubiquitous in the Soviet era, have continued unabated since the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ Elizaveta Potapova, research fellow of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, notes that post-secondary education "is particularly vulnerable to corruption" because most faculty are poorly paid, and many students "are willing to pay instructors for better grades, revised transcripts, and more."⁴⁵ Gennadi Gudkov, head of a Duma Anti-Corruption Committee, estimates that the bill for corruption in higher education may total the equivalent of one billion dollars annually. In Moscow alone, this Duma committee asserts, "each year 30 to 40 professors are caught accepting bribes in exchange for grades."⁴⁶

University admissions have been particularly susceptible to malpractice. Bribes to gain admittance to Moscow universities and institutes are estimated to have totaled \$520 million USD in 2008 alone, with individual student under-the-table payments up to \$5,000. In 2009 Rosobrnadzor made mandatory a nationwide standardized higher education admissions test aimed at eliminating fraud in the process, which did reduce direct bribes. However, corruption is said to continue through payments for covert distribution of test questions and post-exam correction of wrong answers.⁴⁷

Other corrupt practices in higher education include the sale of diplomas and plagiarized and ghost-written papers and dissertations. Some studies suggest that since the collapse of the Soviet Union 30 to 50 percent of Russian doctoral degrees in law and medicine have been

⁴³ Most stunning and comprehensive is Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy; Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014). See also Gilles Favarel-Garrigues, *Policing Economic Crime in Russia; From Soviet Planned Economy to Privatization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); and Vladimir Soloviev, *Empire of Corruption* (Tilburg, Netherlands: Glagoslav Publications, 2012).

⁴⁴ Morgan and Kulikova, "Reform," 59; Kortunov, "Russian Higher Education," 206.

⁴⁵ Potapova and Trines, "Education," 3. See also Anna Numtsova, "In Russia, Corruption Plagues the Higher-Education System," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 54 (No. 24, 2008), A18-A20.

⁴⁶ Nemtsova, "In Russia," A18-A20.

⁴⁷ Potapova and Trines, "Education," 12-13.

plagiarized and that 20 to 30 percent of dissertations have been “purchased on the black market.”⁴⁸ In the same vein, “a 2015 study by the Dissnet Project, an organization dedicated to exposing academic fraud, found that one in nine politicians in the lower house of the Russian parliament had a plagiarized or fake academic degree.”⁴⁹ A 2006 Brookings Institution study of Vladimir Putin’s 1997 dissertation speaks to the pervasiveness of fraud that is seemingly endemic in Russian higher education. Brookings fellows Clifford Gaddy and Igor Danchenko determined that in Putin’s dissertation “More than 16 pages worth of text [out of a nearly 20-page segment] were taken verbatim” from *Strategic Planning and Policy* by American economists William King and David Cleland. Even more disturbing than Putin’s plagiarism is the fact that “The scandal...led nowhere.”⁵⁰ Given these facts, is it possible for a plagiarist to succeed in superintending a significant upgrade in the quality of Russian higher education? More colloquially, can a fox guard a hen house?

Orthodox Advantages and Protestant Disadvantages

State dealings with Russian Orthodox seminaries, in comparison with Protestant seminaries, underscore the disadvantages the latter face. On the one hand, theological educator Zaprometova observes that Orthodox theological schools away from Moscow often face serious challenges from Rosobrnadzor. As a result, many Orthodox, as well as Protestant seminaries, have chosen not to seek state accreditation as too burdensome a process.⁵¹ As theologian John Burgess, author of *Holy Rus; The Rebirth of Orthodoxy in the New Russia*, has put it, theological educators of diverse confessions dread the weight of “heavy-handed bureaucracy” that accreditation entails. Illustrating the “reality of a highly bureaucratized society,” he notes that state authorities threatened Belgorod Orthodox Seminary with a fine for a minor infraction: its website was said not to be up-to-date.⁵² On the other hand, Orthodox institutions in Moscow which have obtained state accreditation, such as St. Tikhon Orthodox Humanitarian University and the Russian

⁴⁸ Stefan Trines, “Academic Fraud, Corruption, and Implications for Credential Assessment,” *World Education News + Reviews*, 10 December 2017; wenr.wes.org/2017/12/academic-fraud-corruption-and-implications-for-credential-assessment.

⁴⁹ Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 13.

⁵⁰ Olga Khvostunova. “Plagiarism-gate,” Institute of Modern Russia, 7 May 2013; imrussia.org/en/nation/453-plagiarism-gate.

⁵¹ Olga Zaprometova, email to author, 9 October 2019; Aleksandr Spichak, email to author, 11 December 2019.

⁵² John Burgess, phone interview with author, 16 September 2019.

Orthodox University of St. John the Theologian, have had no difficulty securing it, “probably due to their political connections and influence.”⁵³

Also to the advantage of Orthodox is the relative ease with which they obtain premises for instruction. The state, for example, has afforded St. Tikhon and St. John free or nearly free use of Moscow buildings that had been the property of the Orthodox Church before the 1917 Revolution. Rector John Ekonomtsev of St. John regretted how “very difficult” it was “to actually get a building free of charge.” The Patriarch reportedly approached Putin personally to help secure St. John’s building.⁵⁴ In contrast, Protestant seminaries have typically encountered protracted difficulties gaining permission to build, lease, or rent property at any cost. Protestant educators could only hope for the “troubles” Orthodox experience finding facilities. That government authorities called upon St. Tikhon University to write state standards for theological degrees, applicable to non-Orthodox, even Jewish and Islamic, as well as Orthodox institutions, is another indication of the Kremlin’s favoring Orthodoxy.⁵⁵ As Russian Academy of Sciences scholar Roman Lunkin notes, “It is clear from...state religious policy trends that officials often understand protection of the Russian Orthodox Church as necessitating discrimination of other religious communities.”⁵⁶

It may be argued that the Russian Orthodox Church enjoys the de facto status of an established church. Patriarch Kyrill’s frequent public appearances with President Putin and the panoply of legislative restrictions placed upon non-Orthodox faiths since 1997 form the context in which punitive state scrutiny of Protestant seminaries should be understood. In this author’s 2019-20 survey of Protestant theological educators and church leaders, three options were posed as possible explanations for “increasing Russian state oversight of private educational institutions, including Protestant seminaries.” Two of the three have been previously discussed: option one, “a justifiable effort to standardize higher education and ensure quality,” and option two, “an overall government strategy to bring all sectors of Russian society under closer state supervision.”

⁵³ Perry L. Glanzer and Konstantin Petrenko, “Resurrecting the Russian University’s Soul: The Emergence of Eastern Orthodox Universities and Their Distinctive Approaches to Keeping Faith with Tradition,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 36 (Spring 2007): 281. See also Petrenko and Glanzer, “Recent Emergence,” 90.

