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## LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING RUSSIAN PROTESTANT SEMINARIES AND CHURCHES

Mark R. Elliott

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This author's article, "Increasing State Restrictions on Russian Protestant Seminaries," covered developments through the early months of 2020.<sup>1</sup> Difficulties for religious minority theological education continue apace. Perhaps most consequential of late has been Russian Duma legislation (24 March 2021) requiring the mandatory re-education and state recertification of clergy trained abroad before they may legally serve their churches or seminaries in Russia.<sup>2</sup> President Putin signed into law this latest of dozens of problematic amendments to Russia's 1997 restrictive legislation on religion, which will go into effect 3 October 2021.<sup>3</sup>

To no avail, minority faiths (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist) all contended against the introduction of this additional impediment to the free exercise of religion in Russia and the legislation's violation of the Russian Constitution's much-abused provision avowing separation of church and state.<sup>4</sup> Yonten-Gelong, head of the central Buddhist temple in Kalmykia, noted that most Buddhist religious teachers in Russia have been educated in India, Nepal, China, and Mongolia. With no state-registered Buddhist clergy training institution existing in Kalmykia, one may wonder if secular universities are equipped to vouchsafe the "re-education"

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<sup>1</sup> *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 40 (No. 4, 2020): 1-31. An abridged version of the present article was published in the *East-West Church Report* 29 (No. 2, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> "State Duma Adopts Law on Recertification in R. F. of Clergy Who Studied Abroad," *Intefax-Religiya*, 24 March 2021; <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/>.

<sup>3</sup> Victoria Arnold, "Russia: Flagship Protestant Colleges Stripped of Right to Offer Higher Education," *Forum* 18, 13 April 2021; Olga Sibireva, "Russia; New Restrictions in the Religion Law: What Should Believers Expect?" *Human Rights Without Frontiers International Newsletter*, 8 January 2021.

<sup>4</sup> "Clergy Refuse to Retrain Over Again; Historically Clergy of Most Confessions Received Foreign Education," *Vzgliad*, 18 September 2020; <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/>.

of Buddhist clergy trained abroad.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Mufti Albir Krganov, head of the Religious Assembly of Muslims of Russia, pointed out, “A majority of our religious leaders studied in Bukhara. But today Uzbekistan is another state. Will we be forced to require going through recertification of all of our respected muftis?”<sup>6</sup> With Protestant seminaries in mind, attorney Stanislav Kulov of Moscow’s Slavic Center for Law and Justice noted that the March 2021 legislation is “replete with vague wording,” is an “unjustified interference in the activities of religious associations,” and is “an encroachment on the constitutionally enshrined principle of separating religious associations from the state.”<sup>7</sup>

Only the Russian Orthodox Church has supported mandatory recertification of clergy, with Metropolitan Ilarion, head of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Relations, deeming the legislation necessary to protect Russia against political extremism.<sup>8</sup> But even Abbess Ksenia Chernega of the Russian Orthodox legal department found fault with one aspect of proposed recertification. Upon her urging--and underscoring the clout of Russia’s de facto state church--Russian Orthodox managed to successfully amend the amendment so that only new, not existing clergy, who have studied abroad, must undergo state recertification before undertaking church or seminary responsibilities.<sup>9</sup>

In a peculiar blend of religio-political syncretism, this latest affront to religious liberty in Russia was shepherded through the legislative process by Duma representative Sergei Gavrillov, at once a member of the Communist Party and an active Russian Orthodox parishioner.<sup>10</sup> Proud of the passage of his clergy recertification amendment, Gavrillov has misread Russia’s disparate religious communities’ compliance with state-imposed restrictions on freedom of conscience as proof of inter-confessional harmony. He has gone so far as to boast (falsely), “We have unique experience here, which we can ‘export’ to other countries of the world, in order to avoid conflicts

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<sup>5</sup> “Central Monastery of Kalmykia Criticizes Amendments in Law on Religious Associations,” *Vzgliad*, 17 September 2020. See also “Clergy Will Be Sent for Retraining; Is Criticism of Amendments to Law on Religious Organizations Fair?” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 20 September 2020; <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Clergy Will Be Sent for Retraining.”

<sup>7</sup> Arnold, “Russia: Flagship.” See also Sibireva, “Russia; New Restrictions.”

