

# Why Russia Needs Christian Writers

*Doug Wicks, a missionary working to establish a publishing house in Krasnodar, Russia, describes why that country needs Russian writers to communicate the gospel.*

**R**ussians have an interesting way of responding to disasters. They make jokes about them. For example, in the aftermath of the crippling ruble collapse in August 1998, scores of satirical cartoons dominated newspapers and magazines. One well-known Russian humorist told a joke about former President Yeltsin, who said, "For years we have stood on the edge of an abyss. Now, fellow countrymen, we have taken a great step forward!"

## *No Laughing Matter*

But the reality of the present political-social-economic situation in Russia is no laughing matter. Ever since the 1998 financial disaster, a thick cloud of gloom, despair and confusion has been hanging over the nation. Although a new president has been installed, many are skeptical that real change will result. A beleaguered woman on the streets of Moscow seemed to capture the mood of the whole country when she said, "I am so tired of this emotional ping-pong that I think I will just go back to bed, pull the covers up around my head and hope that it is all over soon."

The longsuffering Russian people not only have lost confidence in their current banking system and government officials, but they are growing tired of empty and unfulfilled promises that have been offered for decades.

Rubles aren't the only commodity in short supply in Russia. Hope also is a scarcity. And the Bible says that "hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12 NIV). In Russia today there are millions of people with spiritually sick hearts. The economic debacle in Russia is merely symptomatic of a much greater problem, which will yield eternally grave results if not resolved. Russia suffers from a profound moral and spiritual vacuum.

That is why Russia desperately needs evangelical Christian writers who are compelled by God's love and special enabling to communicate effectively and persuasively through the print medium (e.g. tracts, pamphlets, articles and books). Skillful Russian Christian writers are needed to convey the truth of God's Word to an array of formidable readers, including die-hard skeptics, agnostics, atheists, communists and ethnic nationalists, just to name a few.

## *Ten Reasons Why Russia Needs Christian Writers*

**1** Biblical Christians are the only ones who can legitimately offer their countrymen any real hope with which to cope with their unenviable list of problems. The only hope for the people of Russia is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Russians may not be

able to trust in their banks but they can bank upon the glorious riches that are promised through Jesus Christ. Trained Christian writers can present this incredible uplifting message in a relevant, sensitive and penetrating fashion.

**2** Less than 1 percent of Russians are evangelical Christians. Yes, there are evangelical pastors and a growing number of evangelical churches, but there has also been a major exodus of Russian evangelicals to Israel and the United States. What was once an open and curious mind-set toward things spiritual in the early 1990s is now a closed and skeptical one. Things must be done slowly and patiently in Russia, allowing God to work and move and change hearts according to His timetable.

**3** Only native Russians can truly identify with their own culture and people. Foreigners lack the thought patterns, idioms and nuances of meaning that are important for accurate communication. For centuries Russians have exhibited xenophobic behavior toward ideas and people from the outside. This is especially true with religion, where anything that is not strictly Russian Orthodox is considered impure and therefore unacceptable. This attitude makes it difficult for Western missionaries to break through pre-existing barriers.

Native, born-again Russians have a greater chance of gaining a hearing and of being trusted more than their foreign counterparts.

**4** Life spans in Russia are decreasing. Russia's population is expected to shrink by one-half by the year 2050. Siberians have the shortest life span in Russia—only 64 years. Shorter life spans translate into fewer opportunities for Russians to hear about the good news of Jesus Christ. Just as KGB operatives purportedly kept tabs on nearly every family in the former Soviet Union, so must the message of God's love permeate all age segments of Russian society. Without delay, adept Christian writers are needed to soften the soil of Russian hearts to prepare them for sowing seeds of the gospel.

**5** Literature remains a highly accepted—almost revered—form of communication in Russia. Christians can capitalize on this deep respect for good literature by producing well-researched and passionate writing in the areas of biblical apologetics, philosophy and theology, history and culture, science and the arts.

**6** Print media still convey a large degree of authority because of their role in disseminating ideological propaganda during the Soviet era. Russia ranks among the world's leaders in literacy rates. Riding the Moscow metro system is like visiting the public library. Most passengers' noses are stuck in books and newspapers. So why not give them something worth reading?

**7** Literature has the unique advantage of being able to probe into complex subjects. Doctrinal issues, such as salvation and eternal security, require careful, biblical investigation. Topics such as evangelism methods, or the roles of men and women in the church, require serious treatment. Writers have the luxury of presenting well-reasoned arguments, which the reader can reflect on privately, at

length, without interruptions or distractions, and as often as desired.

**8** Most newer Russian Christian books are translations from the West. Few translated works capture the essence of what it means to be Russian. The best writers will be "homegrown." Their work will bear the emotional scars of families who lost loved ones during one of Russia's epic wars or who have suffered at the hands of godless dictators. It is impossible for even the best-intentioned foreign Christians to capture the essence of being Russian. But sadly, few of today's Christian books in Russia are being written by Russian authors. Worse, no serious efforts are being made to train or encourage indigenous writers by any major Russian Christian publishers.

**9** Russian writers don't need visas to reside in their own country, but foreigners do. Russian writers are permanent citizens. Regardless of the religion laws that might be enacted to restrict the activities of Western Christian agencies, Russians will have the freedom and know-how to operate effectively within their own society. Taking the time to train and motivate an army of Russian Christian writers now ensures that whatever happens in the future, there will be an active, indigenous force prepared to propagate the gospel via the printed page.

**10** Evangelical Christians across Russia are in search of a strong, leading voice around which they can rally and bring legitimacy to their cause. It is time for Spirit-filled Christian writers to step into the role of opinion leaders who dispense wise counsel and credible information. In the early part of this century, Lenin was the editor of the underground newspaper *Iskra* (Spark), which was a leading factor in priming the Russian masses for a social revolution. Similarly, Christian writers can become the spark in a spiritual revolution that

can change the hearts of Russian readers.

### *What Is Being Done?*

Such a revolution has begun in southern Russia. The publishing arm of the Evangelical Christian Missionary Union (ECMU) in the city of Krasnodar has developed a seminar for Christian writers in both day- and week-long modules. These cover elements of the theory of Christian communications and the principles of good writing, and the attendees are given practical writing assignments. These seminars have been presented or will soon take place in Krasnodar, Volgograd, Moscow, Sevastopol, Minsk, Maikop, Rostov-na-Dony, and St. Petersburg.

A by-product of these writing workshops is a correspondence course for Christian writers entitled "For Such a Time as This." The purpose is to provide training and encouragement to Russian Christians of all denominations in all regions of the former Soviet Union.

Through the ECMU quarterly newsletter, writing contests for Christian teens and for writers of all ages have been launched as well.

### *A Different Perspective*

The "God factor" changes the picture considerably. I believe that with God's help and an army of well-trained, Spirit-led Christian writers, Russia is not situated on the edge of an abyss; rather it is perched on the brink of a mighty spiritual awakening. ❖

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