⁵⁴ Glanzer and Petrenko, “Resurrecting,” 281.

⁵⁵ Hunter Baker, “Christian Higher Education Goes to Russia,” *Christianity Today* online, 2 August 2007; Glanzer and Petrenko, “Resurrecting,” 273.

⁵⁶ Lunkin, “Theology,” 13.

The third option offered to account for impediments facing Protestant seminaries is to view them as part of state measures to discriminate against, and in some cases suppress, non-Orthodox faiths, in keeping with the close collaboration between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church. In a sentence, ample evidence exists to conclude that all three factors contribute to the challenges faced by Protestant pastoral training programs.

This is not the place to enumerate the myriad ways in which Russian state policies marginalize and state-dominated media malign non-Orthodox faiths, despite formal constitutional protections for freedom of conscience for all. The Russian Constitution explicitly states, “Religious associations shall be separated from the State and shall be equal before the law.”⁵⁷

Just one facet of the uphill struggle faced by Russian Protestants should suffice to illustrate the point. Compared to the thousands of Russian Orthodox parishes now in possession of churches returned to them by the state, Protestants and other non-Orthodox confessions frequently struggle to secure and hold on to places of worship. Roman Lunkin notes that “local officials prefer not to apply the 2010 Law on Restitution of Property of Religious Significance to Religious Organizations to churches other than the Russian Orthodox Church.” Examples abound. Old Believers have been denied the return of their church buildings in Kirov, St. Petersburg, Saratov, and their Dormition Church in Moscow. Similarly, Roman Catholics have been unable to retrieve Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Moscow, nor their previously confiscated sanctuaries in Barnaul,

⁵⁷ Mikhail Strokan, “Church-State Relations and Property Restitution in Modern Russia,” Washington, DC, Center for Strategic & International Relations, 18 August 2016; <https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/church-state-relations-and-property-restitution-modern-russia>, p. 210. Since the early 1990s the free exercise of religion in post-Soviet space has been a constant theme in the pages of the *East-West Church and Ministry Report* which I served as editor from 1993 through 2017. For a sampling of reporting on state infringements upon the constitutionally protected rights of Russian Protestants see: Victoria Arnold, “RUSSIA: 159 Anti-Missionary Prosecutions in 2018—List,” *Forum 18*, 7 May 2019; Victoria Arnold, “RUSSIA: Increasing Land Use Fines ‘a Lottery,’” *Forum 18*, 20 March 2018; www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2362; Roman Lunkin, “Do More Than Two Not Gather Together? Interview with Lawyer and Member of Council of Human Rights of the Russian Presidential Administration, Vladimir Ryakhovskiy,” *Religiya i pravo*, 6 December 2016; <http://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/161206a.html>; Lauren B. Homer, “Making Sense of the Anti-Missionary Provisions of Russia’s Anti-Terrorism Legislation,” *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 25 (Spring 2017), 1-7; Roman Lunkin, “Russia: Anti-Evangelism Law Used Against Foreigners Who Speak in Church,” *Human Rights Without Frontiers*, 22 September 2016; <http://hrwf.eu/russia-anti-evangelism-law-used-against-foreigners-who...>; U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2019*; <https://www.uscirf.gov/reports/>; U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Inventing Extremists: The Impact of Russian Anti-Extremism Policies on Freedom of Religion and Belief,” 2017; <https://www.uscirf.gov/reports-briefs/special-reports/inventing-extremists-the-impact-russian-extremism-policies>; U.S. Department of State, *2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Russia*; <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018...>; “Yarovaya Law Strikes Protestants; Interview with Historian of Religion Elena Glavatskaia,” *Ploitsvet*, 19 January 2018; <https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/180119c.html>; William Yoder, “A Commentary on Russia’s New Anti-Terror Legislation” 15 July 2016; rea-moskva.org.

Belgorod, Blagoveshchensk, Chita, Kirov, Krasnoyarsk, and Smolensk. Most egregious, the state has turned over various non-Orthodox houses of worship to the Russian Orthodox Church: more than a dozen former Catholic and Lutheran churches were handed over to Orthodox in Kaliningrad, the former Prussian city of Königsberg, and the same for a Catholic church in Belgorod. Lutherans have also unsuccessfully appealed for the return of churches in Krasnodar, Smolensk, Simferopol, Sudak, Yalta, and Evpatoria.⁵⁸

In contrast, Protestants, other than Lutherans, have few historic properties that would be eligible for restitution, though two secularized Baptist sanctuaries in Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg should be candidates.⁵⁹ Instead, Protestant struggles for places to worship typically have involved the denial of building permits, Orthodox pressure on local owners to refuse or to revoke lease and rental agreements, and local officials prohibiting the use of private residences for worship.

It follows predictably that in this general climate of state partiality toward Orthodox and discrimination against non-Orthodox, Protestant seminaries would suffer. Roman Lunkin well summarizes this point:

Educational institutions founded by other [non-Orthodox] faiths and denominations—above all, Protestants—function under the pressure of constant inspections, and have even faced closure. The campaign against such institutions form a logical part of the state’s policy of restricting non-Orthodox mission, banning worship services in private homes, and barring Protestant church construction. It would be strange, after all, if the authorities looked kindly upon Christians receiving higher theological education unimpeded, while at the same time placing fines on them and confiscating their property.⁶⁰

Conflicting Views on the Applicability of Religious Versus Educational Legislation Upon Seminaries

The precise legislative basis for Rosobrnadzor audits and penalties imposed upon Protestant seminaries is a matter of debate. Reporter Victoria Arnold, in a detailed treatment of the subject for the freedom of conscience news service *Forum 18*, contends, “Religious educational institutions are under no obligation to acquire state accreditation, and many have operated for years

⁵⁸ Lunkin, “Theology,” 13. See also Sophia Kishkovsky, “Russia to Return Church Property,” *New York Times*, 23 November 2010.

⁵⁹ Lunkin, “Theology,” 13.