<sup>8</sup> “R.P.Ts.: Law on Certification of Clergy Must Be Adopted with Approval of Confessions,” *RIA Novosti*, 26 September 2020; <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/>.

<sup>9</sup> Sibireva, “Russia; New Restrictions;” Arnold, “Russia: Flagship;” Nikita Viatchanin, “Proposal in State Duma to Exempt Active Clergy from Mandatory Certification,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 15 October 2020; <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/>.

<sup>10</sup> “State Duma Begins Refining Amendments on Retraining of Religious Ministers Educated Abroad,” *Credo.Press*, 17 November 2020; <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/>.

on religious grounds and maintain peace among the leading world confessions.”<sup>11</sup> However, the acquiescence of minorities in a government’s discrimination against them is no confirmation of their appreciation of their second-class citizenship.

Meanwhile, punitive inspections of Protestant seminaries conducted by Rosobrnadzor (the Federal Service for Supervision of Education and Science) proceed with only sporadic court pushback. Following a July 2019 inspection, Rosobrnadzor cited the Theological Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria (in Kolbino near St. Petersburg) for insufficient detail on its website, followed by a fine on 26 November 2019 for the same infraction. A second unfavorable inspection in May-June 2020 led to a suspension of the Theological Institute’s license on 23 July 2020, followed by a court annulment of its license on 13 November 2020, effective 6 April 2021. According to Forum 18 news service, teaching may continue informally, but the Institute “is unable to issue certificates or admit students to diploma courses.”<sup>12</sup>

The Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia (in the process of moving from Novosartovka into St. Petersburg) has suffered a similar fate. Rosobrnadzor barred new admissions from 11 December 2019, fined Rector Anton Tikhomirov on 5 February and 11 March 2020, and suspended the school’s license on 7 April 2020. A court order restored the license, only to see it suspended again on 10 December 2020. Court decisions have twice blocked Rosobrnadzor’s moves to annul the license, most recently on 18 March 2021, but the seminary’s license remains suspended, and the state educational inspectorate may yet again seek to have it annulled. Rector Tikhomirov characterizes Rosobrnadzor’s allegations as “absolutely far-fetched and false, for example: that there is no information on the website about the organization (there is), or there is no information about the deputy director (we simply do not have such a position).” In addition, a citation for a lack of a gymnasium or cafeteria are nonsensical “since we conduct only distance education.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Viatchanin, “Proposal in State Duma.” As an example of the “export” of Russian religious policy see David Levy, “The Impulse to Orthodoxy: Why Illiberal Democracies Treat Religious Pluralism As a Threat,” *Religion, State and Society* 46 (No. 3, 2018): 243-65.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold, “Russia: Flagship.” See also “Roskomnadzor priostanovil litsenziyu Teologicheskogo instituta Tserkvi Ingrii [Rosobrnadzor Suspends the License of the Theological Institute of the Church of Ingria],” *SOVA*, 3 August 2020; <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2020>.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold, “Russia: Flagship.” See also “Rosobrnadzor zapretit priyom v seminariyu ELTs i lishil litsenzii islamskii vuz [Rosobrnadzor Banned Admission to ELC Seminary and Revoked a License from an Islamic University],” *SOVA*, 11 December 2019.

Equally egregious was Rosobrnadzor's order in December 2020 requiring the Pentecostal Tyumen Biblical Seminary to spell out in writing its procedures for interactions with parents of students under the age of 18, even though the school has no minors enrolled. This "failure," plus the seminary's lack of provisions for a student food service and sports, even during the pandemic when authorities have suspended in-person, group instruction, was enough to generate an order for Rector Evgeny Shestakov to halt new student admissions.<sup>14</sup>

The Evangelical Christian-Baptist (ECB) North Caucasus Bible Institute (Prokhladny, Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya) has also been subjected to questionable state-imposed penalties. A Rosobrnadzor inspection in June 2018 alleged the Institute "lacked...proper teaching and assessment tools" and necessary provisions for "sanitation, first aid, and fire safety," resulting in a ban on student admissions from November 2018 to November 2020. As of April 2021 the Institute was awaiting a court decision prompted by a renewed state educational inspectorate effort to revoke its educational license.<sup>15</sup>

