

Glowing embers beneath the ashes of Eastern Europe

We are hearing more and more from the missiological scholars of today that the centre of Christianity has moved from Europe and North America to Asia and Africa – and it seems that this tendency will grow stronger during the coming decade. In our own part of the world, we are experiencing that in this secularised and convenience-orientated European society, less and less people are interested in the gospel and faith in Christ, despite the fact that in most European countries there is no risk of persecution for your faith. In direct opposition to this, the Good News is spreading like wildfire in countries where it has only been present for a relatively short time and where it is often dangerous to be a practising Christian. In many respects Europe has been left behind by these countries and has to live off the highlights of past ages. Now Europe itself is becoming a *mission field*.

Of course the real situation is not as black and white as this. We still hear of spiritual revival in Europe too. Amidst the many depressing developments, there are still things happening in our region which lead us to believe that the embers are still glowing beneath the ashes, and that despite appearances, our nations have not yet completely turned their backs on God.

It is a sign of God's regenerating grace that, after a lapse of many decades, Hungarian Christians are once again getting involved in overseas mission. It is a particular joy for us in Wycliffe Hungary that more and more people are choosing to serve the kingdom of God with our organisation. Of course our readers are already well informed about our work, since it is the purpose of Wycliffe News to give regular updates about the ministry of our Hungarian members.

We would like to use this edition of Wycliffe News to give you a short outline of the history of Wycliffe in our neighbouring countries. These

countries have more or less similar historical and cultural heritages as in Hungary. Let us rejoice with them as we see how wonderfully God is working among the Christians from our neighbouring countries, where in some cases they are experiencing an even more difficult economic climate than we are. The information presented here is based on an article by *Wolfgang Binder*, the Director for the Central and Eastern European Area of Wycliffe. Through his work he has come to know the area well as he travels regularly to each of these countries.



Today mission is not the privilege of the Western church alone. The *whole Church* has to take

the whole gospel *to the whole world*. For various reasons this was not possible for a long time. But today the situation has changed. Churches all over the world have started to send missionaries. And the church in Central and Eastern Europe is no exception.

In our region, *Poland* and Hungary were the first two countries sending Wycliffe missionaries. Wycliffe Poland has been operating for more than ten years under the direction of *Jurek Marcol*. Their members are serving in

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► many different countries. A few months ago Polish Christians were able to celebrate the completion of the *first New Testament* in which a Polish Wycliffe member participated. The translation was into *Tamasheq*, which is one of the languages in Mali, spoken by about 500,000 people. *Gosia*, the Polish translator and her husband who is from this people group, were part of the translation team and worked for almost ten years on the translation project.

Work in the *Czech Republic* has also recently gained momentum. The first Czech couple left for Indonesia in July 2004. Another Czech lady has finished her initial training with Wycliffe and is preparing to go with her British husband to East Africa later this year. Another couple is in the process of application and hopes to start their Wycliffe training next year.

In *Slovakia* new hopes are rising with respect to Wycliffe work. In December 2004 Wycliffe

was registered as an organisation and now has a board. During the last year a very talented young pastor *Jaroslav Tomasovsky* was appointed as Director. (Actually Jaroslav's parents moved to Slovakia from Nyíregyháza, Hungary at the end of

the 1940s.) They hope to be able to accept the first missionary applicant later this year. Although the evangelical population in these two countries is relatively small, we expect several more Bible translators to come from there.

The picture in *Ukraine* is quite different. There the evangelical church has grown rapidly over the last fifteen years. The number of church-

es in at least one denomination has *tripled* since 1989. Hundreds of students are attending Bible Colleges and Christian Universities. Hundreds of missionaries have gone out already, most of them to countries of the former Soviet Union. But so far there has not been a focus on the need of Bible translation in many parts of the world. *Ivan Kunderenko*, the Wycliffe director in Ukraine, is trying to change that. Once the vision of peoples without the Word of God spreads in Ukrainian churches, they could make a big contribution in reaching the remaining language groups with the Word.

Another potential European giant in respect to missions is *Romania*. According to the book *'Operation World'*, which has prayer requests and statistics from all the countries of the world, Romania has about 1.5 million evangelicals – more than the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia together. Wycliffe does not exist in Romania yet, but the first Wycliffe family left for Ghana this January. Another single lady has finished her initial Wycliffe training and is hoping to leave for Indonesia this summer.

Some people think that these countries are still mission fields and therefore can't send missionaries. The first part is true. But I don't know of any country, which is not a mission field any more. But the second part is wrong. We can't wait until there is nothing left to be done at home before we take the gospel to the ends of the earth. And when we do, when we make God's priority our priority, He will bless us richly and supply all our needs. Let's thank him especially for his grace that he has found us worthy to be his disciples from Eastern Europe, to serve in countries and among people groups that do not yet know of his love.

Written and translated by Attila Kovács

Where the first New Testament was prepared with the help of a Polish Wycliffe member...



... the picture shows the Polish director, Jurek (centre), the main translator and the pastor of the church in Mali.

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