⁶⁰ Lunkin, “Theology,” 11.

without it, including the Baptist and Pentecostal seminaries discussed here, the Catholic Church's Mary, Queen of the Apostles Higher Seminary in St. Petersburg, and the Lutheran Church Seminary in Novosaratovka, near St. Petersburg." Furthermore, Rosobrnadzor inspections are undertaken on the basis of "somewhat vague legislation [that] may be misapplied, e.g. in the two parallel systems of state-accredited and non-state-accredited religious educational institutions."⁶¹

Regarding 2018-19 audits of Moscow's Baptist and Pentecostal seminaries, Arnold wonders "why inspectors had treated the courses offered by these religious educational establishments as if they were state-accredited and therefore obliged to abide by state requirements, when according to the law...such institutions have the right to offer non-state-accredited programmes which must conform only to the standards of the responsible religious organization." The consequence, she argues, is "the possibility of disproportionate punishment for infractions which are minor or which institutions themselves insist they have not committed. Such punishments include suspension of admissions, suspension of activities, and revocation of licences—all of which arguably have a greater longer-term impact on an institution's functioning than a fine."⁶²

In contrast to *Forum 18's* interpretation, Russian authorities insist—and carry the day—that Protestant seminaries are subject to both 1997 legislation, "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" (125-FZ), as amended 19 times between 2000 and 2016,⁶³ and 2012 legislation, "On Education in the Russian Federation" (273-FZ). As Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary President Sergei Chervonenko relates, 2018-19 Rosobrnadzor inspections focused on provisions of 2012 "On Education" legislative requirements, "practically without touching or gently circumventing everything related to 125-FZ [the 1997 Law On Freedom of Conscience]." Chervonenko continues, "In practice, it turned out that some religious universities [and seminaries] were not ready for such a development of events and emphasized their religious status." Nevertheless, "Those [seminaries] that insisted that they were not bound by the requirements of the 2012 law proved to be mistaken."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Victoria Arnold, "RUSSIA: Obstructions to Protestant Theological Education 'Systemic, Intentional'?" *Forum 18*, 25 March 2019.

⁶² Arnold, "RUSSIA: Obstructions."

⁶³ <https://www.global-regulation.com/translation/russia/2941574/on-freedom-of-conscience-and-religious-associations-act.html>.

⁶⁴ Chervonenko, "Proverka."

A key mechanism for state (Rosobrnadzor) oversight of higher education is its authority to license and accredit.⁶⁵ A license permits an institution to conduct educational programs and to admit students, while accreditation allows an institution “to award nationally recognized degrees,” to extend military deferments to students, and to afford graduates the right to seek employment in the government sector and to pursue graduate degrees in state-accredited universities.⁶⁶

A series of 2008 Rosobrnadzor higher education inspections determined that many private sector programs, including many Protestant seminaries, were operating without a valid license, and as a result, were forced to close.⁶⁷ More recently, between January 2018 and March 2019, Rosobrnadzor conducted audits of 16 religious educational programs (two Russian Orthodox, three Muslim, three Baptist, two Pentecostal, one Adventist, and five additional Protestant). Inspectors recorded violations in all but one case.⁶⁸ Penalties ran the gamut: fines, suspended or revoked licenses, suspension of admissions, suspension of instruction, and revocation of accreditation. As Andrei Kortunov observed, “This dependency has been considered by the majority of the Russian educational community to be a liability, and all the history of the Russian higher education demonstrates continuous attempts of universities to achieve more autonomy from state bureaucrats.”⁶⁹

Victoria Arnold’s *Forum 18* reporting devotes considerable space to the consequences of 2018-19 inspections upon three Protestant institutions—Moscow Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (MTS), the Eurasian Theological Seminary of the Russian Pentecostal Union (ETS), and the interdenominational Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary (MECS).

Moscow Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christians-Baptists

Moscow Theological Seminary (MTS) has been the leading pastoral training program of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist (ECB) Union. Successor to the correspondence course permitted by Soviet authorities beginning in 1968, its residential instruction commenced in 1993 in Moscow in the ECB headquarters on Varshavskoye Shosse, shifting in 2002 to its own facility in a renovated

⁶⁵ Kortunov, “Russian Higher Education,” 204.

⁶⁶ Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 17; Lunkin, “Theology,” 11.

⁶⁷ Chervonenko, “Proverka.”

⁶⁸ Arnold, “RUSSIA: Obstructions.”

⁶⁹ Kortunov, “Russian Higher Education,” 204.

elementary school building. At the beginning of 2020 MTS was instructing some 375 students in Moscow and another 555 in eight additional distance learning centers across Russia.⁷⁰

Following an October 2018 inspection, Rosobrnadzor cited MTS for “gross violation of the requirements and conditions of a special permit (license),” leading to a court case against the school on 18 October. The seminary submitted responses to Rosobrnadzor citations on 19 November and 28 December. Meanwhile, on 27 December Moscow’s Perovo District Court found the seminary non-compliant and ordered a 60-day suspension of activities.⁷¹

In the midst of a follow-up inspection, 15-17 January 2020, a seminary appeal of the court decision failed. The suspension began on 25 January with the sealing of the building by bailiffs. On 15 February 2020 Rosobrnadzor also imposed a ban on new MTS admissions. Courts subsequently extended the suspension, including a prohibition on the use of the seminary building for any purpose. At this point the seminary reverted to a non-formal, non-credit instructional program back on the premises of the ECB headquarters building under conditions reminiscent of the semi-underground pastoral training of the Soviet era.

Most recently, on 27 February 2020, came word of a Moscow arbitration court’s revocation of the MTS license. According to the seminary’s stunned Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs Aleksei Markevich,

The main complaint of a “violation” of licensing requirements was the “incorrect” form of a document describing the teaching load, although this form was developed in accordance with the law.... Revocation of a license is an extreme measure, which the government uses when an organization, by its activity, grossly violates the law and threatens society, the state, or citizens. Evidently the judge saw in our seminary such a threat. Many ask, what is the reason for such a decision. I see it as a *carte blanche* that is given to the Russian bureaucracy and the lack of independent judicial procedures. But that is my personal opinion, a person who has tried for a year and a half to do everything to satisfy this bureaucracy [Rosobrnadzor], which turned out to be impossible.

Two months prior, in December 2019, perhaps in anticipation of a worst-case scenario, Rector Peter Mitskevich had written in a communication to the entire ECB denomination, “We want to

⁷⁰ Elliott, “Protestant Theological Education,” 14; Dale Kemp, email to author, 25 February 2020; russianleadership.org/our-ministry/. A goal for 2020 for Russian Leadership Ministries is to facilitate the opening of additional distance learning centers in Smolensk, Bryansk, Elabuga, and Krasnodar. *Moscow Theological Seminary Annual Report*, 2019.