At the very least, precariousness also characterizes the current status of the ECB's flagship Moscow Theological Seminary (MTS), with a string of negative Rosobrnadzor measures and court decisions prevailing against it: suspension of its educational license (27 February 2018); following appeal, a renewed suspension and a sealing of the seminary building (25 January 2020); a ban on new admissions (15 February 2020); its educational license revoked (27 February 2020); and a Moscow Arbitration Court confirmation of the revocation of license (10 June 2020).<sup>16</sup> A disappointed Deputy Rector Alexis Markevich reflects,

We do not know who is or isn't behind these unfair decisions regarding our seminary. As I have already written many times, I personally see that the reason for this is the unbridled Russian bureaucracy, which does not act for the sake of any lofty goals, but simply fulfils the commands: "catch" and "forbid."<sup>17</sup>

In a nearly identical scenario the Eurasian Theological Seminary (ETS) of the Pentecostal Union has also been hamstrung by the state's educational inspectorate: a Rosobrnadzor inspection (19-22 February 2018) leading to a fine (25 April 2018); an unannounced Rosobrnadzor inspection

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<sup>14</sup> Olga Sibireva, "Problemy realizatsii svobody sovesti v Rossii v 2020 godu [Problems of the Realization of Freedom of Conscience in Russia in 2020]," *SOVA*, 31 March 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Arnold, "Russia: Flagship Protestant;" Peter Mitskevich to author, 28 April 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Arnold, "Russia: Flagship Protestant;" "The Court Revoked the License of the Moscow ECB Seminary," *SOVA*, 18 June 2020; Mark R. Elliott, *The Arduous Path of Post-Soviet Protestant Theological Education* (Wilmore, KY: First Fruits Press, 2020), 160-63.

<sup>17</sup> Arnold, "Russia: Flagship Protestant."

(30 April–4 May 2018) leading to a suspension of admissions (1 June 2018); suspension of its educational license (9 August 2018); and revocation of its license (23 November 2018).<sup>18</sup> To survive, ETS managed to secure from the Moscow City Department for Education and Science a new educational license as a new entity (7 November 2019), which has permitted it to resume classes, and which—for now at least—has permitted it to forego the oversight of Rosobrnadzor, the federal higher education inspectorate. On 28 May 2020 under the new name of Theological Seminary in Moscow (TSM), the ECB’s Moscow Theological Seminary also obtained a new educational license from the same Moscow city department and resumed instruction in September 2020.<sup>19</sup> Rector Peter Mitskevich reports ongoing efforts in 2021 for MTS to regain its higher education license but concedes, “If it will happen—it will be a miracle.”<sup>20</sup>

The new licenses of the leading Evangelical Christian-Baptist and Pentecostal theological programs officially characterize their instruction as “additional professional training,” rather than “higher education,” unfortunately making them ineligible to provide the “re-education” of would-be faculty required of those who have studied abroad.<sup>21</sup> Might state decertification of minority theological programs, coupled with required recertification of minority religious who have studied abroad, be part of a design of the state—in collaboration with the Moscow Patriarchate—to further marginalize non-Orthodox religious expression in Russia? To this point, Academy of Science religion scholar Roman Lunkin sees a pattern of “links on a single chain” in the “wave of cancellation of licenses” prior to the burdensome March 2021 requirement for recertification of seminary faculty who have studied abroad.<sup>22</sup> On 24 March 2021 Slavic Center for Law and Justice attorney Stanislav Kulov spelled out these “links” in explicit terms:

In light of the adopted amendments, the earlier [Rosobrnadzor] inspections, as a result of which a number of Protestant seminaries were deprived of licences that gave the right to implement higher professional education programmes, look like part of some kind of “repressive” plan to reduce the number of religious educational institutions that have the ability to conduct re-training and re-certification for their fellow believers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Arnold, “Russia: Flagship Protestant,” Elliott, *Arduous*, 163–65.

<sup>19</sup> Arnold, “Russia: Flagship Protestant; Russian Leadership Ministries Annual Report, 2020; “Moskovskaya seminariya EKhB poluchila litsenziyu na obrazovat’ nuyu deyatel’nost’ [Moscow ECB Seminary Received a License for Educational Activity],” *SOVA*, 20 August 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Mitskevich to author, 28 April 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Arnold, “Russia: Flagship Protestant.”

<sup>22</sup> “Clergy Refuse,” *Vzgliad*, 18 September 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Arnold, “Russia: Flagship Protestant.”

Consider the increasing restrictions imposed upon Protestants under Putin in the light of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Soviet campaign against religion. Protestants were—and to a large extent still are—popularly considered to be ignorant and uneducated—never mind their systematic exclusion from higher education for seventy-plus years. Lacking respect—but not lacking intelligence—Evangelicals emerging from the Soviet straightjacket in the early 1990s energetically pursued opportunities to educate themselves, including the institution of formal training for their pastors. Even the atheistic USSR had permitted some residential Orthodox—but not Protestant—theological education in the post-World War II era. So after the end of Communist Party rule in 1991 pent-up evangelical yearning for formal training was intense and palpable. I recall attending a February 1993 meeting in Moscow with 38 representatives of 22 new Protestant seminaries. In the context of institutions that for the most part lacked everything needful—buildings, libraries, course textbooks, and credentialed faculty—I was struck by the passion with which Russian and Ukrainian participants advocated, above all else, for the “establishment of seminary accreditation standards.”<sup>24</sup> These evangelical seminary educators saw the need for excellence in their training programs, but they also understandably craved respect for their institutions, for their churches, and for their pastors in a post-Soviet society that typically deemed them irrelevant. Given this back story, is it any wonder that Russian Evangelicals grieve over the reinstitution of Soviet-style measures meant to curtail or eliminate their existence. For their part, those who wield power in Russia today presume that national coherence requires a “Russian Idea” that is bolstered by Russian Orthodoxy. This established church in all but name is touted as the repository of the country’s spiritual and “traditional” values, hence the state campaign to eviscerate, even proscribe, religious expression alleged to be a threat to the leading position of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Of course, the Russian state assault on Protestant theological education does not occur in a vacuum, as can be seen by an ongoing parallel campaign against individual Protestant congregations. A sample of three cases of direct disruption of Baptist, Pentecostal, and Adventist worship by local authorities in 2019, 2020, and 2021 may illustrate the point. In spring 2019 police, state security agents, and Cossacks interrupted an Evangelical Christian-Baptist Sunday service in the village of Verknebakinskii, Krasnodar Region, following earlier, September 2018, charges of violations of fire safety regulations and activities allegedly promoting terrorism. A subsequent July 2019 court order prohibited the congregation from worshipping in the private residence of the

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<sup>24</sup> Elliott, *Arduous*, 6.

pastor. Previously prevented from renting facilities for services, this Protestant fellowship now meets in the woods, as was the practice of unregistered Baptists in Soviet days. Three attorneys from Moscow's Slavic Center for Law and Justice traveled to Verkhnebakinskii in a show of solidarity, with the leader of the delegation, Vladimir Riakhovsky, asking rhetorically, "Will the government really strengthen public safety by forcing dozens of believers to conduct their prayer meetings in the woods?"<sup>25</sup> Their case now awaits adjudication before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France.<sup>26</sup>

On 18 October 2020 local police, representatives of the prosecutor's office, and FSB (secret police) agents broke up a meeting of approximately ten Pentecostal youth in Orekhovo-Zuevo, Moscow Region. Authorities searched the premises, dumped desk drawers, confiscated passports, refused to permit phone calls, arrested, and took fingerprints of the youth at the police station. Prior to their release the group's youth pastor asked the authorities, "Why are you disrupting the worship service?" The police response was chilling: "We know what we have to do, and if you press the law then drugs or extremist literature will be discovered on you." Human rights lawyer Stanislav Kulov made the obvious point that this small group of Pentecostal youth "was not engaged in extremist activity and in no way did it [their worship] violate public order or existing legislation of the Russian Federation." Slavic Center for Law and Justice attorney Anatoly Pchelintsev commented,

It turns out that an enormous army of law enforcers artificially created problems out of the blue. The young people who attended worship services, which included five girls, were forced to seek psychological help after this performance by the "guardians of the law."<sup>27</sup>

On 1 April 2021, a city court in Uzlovaya, Tula Region, overturned a lower court ruling, thereby acquitting two Seventh-day Adventists whom local authorities earlier had fined 5,000 rubles each for reading the Bible and praying during worship. Previously, on 24 October 2020, MVD (Interior Ministry) agents of the Center for Combatting Terrorism had visited this Adventist Church during worship, ostensibly to monitor the use of masks in the midst of the pandemic. Out

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<sup>25</sup> "Church without Walls; ECB Church of the Village of Verkhnebakanskii," *Religiya i pravo*, 17 September 2020; <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/>.