⁷¹ Arnold, “RUSSIA: Obstructions;” Dale Kemp, email to author, 25 February 2020.

be obedient to God here. It is all in His hands. We will train people to be gospel servants whether it is unofficial in the church, or in an official seminary context.”⁷²

Mitskevich, who has served as rector of MTS since 2007 and as president of the ECB Union since 2017, has clearly been laboring under a formidable administrative burden.⁷³ His heavy workload, which also includes pastoring Moscow’s Golgotha ECB Church since 2004, means he may not always have been able to give sufficient attention to documentation that a highly bureaucratic Russian administration requires and that a truly fulltime rector would have been able to oversee. In addition, Roman Lunkin suggests, “Rosobrnadzor bureaucrats expect documentation to be drawn up by the experts they have recommended. Protestant institutions like the Moscow Baptist Seminary insist on their independence, however, and thus have ended up adopting a confrontational approach.”⁷⁴

To have survived intact in its bouts with the Ministry of Education and Science, Lunkin believes MTS leadership would have to have been “more polite and loyal.”⁷⁵ Rosobrnadzor, for its part, is increasingly combative towards any institution that fails to sufficiently conform. In an interview with Roman Lunkin, Dr. Mitskevich shared his belief that the climate of distrust of non-Orthodox fostered by the 2016 Yarovaya “Anti-Terrorist” Law helps explain the troubles faced by his seminary:

Any law can result in benefit or harm, and unfortunately the Yarovaya Law has brought much harm; it has in essence become an anti-missionary law that has instilled fear among believers and created problems for churches. I am a doctor by profession, and I often think about how not to cause harm but instead to help. Yet the first thought of our security agencies is usually to look for guilt and a concrete reason why someone may be prosecuted. The Church’s calling is to spread faith—that is what missionary activity is about. Yet how often are we not healed, helped, or warned here, but forced into a corner straight away, as when Rosobrnadzor suspended the activity of our Moscow Theological Seminary in early 2019. Our country must try to walk the path of prayer with God and trust

⁷² “Court Revokes License of Moscow Theological Seminary of Evangelical Christians -Baptists,” *Invictory.org*, 28 February 2020; translated in *Russia Religion News*; <https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/re/news/200228a.html>; Peter Mitskevich, “Words from the President – December 2019,” 28 December 2019; <https://baptist.org.ru/en/news/view/articles/1535153>. See also Lunkin, “Theology,” 11-12; Michael Thom, “Russia Shuts Down Baptist and Pentecostal Seminaries,” 2 April 2019; <https://baptist.org.ru/en/news/vies/article/153515>; <https://www.chvnradio.com/christian-news/russia-shuts-down-baptist-and-pentecostal-seminaries>. Markevich related to MTS professor Nikolai Kornilov that documentation required by state inspectors was amounting to a mountain of paperwork. Nikolai Kornilov, interview, 23 May 2019.

⁷³ William Yoder, “Peter Mitskevich, New President of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians -Baptists,” *China Christian Daily*, 12 June 2018; Roman Lunkin, interview, 22 May 2019.

⁷⁴ Lunkin, “Theology,” 12.

⁷⁵ Roman Lunkin, interview, 22 May 2019.

for one another, but we are ruled by suspicion, fear, and doubt. There is no desire for reconciliation; everyone is shut away from everyone else behind iron doors. The Yarovaya Law has become a law of intimidation that can be used at any moment against any preacher, whereas there should be an enlightened and respectful attitude towards religious believers.⁷⁶

A number of individuals interviewed by this author in Moscow in May 2019 expressed an opinion similar to one voiced by journalist Dr. William Yoder in March 2020, that MTS “had refused to do the necessary homework and instead chose to accuse the state. No one I heard in Moscow claimed there is a general, state-introduced closing of seminaries in the country. But my impression may be too optimistic.”⁷⁷ Whatever shortcomings MTS may have been guilty of in terms of paperwork, ongoing troubles with state inspections at a host of additional Protestant institutions would suggest a pattern of discrimination that goes well beyond one seminary’s purported insufficient attention to state higher education documentation requirements. This author is in receipt of too many communications from too many beleaguered Russian Protestant educators to believe otherwise.

In the wake of the late February 2020 court decision, Dale Kemp, president of Russian Leadership Ministries, which raises Western financial support for MTS, summarized the seminary’s present plight and prospects: “We have no accreditation; we have lost our license in Moscow; we are being pushed out into the churches, offering non-credit seminars.” In addition, fire marshal inspections in February-March 2020 generated citations that could cost the equivalent of \$50,000 to 60,000 to remedy—in a building to which faculty and students have no access. Still, Kemp noted, there has been no curtailment of MTS instruction underway online, via correspondence, or in its distance learning centers—trends in non-residential education well underway before the school’s present troubles.⁷⁸ As a last resort, “We are still going to appeal to European courts,” even though Russia often ignores their rulings.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Lunkin, “Theology,” 14. See also Peter Mitskevich, “Words from the President-February 2020,” 14 February 2020; <https://baptist.org.ru/en/news/view/article/1539124>.

⁷⁷ William Yoder, email to author, 14 March 2020.

⁷⁸ Over the past decade non-traditional instruction, especially online, has been a growing trend worldwide, now accelerating in the midst of the present corona virus pandemic [winter-spring 2020]. A recent survey of Evangelical seminaries worldwide documents the post-Soviet region of Eastern Europe and Central Asia as a leader in the movement. Paul Clark, “Survey on Online Theological Education,” Overseas Council, 2019, 4.

⁷⁹ Dale Kemp phone interview, 30 March 2020.

The Eurasian Theological Seminary

The Pentecostal Union's Eurasian Theological Seminary (ETS) has faced the same state scrutiny as MTS. Following an inspection 19-22 February 2018, Rosobrnadzor ordered ETS to correct cited violations by 22 March 2018. *Forum 18's* Arnold writes,

According to the record...on Rosobrnadzor's website, most of these related to how the seminary was run day-to-day, including an apparent lack of consultation with student representatives, lack of provision of sporting and cultural activities, and the absence of particular documents on its website."⁸⁰

Academy of Sciences religion scholar Roman Lunkin concurs with Arnold's assessment: "The misdemeanors of which the Moscow Theological Seminary stands accused are purely bureaucratic."⁸¹

Dissatisfied with ETS responses, Rosobrnadzor took the seminary to court, leading to a fine of 150,000 rubles (\$2,300) by Lyublino District Court on 25 April 2018, which was upheld by Moscow City Court on 2 July 2018. Meanwhile, ETS faced an unplanned Rosobrnadzor inspection 30 April-4 May 2018, which led to a suspension of ETS admissions on 1 June 2018, a suspension of ETS's license on 9 August 2018, and the annulment of its license on 23 November 2018, at which point the seminary was "obliged to stop offering certificated courses."⁸²

In contrast to the position taken by Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary's Sergey Chervonyenko that seminaries are subject to Rosobrnadzor's accreditation as well as licensing standards, Pentecostal Union lawyer Vladimir Ozolin has objected to Rosobrnadzor's

treating the [Eurasian Theological] Seminary's non-state-accredited theology bachelor's degree as if it corresponded to the degree of theology on the Education Ministry's formal "List of Areas of Higher Education Preparation – Undergraduate." This was despite the materials submitted to the inspection clearly indicating that the [ETS] course was intended for the training of clergy and church personnel and was therefore not subject to the same organizational and administrative requirements as a state-accredited programme.⁸³

An official with the Church of God (Cleveland), with which ETS is affiliated, writes that the seminary "did face some extreme inspections on short notice along with just about every other evangelical seminary in Russia." Fortunately for ETS, he writes, on 7 November 2019 the seminary

⁸⁰ Arnold, "RUSSIA: Obstructions."