<sup>26</sup> "A Case of Violation of the Right to Freely Practice One's Faith in Community Pending in Strasbourg," *Human Rights Without Frontiers International Newsletter*, 23 April 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Moisei Kondrashin, "Who Will Answer for Lawlessness? Law Enforcement Personnel Disrupted Worship Service in Orekhovo-Zuevo," *Religiya i pravo*, 20 October 2020; <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/>.



of this confrontation, which authorities videotaped, came the fines for “the study of the Bible and conducting a worship service...without permission specifically for missionary activity.”<sup>28</sup>

That such specious charges could ever have been brought against the peaceful worshippers of Uzlovaya underscores the primitive nature of the campaign against law-abiding citizens who happen not to be Orthodox. On the basis of the Adventists’ “extremist” activities of reading Scripture and praying during worship every Orthodox Church in Russia could—but will not—be in jeopardy because the Divine Liturgy is replete with biblical passages and prayers. Russian church historian Paul Steeves rightly sums up these charges against Adventists in a word: “absurd.”<sup>29</sup>

Returning to the theme of the “Russian Idea,” what import does the concept hold for minority religious rights? For one, under Putin church-state collaboration has increasingly replaced the Russian Constitution’s separation of church and state, with fraught consequences for non-Orthodox believers. Former U.S. National Security Council Russia specialist Fiona Hill and Brookings Institution economist Clifford Gaddy address the issue head on in their political biography of *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*. They note that in 1995 ex-KGB General Nikolai Leonov became a regular on the Russian House TV program promoting “an Orthodox nationalist” agenda. Hill and Gaddy also cite a 1997 exploration of the “Russian Idea” in a meeting of Interior Ministry and Moscow Patriarchate representatives which ended with a public promotion of “the reestablishment of Orthodoxy as an official ideology and instrument of state policy.”<sup>30</sup> At the grassroots level cadres in the campaign to substitute Orthodoxy for Marxism as the spiritual underpinning for a new “Russian Idea” have been the legions of out-of-work professors of scientific atheism who converted themselves into professors of religion: retooled propagandists advancing the new party line.<sup>31</sup>

Putin argues so-called “universal values” of equality for all, tolerance, and respect for diversity (viewed as a ruse for immorality) actually amount to a Western agenda of “anything

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<sup>28</sup> “Court in Uzlovaya Acquits Believers Who Were Fined for Reading Bible and Praying,” *Religiya i pravo*, 19 April 2021; <https://www2.stetson.edu/religious-news/>.

<sup>29</sup> “Court in Uzlovaya.”

<sup>30</sup> Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 48. For further reading on the Russian Idea see Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Wendy E. Helleman, ed., *The Russian Idea: In Search of a New Identity* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2004); and Alexander Yanov, “Putin and the ‘Russian Idea,’” *The Institute of Modern Russia*, 1 July 2013; [imrussia.org](http://imrussia.org).

<sup>31</sup> Elena Stepanova, “Atheism’s Peaks and Valleys in Russia” in *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe; The Development of Secularity and Nonreligion*, ed. by Tomas Bubik et al. (London: Routledge, 2020), 249.

goes,” in contrast to conservative “traditional values” that he purports to defend. Stunning is an apt adjective for the dissimulation of this ex-KGB agent who poses as the defender of morality yet superintends a criminally corrupt regime and who is, based on ample evidence, the instigator of the assassination of dozens of opposition journalists and politicians. Putin regrets Bolshevik attacks on the Orthodox Church, thus “depriving the Russian government of using this important instrument.” In contrast to what he calls sham universal—read Western—values, he promotes “true Russianness...embodied in the Orthodox Church.”<sup>32</sup>

In the formulation of the “Russian Idea” as a replacement for a debunked communist ideology, Putin and company have, in effect, been updating the mantra of Sergei Uvarov, Nicholas I’s Minister of Education, who in 1833 coined the tsarist empire’s touchstone: “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality.” In its 21<sup>st</sup> century iteration *Orthodoxy* stands for the spiritual defense of regime legitimacy; *autocracy* stands for Putin authoritarianism; and *nationality* stands for majority Russian privilege at the expense of ethnic and religious minority rights.