⁸¹ Lunkin, "Theology," 11.

⁸² Arnold, "RUSSIA: Obstructions."

⁸³ Arnold, "RUSSIA: Obstructions."

received a new license from the Moscow City Department of Education and Science. Again, terminology is different, but we are still in operation. ETS currently gives training to about 850 people, including residential, extension, and online [programs]. It seems that the inspection of the seminaries in 2018 was only the first wave.⁸⁴

As a member of Russia's Public Chamber appointed by Putin in 2006, Bishop Sergei Ryakhovsky, head of Russia's second-largest Pentecostal denomination, is something of a de facto spokesperson for all of Russia's Protestant churches. Nevertheless, he appears to have been powerless to provide effectual cover on behalf of his denomination's ETS. Nor has his appointment by Putin to the Public Chamber impeded increasing numbers of threats to the property of Pentecostal churches in Oryol, Kaluga, Nizhny Novgorod, Novorossiysk, Krasnodar, Tatarstan, and Tula.⁸⁵ In the opinion of attorney Ozolin, state restrictions imposed upon Protestant seminaries are part of a more comprehensive effort to exert "pressure...on the non-traditional confessions."⁸⁶ The lengthy litigation being endured by MTS & ETS, along with the close state scrutiny of many other Protestant seminaries (and churches), is reminiscent of the concerted court effort over the years to disenfranchise Salvation Army ministry in Russia.⁸⁷

The 2016 Anti-Extremist Law

Forum 18's Victoria Arnold compiled a list of prosecutions in 2018 under the Yarovaya Anti-Extremist Law of 2016. Ostensibly directed at the threat posed by Islamic radicals, it in fact primarily targets Protestants. Of 159 known prosecutions in 2018 under this 2016 law, only 15 took action against Russian Muslims. In contrast, Protestants faced charges of unlawful missionary activity in 104 cases (50 Pentecostals, 39 Baptists, 5 Seventh-day Adventists, and 10 other Protestants).⁸⁸ The arbitrariness of Yarovaya Law enforcement is well illustrated by the fate of two churches in 2018 reported by *Forum 18*. The Good News Mission Pentecostal Church in Ufa, Bashkortostan, was fined 30,000 rubles (\$4,600) for *failure to display* its official full name at its entrance, whereas an Evangelical Christian-Baptist House of Prayer in the Perm Region was found

⁸⁴ Church of God, emails to author, 4 and 31 December 2019.

⁸⁵ Church of God, emails to author, 4 and 31 December 2019; Lunkin, "Theology," 13-14.

⁸⁶ Arnold, "RUSSIA: Obstruction."

⁸⁷ Ian Traynor, "Russian Court Lifts Salvation Army Ban," *The Guardian*, 6 March 2002.

⁸⁸ Arnold, "RUSSIA: 159." See also Yoder, "A Commentary;" "Yarovaya Law;" Kate Shellnutt, "Russian Evangelicals Penalized Most Under Anti-Evangelism Law," *Christianity Today*, 7 May 2019; and U.S. Department of State, *2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Russia*; <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/russia/>.

in violation of the law because it *did display* its full name outside the church. According to the court verdict, the ECB signage amounted to “missionary activity aimed at disseminating information about the beliefs of [the church] among other persons who are not members.”⁸⁹

The Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary

The interdenominational Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary (MECS) is no stranger to close state oversight. Founded by One Mission Society, a U.S.-based Evangelical mission agency, MECS was briefly shuttered by Rosobrnadzor in the summer of 2007 for alleged “fire violations and for failing to offer a quality education.”⁹⁰ MECS recouped and reopened, but it has continued to be the object of Rosobrnadzor inspections, most recently in October 2018. Being one of the last Protestant seminaries to face inspection in 2018, MECS drew lessons from the experience of others. According to MECS administrator Sergey Chervonenko, “Observing the results of the audit at one of the Moscow seminaries, we understood that the process would be difficult and tried to prepare as much as possible.” Harold Brown, OMS missionary and MECS board chair, characterized the most recent lead inspector as “tough,” but one who in the end upheld the school’s accreditation.⁹¹

Other Protestant Institutions

Representative of Protestant seminary challenges far afield from Moscow is the experience of the Pentecostal Chuvash Bible Centre. In 2007 state authorities shuttered this school on grounds that it “conducted educational activities without authorization” and allegations of fire and sanitation code violations. The school took its grievance to the European Court of Human Rights in 2008 and eventually won its case in 2014.⁹²

A Rosobrnadzor inspection of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist North Caucasus Bible Institute (Prokhladny, Kabardino – Balkaria Republic) on 27-28 June 2018 ended with citations for non-compliance with educational, sanitation, and fire safety standards. Prokhladny District

⁸⁹ Arnold, “RUSSIA: 159.” See also U.S. Department of State, *2018 Report*, 7.

⁹⁰ Baker, “Russian Seminaries’ Enrollment Woes.”

⁹¹ Brown explained that Alexander Tsutserov (St. Andrews University Ph.D.) is president of Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary (MECS), while Sergey Chervonenko (Asbury Theological Seminary D.Min.) is president of Evangelical Christian Seminary at the same location. Brown phone interview, 22 November 2019, and Brown email, 25 February 2020. Chervonenko explained the same arrangement to the author in a 21 May 2019 interview in Moscow.

⁹² “Biblical Centre of the Chuvash Republic v Russia: ECHR, 12 June 2014;” <https://swarb.co.uk/biblical-centre-of-the-chuvash-republic-v-russia-echr-12-jun-2014/>; Arnold, RUSSIA: Obstructions.”