Acclaimed Russian film director Nikita Mikhalkov, himself an increasingly ardent nationalist, nevertheless contends that Orthodoxy “turned into a state doctrine or policy” will “quickly be rendered spiritually meaningless.”<sup>33</sup> Russian journalist and former priest Oleg Kursakov makes exactly this argument in a trenchant 2020 essay, “Cracks in Patriarch Kyrill’s Power Vertical.”

- In the post-Soviet “reconstruction of the state,” Russian Orthodoxy is tasked with filling in the “ideological vacuum...with a combination of traditional values, spirituality and national patriotism...[and] persecution of ‘non-systemic’ religious groups.”
- Yet on Sundays “The number of [Orthodox} parishioners does not exceed 0.5 percent of the population.”
- Given this nominalism of most Russians who in surveys self-identify as Orthodox, the Moscow Patriarchate “is becoming more and more dependent on the state.”
- At the same time millions of impoverished Russians have had to endure bishops and even Patriarch Kyrill compromised by press revelations of scandal and luxurious lifestyles.

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<sup>32</sup> Hill and Gaddy, 258. See also p. 351 and Suzanne Loftus, *Insecurity & the Rise of Nationalism in Putin’s Russia; Keeper of Traditional Values* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 168-69.

<sup>33</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 48.

- Kursakov's conclusion is that "Attempts to transform faith into an ideology" and "to put Christianity at the service of state power have always led to a church crisis."<sup>34</sup>

Returning to the existential plight of Russian Evangelicals brought on by implementation of the discriminatory "Russian Idea," missionary administrator Mikhail Cherenkov notes the predicament of Protestant congregations that just as readily applies to Protestant seminaries:

The state does not allow believers to exercise even minimal rights to a designated place for assembly, forcing them into a semi-legal space and clandestine existence. Evangelical believers assemble in private homes not because they do not want to build separate church buildings ("cultic facilities"). Rather they are not allowed to do this by the state itself.... Today we see a shocking contrast between the golden cupolas of the Orthodox Church and the humble congregations of evangelical believers in the forest. These contrasts speak volumes.... Current Russian authorities are quite discriminatory in their attitudes toward religion. They maintain a course of state support for one confession and of marginalizing the others. That which can be controlled winds up in a golden cage. That which opposes control winds up behind prison bars, or in the forest.<sup>35</sup>

At the end of September 2020 the Russian federal agency charged with oversight of consumer protection and national sanitary and epidemiological safeguards (Rospotrebnadzor) published a list of 30 universities (21 secular and 9 confessional) accredited in the discipline of theology.<sup>36</sup> In accordance with the dictates of the March 2021 Duma theological re-education legislation, these select institutions presumably will be those permitted to supervise the re-education and recertification of Russians who have studied theology abroad. Of the confessional schools eight are Orthodox and one is Islamic. For an unknown reason, the fully accredited Zaoksky Adventist University did not make the cut.<sup>37</sup> Also excluded from any role in vetting theological training is the Euro-Asiatic Accrediting Association, an affiliate in good standing of the International Council of Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), a highly professional but independent NGO lacking state recognition.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Oleg Kurzakov, "Crack in Patriarch Kirill's Power Vertical?" *Religion und Gesellschaft in Ost und West* 36 (No. 2, 2020); <https://www.g2w.eu>.

<sup>35</sup> Mikhail Cherenkov, "How Are Anti-Missionary Laws Influencing the Evangelical Church in Russia?" *The Christian Post*, 23 September 2020.

<sup>36</sup> "Perechen' svetskikh i konfessional'nykh vuzov, gde prepodayut teologiyu [List of Secular and Confessional Universities Where Theology Is Taught]," *SOVA*, 1 October 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Roman Lunkin, "Theology for a Select Few: Soviet Déjà Vu for Russian Protestants," *East-West Church Report* 27 (No. 3, 2019), 12.

<sup>38</sup> <http://e-aaa.org>.

Here is the heart of the predicament facing Russian Protestant seminaries. The Russian state has arrogated to itself sole authority over the life and death of any given institution, but it possesses neither the expertise nor the objectivity necessary to serve as honest gatekeeper. In a more rationally ordered universe, to repeat the conclusion of my earlier study, “Russian society and the rule of law would best be served if the state simply left its Protestant seminaries to their own devices.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Elliott, *Arduous*, 174.