Court imposed a fine of 150,000 rubles (\$2,300) on 27 August 2018. An additional inspection, 15-19 October 2018, led Rosobrnadzor to charge the institute and Rector Mikhail Chizhma with failure to rectify educational and other violations. In November 2018 Rosobrnadzor suspended the school's right to admit new students. By latest report the institute, nevertheless, continues to offer its educational program to the satisfaction of denominational if not state standards.⁹³

Also in November 2018 Kuban Evangelical Christian University (KECS) in Krasnodar had its license temporarily suspended. Originally founded as Lampados Bible College under the sponsorship of the U.S. Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination, this seminary's rector, Gennadi Pshenichny, nevertheless manages a hopeful note: "This past year we faced many challenges as the state education agency paid several visits to our campus. Still, God is faithful and we continue to work and study even though the future may at times seem uncertain."⁹⁴

Further Tightening of State Requirements

Sergey Chervonenko (MECS) anticipates that the next hurdle that Rosobrnadzor may erect is state verification of the degrees held by higher education faculty: "In the future they may well introduce requirements to confirm the level of teaching staff in Russia," an especially ominous prospect for Protestant seminaries.⁹⁵ In Russia's current anti-Western climate closer scrutiny of staff degrees does not bode well for these schools which depend heavily upon Western support and whose administrators and faculty so often hold theological degrees from Europe and the U.S. It is widely recognized that Western ties and support taint Protestant institutions and Protestants in general.⁹⁶ Case in point is Moscow's Russian-American Christian University (RACU), one of only two Russian Evangelical liberal arts programs to receive state accreditation, along with Zaoksky Adventist University near Tula.⁹⁷ RACU's hard-won accreditation, awarded in 2003, was

⁹³ Arnold, "RUSSIA: Obstructions;" Lunkin, "Theology," 12.

⁹⁴ Gennadi Pshenichny, email to author, 1 November 2019. See also "Rosobrnadzor Bans Acceptance of Students to Seminary of Evangelical-Lutheran Church," *Interfax*, 13 December 2019; interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=15405.

⁹⁵ Sergey Chervonenko, "Proverka."

⁹⁶ Gennadi Pshenichny, email to author, 1 November 2019; John Burgess, phone interview with author, 16 September 2019; Church of God, emails to author, 4 and 31 December 2019; Scott Cunningham, phone interview, 31 March 2020; Dale Kemp, phone interview, 30 March 2020; Gennadi Sergienko, interview, 24 May 2019; U.S. Department of State, *2018 Report*, 16.

⁹⁷ Mikhail Kulakov, *God's Soviet Miracles: How Adventists Built the First Protestant Seminary in Russian History* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993); Petrenko and Glanzer, "The Recent Emergence," 90-91.

lost in 2009, in good measure because Rosobrnadzor changed accreditation requirements to no longer credit faculty with Western doctorates in calculating the number of qualified instructors.⁹⁸

Russian Protestant seminary faculty are now even beginning to be required to undergo “state-recognized advanced theological training” leading to a “diploma in theological pedagogy” from a secular university, “as absurd as it sounds.”⁹⁹ Compounding this imposition forced upon Kuban Evangelical Christian University, the secular institute affiliated with Kuban State University that offers this new diploma has already doubled the tuition for this mandatory training.¹⁰⁰

“Audits” of the Auditors: From Sympathetic to Strongly Critical

On balance, Sergei Chervonenko (MECS) desires to give state auditors the benefit of the doubt:

After a scheduled inspection of Rosobrnadzor [RON], we reported on the implementation of the requirements and received an unscheduled inspection of RON with a new staff of inspectors. This taught us that different experts can interpret the requirements in different ways; one expert will say “normal,” the other – “violation.” Yes, that’s right, some decisions are subjective. It is necessary to interact with each expert individually. Difficult and unpredictable? Yes. Is it possible to handle this? Definitely possible.... It is important to interact with RON experts; they pay attention to the tone of communication of the tested, the willingness to listen to their comments and involvement in the correction of the shortcomings found. RON experts are living people, no matter how trite it sounds; they value a good attitude (but do not allow attempts to “grease the palm”). And even RON experts can make a mistake. Yes, this is so. They have to study a huge array of documents, and given our religious specificity, the likelihood of error increases.¹⁰¹

Even hard-pressed Rector Pshenichny in Kuban can marshal up charity toward individual Rosobrnadzor inspectors:

When it comes to personal interactions with officials the situation can change.... People begin to ask questions and see the disparity between what they see and hear on TV [about Protestants] and real life. They become much more balanced and open to dialogue. Some of them make efforts to help us. Some become genuinely interested in Christianity.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Bembaum, *Opening the Red Door*, 199; Mark R. Elliott, Review of *Opening the Red Door; The Inside Story of Russia’s First Christian Liberal Arts University in Christianity Today* online, 17 February 2020.

⁹⁹ Gennadi Pshenichny, email to author, 1 November 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Gennadi Pshenichny, email to author, 1 November 2019; Harold Brown, phone interview, 22 November 2019. In a 24 May 2019 interview Dr. Gennadi Sergienko also attested to Rosobrnadzor’s move toward state validation of theological faculty.

¹⁰¹ Sergey Chervonenko, “Proverka.”

¹⁰² Gennadi Pshenichny, email to author, 1 November 2019.

Nevertheless, Pshenichny judges Rosobrnadzor's overall implementation of oversight as "a profanation of education, relegating it to a piece of paper with a stamp." He openly critiques this state body, which holds a Damocles Sword over the life of his seminary, in a manner that is both searching and courageous. When queried by the author concerning state oversight of private educational institutions, he judged it to be a combination of a) an effort to standardize and ensure quality, b) part of an overall government goal to bring all sectors of Russian society under closer state supervisions, and c) part of state measures to discriminate against, and in some cases, suppress, non-Orthodox faiths:

It is common knowledge that the overall state of education in Russia leaves much to be desired. Therefore, I would say that it is not at all surprising that the state has taken upon itself the effort to standardize higher education. However, speaking from my experience in the field of education, I would say that ensuring quality is not a top priority of the Ministry of Education. It is virtually impossible to find people in today's system who would be genuinely interested in education. We hear slogans and goals but that's just words. Most of what we see is a vast gap between what is being proclaimed and even written on paper—and real everyday life. The system is set up in such a way that officials have to give account to their supervisors and so they react only as prompted. The inspections are genuinely interested only in checking off their lists and finding faults with the schools so they can report back to their respective supervisors and prove they are effective. They do not care about education in the least. In this, they are part of the larger system and not necessarily discriminating against one group or another. The tendency is to stifle initiative anywhere and lay [down a] heavy burden, which creates a façade of uniformity and order. This is just how things work.

At the same time the discrimination against non-Orthodox faiths, especially evangelicals, has always been there. It is twofold. First, there are those who are ideologically opposed and purposefully malign and denigrate non-Orthodox believers through every means possible. And then there are those who are "strengthening" the hands of the first group through ignorance. Unfortunately, evangelicals still make up a fraction of the overall population of the country and this works against us because the community at large is still in the dark about who we are. The connection with the West does not help. Current sentiment in the media is anti-West and anti-US.¹⁰³

In the same vein Kursk Protestant educator Aleksandr Spichak writes, "Of course, when it comes to Protestant schools, you cannot escape subjectivity because it is in the air in Russia, when the nationalism and anti-American attitude is promoted everywhere. And there might be men in

¹⁰³ Gennadi Pshenichny, email to author, 1 November 2019.

local administration who would use this opportunity to press more on Protestants.”¹⁰⁴ A denominational leader close to the Eurasian Theological Seminary seconds the opinion of Pshenichny and Spichak in reference to dealings with Rosobrnadzor: “To answer your questions, is it a justifiable effort to standardize education? We are not of this opinion. We fulfilled all of the state’s demands. But there was no effort from the state to work with us to help us ensure that their standards were met.”¹⁰⁵

Especially telling is Rosobrnadzor’s draconian treatment of two secular institutions: the European University of St. Petersburg and the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, private universities with stellar international reputations.¹⁰⁶ Rosobrnadzor cancelled the former’s accreditation and revoked its license in 2016 over alleged building code infractions and took possession of most of its campus property in early 2018. Accreditation was restored in July 2018, but not before Rosobrnadzor had dealt the university a near-lethal blow.¹⁰⁷ On 20 June 2019 Rosobrnadzor also revoked the accreditation of the highly regarded Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences which, however, was restored in March 2020.¹⁰⁸

Two leading Western professional bodies, the U.S.-based Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) and its sister British Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (BASEEES), publicly addressed their concerns to Russian authorities, expressing “great disappointment” with Rosobrnadzor actions against the two schools. An ASEEES press release described the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences as “one of the country’s most highly regarded universities” and the European University of St. Petersburg as “another of the country’s leading private universities.”¹⁰⁹

Just as bold as Rector Pshenichny’s critique of Rosobrnadzor, the European University of St. Petersburg prepared a 24-page “audit” of the auditors entitled “How Does Rosobrnadzor Work:

¹⁰⁴ Aleksandr Spichak, email to author, 11 December 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Church of God, email to author, 4 December 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Potapova and Trines, “Education,” 17-18; “Russia’s Higher Education.”

¹⁰⁷ “Russia Certifies European University at St. Petersburg’s Master’s Programs,” *Moscow Times*, 5 July 2019.

¹⁰⁸ “Rector Zuev’s Comments Regarding the Denial of Accreditation for Activities in the Field of Higher Education,” December 2019; <https://www.msses.ru/en/about/news/4083/>; Grigory Yudin, “Overzealous Regulators Are Closing in on Russian Universities,” *Moscow Times*, 10 July 2018; “MSSSES Got Accreditation Back,” [linkedin.com/school/shaninka](https://www.linkedin.com/school/shaninka).

¹⁰⁹ “ASEEES Statement Concerning the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (Shaninka),” 20 July 2018; <https://www.aseees.org/advocacy/aseees-statement-concerning-moscow-school-social-and-economic-sciences-shaninka>. See also *Scholars at Risk Network*, 20 June 2018; <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2018-06-20-moscow-school-of-social-and-economic-sciences/>.

Analysis of Open Data on Supervisory Activities in the Sphere of Higher Education.” More accustomed to enumerating the institutional shortcomings of others, Rosobrnadzor in this instance was subjected to a searching critique of its own ethical and procedural shortcomings. The European University report gave this state higher education watchdog a low, if not failing, grade in a wide-ranging series of findings:

- The number of higher education institutions is decreasing year by year. However, the number of supervisory activities is increasing.
- Private universities are much more likely to be inspected. Effective performance indicators do not significantly reduce the likelihood of an inspection....The actual inspection is largely detached from the monitoring results and it is not always consistent with the performance indicators developed by the Ministry of Education.
- The procedure of selecting experts [auditors] does not prevent the enlisting of specialists who have violated ethical norms in their professional activities. Among these experts there are authors of dissertations with sizeable borrowings from other people’s texts. Indicators of the publication activity of such experts demonstrate that they are on average more prone to manipulating formal performance indicators of academic activity than most other lecturers.
- Inspections are increasingly being carried out remotely, in the form of working with documents without visiting the university. The inspectors focus on minor violations mainly related to documenting the work of the institution.¹¹⁰

Regarding inspections not conducted on site that are cited in the final bullet, it should be noted that in all known cases Protestant seminaries have undergone in-person inspections. Given their small enrollments, compared to those of most other private institutions and all state universities, might this focused attention on Protestants have more to do with discrimination against a suspect religious minority than with the goal of fostering high educational standards?

¹¹⁰ Katerina Guba, Aleksandra Makeeva, Mikhail Sokolov, and Anzhelika Tsivinskaya, “Kak rabotaet Rosobrnadzor: analiz otkrytykh dannyykh o kontrol’no—nadzornoi deyatel’nost v sfere vysshego obrazovaniya [“How Does Rosobrnadzor Work: Analysis of Open Data on Supervisory Activities in the Sphere of Higher Education],” St. Petersburg: European University in St. Petersburg, 2017; <https://eusp.org/en/news/how-does-rosobrnadzor-work-analysis-of-open-data-supervisory-activities-in-the-sphere-of-higher-education>.

Conclusion

In sum, Russian Protestant seminaries are presently undergoing a trial by state inspection that threatens their very existence. Academics Perry Glanzer and Konstantin Petrenko are correct in asserting that the Russian state's "power to license and accredit" is "the power of life and death" over any educational institution.¹¹¹

State justifications for close oversight of Protestant seminaries appear overstated at best and lack credibility at worst. As regards state concerns for quality control, should not the Russian constitution's requirement for separation of church and state take precedence over a secular government's presumption to instruct believers on how best to train their clergy?

Russia's declining student-age population has led leaders in public higher education to lobby the state to curtail private universities and institutes. And on its own account the state has concluded the country needs far fewer tertiary institutions in general. But Russia's Protestant population of approximately two percent means the quite modest enrollments in its non-state-funded seminaries cannot possibly be a demographic threat to public higher education.¹¹²

The concerted efforts of the administration of President Vladimir Putin to exert ever greater control over all sectors of Russian life is much in keeping with the country's longstanding tradition of authoritarian rule. Russia's Protestant seminaries labor under the additional burden of the common, Russian media-stoked perception of Protestantism as a Western import—and this in a climate of chauvinistic nationalism and xenophobia. A Russian News Agency TASS release of 6 April 2020 underscores this ever-present threat to Protestant seminaries. Proposed Duma legislation would further impair the work of "foreign NGOs," including "foreign-funded educational programmes...likely to be subjected to additional sanction and scrutiny."¹¹³ Such a prospect would further jeopardize those Protestant seminaries that still receive financial support from abroad.

A key question addressed in this study centers on the Russian state's motivation for increased state restrictions on Protestant seminaries. Has it been to ensure quality, or to strengthen state control over all sectors of Russian society, or to discriminate against non-Orthodox

¹¹¹ Glanzer and Petrenko, "Private Christian Colleges," 11.

¹¹² The two percent estimate is based on the current Russian Federation population of 145,872,000 (*United Nations World Population Review*; worldpopulationreview.com) and Roman Lunkin's calculation that the number of the country's Protestant adherents "is approaching 3 million" (Pyat'sot let vmeste," *Nezavisimaya gazeta—Religii*, 18 October 2017; http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2017-10-18/13_430_together.html).

¹¹³ William Yoder, "Russian Seminaries Remain in Limbo: The Future Remains Uncertain," 6 April 2020.

believers—or some combination of the three? One Russian Orthodox educator, who prefers not to be identified, rejects the idea that new government requirements placed on Protestant seminaries amounts to persecution. He argues, for example, that Baptists did not do their homework in preparing documents for inspectors. In sum, he sees the government upholding standards for all educational institutions to ensure quality, a process he considers normal and positive.¹¹⁴

A contrasting view is held by Dale Kemp of Russian Leadership Ministries who believes the state's desire for improved quality is a minor consideration—if one at all. Rather, he views the goal of increased secular control and discrimination against non-Orthodox to be the chief state motivators, an opinion held by most Protestant educators who have fared poorly in Ministry of Education inspections.¹¹⁵

In the present COVID-19 pandemic, Evangelical seminaries and churches, like all other Russian institutions, have closed their doors to gatherings of any size for the duration of the crisis. Acting in bad faith, might Russian authorities prolong restrictions upon gatherings of non-Orthodox beyond the point of medical necessity? Fears that authoritarian regimes might take advantage of emergency measures to undermine the rule of law have already surfaced not only in the case of Russia, but as regards Hungary, Serbia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan.¹¹⁶

Finally, a particularly questionable justification for increasing Russian state oversight of private higher education, including Protestant seminaries, is the purported goal of rooting out corruption. Official campaigns against it are a predictable, periodic feature of Russian political life. Unfortunately, a tradition also prevails of a self-aggrandizing bureaucracy seeking its own benefit over the interests of state and society. How then is a corrupt state capable of eliminating corruption in higher education, public or private? And in the case of Protestant seminaries, the Ministry of Education, notwithstanding its proclivity to find fault, does not even bother to charge corruption in Protestant seminaries, where it is rare to non-existent. Similarly, what effort have

¹¹⁴ Russian Orthodox educator interview, 23 May 2019.

¹¹⁵ Dale Kemp, phone interview, 30 March 2020.

¹¹⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty releases: “EU Warns Against Using Pandemic to Undermine Democracy” and “Members of U.S. Congress Criticize Additional Powers for Orban in Corona Emergency,” 31 March 2020; “Podcast: COVID-19 and the ‘Dictatorship of Law,’” 6 April 2020; “Amnesty Slams ‘Offensive’ Against Human Rights in Eastern Europe, Central Asia,” 12 April 2020; “HRW Says Azerbaijan Abuses COVID-19 Restrictions to Crack Down on Critics,” 16 April 2020; and “Rights Defenders Accuse Kazakh Authorities of Using Coronavirus Restrictions to Stifle Dissent,” 20 April 2020.

auditors expended to understand Evangelical subculture when they insist upon letter-of-the-law “No Smoking” signage in a building in which no one smokes?¹¹⁷

In contrast to the problematic interventions of Rosobrnadzor, since the 1990s many Protestant theological schools have chosen self-regulation through their own commendably professional Euro-Asian Accrediting Association (E-AAA).¹¹⁸ The Russian Ministry of Education and Science could learn a great deal from the example of E-AAA in the promotion and facilitation of high professional standards in tertiary education. Dr. Walter Sawatsky (Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) details its achievements in a forthcoming publication, “The Amazing Story of E-AAA (Euro-Asian Accrediting Association).” Here we have an enumeration of the association’s exemplary role as “a leader in shaping and building up a Slavic Evangelical ministry for the sake of the churches, to foster a consciously Slavic theology, and also contextual sensitivity in Central Asia.” In addition to supportive, rather than confrontational, seminary accreditation site visits, E-AAA has facilitated the publication of classroom texts (Bible Pulpit Series), theological serials (especially the bilingual *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniya/Theological Reflections*), Evangelical archival guides and compendia, theological reference works (such as the *Slavic Bible Commentary*),¹¹⁹ the regular hosting of academic and pedagogical conferences, and especially commendable, the promotion of “cooperation across a spectrum of [theological and national] differences.” In contrast, Sawatsky suspects “Putin’s new controls on Russian education...had more to do with blocking innovation than seeking ‘best practices’.”¹²⁰ Thus, it can reasonably be argued that Russian society and the rule of law would best be served if the state simply left its Protestant seminaries to their own devices.

¹¹⁷ Gennadi Sergienko, interview, 24 May 2019.

¹¹⁸ www.e-aaa.org.

¹¹⁹ Peter Penner, Review of *The Slavic Bible Commentary*, *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 25 (Winter 2017): 4-5.

¹²⁰ Walter Sawatsky would like to see “more voices urging the Russian Education department to back off of its efforts to control theological schools.” Walter Sawatsky, email to author, 1 April 2020.

Appendix: Interviews and Correspondence

Interviews

John Burgess (phone), Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 16 September 2019
Harold Brown (phone), One Mission Society, 22 November 2019
Sergey Chervonenko, Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary, 21 May 2019
Scott Cunningham (phone), Overseas Council, 31 March 2020
Dale Kemp, Russian Leadership Ministries, 30 March 2020
Nikolai Kornilov, Moscow Theological Seminary, 23 May 2019
Roman Lunkin, Russian Academy of Sciences, 22 May 2019
Russian Orthodox educator, 23 May 2019
Gennadi Sergienko, Second Evangelical Christian-Baptist Church and Moscow Theological Seminary, 24 May 2019

Email Correspondence

Sergey Chervonenko, Moscow Evangelical Christian Seminary, 23 August 2019
Church of God (Cleveland) official, 4 and 31 December 2019
Gennadi Pshenichny, Kuban Evangelical Christian University, 1 November 2019
Russian denominational leader, 25 October 2019
Walter Sawatsky, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 14 March 2020
“Ivan Smirnov,” 9 and 12 January 2020
Aleksandr Spichak, Trinity Video Seminary, 11 December 2019
William Yoder, Russian Evangelical Alliance, 14 March 2020
Olga Zaprometova, St. Filaret Orthodox Christian Institute, 9 October 2019