

Igor Zyryanov

Who Will Go For Us?

**Cross-cultural mission in the context of ministry
among Western Buryats**

Translated by David C. Lewis

Introduction

I would like, dear friends, to introduce to you this small book which I wrote with the aim of passing on the message which burns within me. It is a message about mission. Principles of cross-cultural mission are expounded in this book against a background of ministry to one of the unreached peoples of Siberia- the Western Buryats. In the summer of 1997 the Lord called us to plant a church in the village of Bayandai in the Ust-Orda Buryat autonomous district of Irkutsk region. Without thinking about it for long, we moved there and for seven years ministered as missionaries to the Buryat people.

My hope is that this book will help you to understand some important principles of cross-cultural mission. It should also be useful to those who want to minister among the Buryat people.

I thank the Lord for the family which He has given to me: my wonderful wife Lena and our four children - Paul (now 17 years old), Kate (14), Jacob (6) and Elizabeth-Victoria (4). The whole experience of ministry would have been unthinkable without their participation.

My prayer is that God would give each reader of this book the courage to fulfil the calling which He has laid on you, especially as the time approaches when all peoples will worship the Lord before His throne.

With love in Christ,

Igor Zyryanov

Chapter 1

Bayandai

It was a hot day in June 1997. Raising clouds of dust, the minibus of a missionary friend from America, who had kindly agreed to take us, began to brake next to a two-storey wooden house. Behind us was a two-hour journey from Irkutsk to our destination – the village of Bayandai in the Ust-Orda Buryat autonomous region. Not much more than a month previously our family had received a call to go to this village and plant a church there. We got out of the vehicle: our friend, myself, my son Paul, our colleague in this work named Yura and a large black Newfoundland dog named Dora. Yura, a remarkable self-taught musician, had decided to join himself with our family and help in organising a church in this settlement. My wife and daughter were supposed to come a week later, when we had got things a little straighter and had made ourselves at home. One lady had helped us rent a house and here we were standing next to it. In delighted excitement we went into the house and our gaze fell on a not very happy scene: all the plaster had come away from the walls and lay in a ten centimetre thick layer on the floor; there was nothing on the walls but rectangular panels. The oven was broken, several windows missing. Neither were there any electrical sockets or lights – but these were not necessary either, as there wasn't any electricity! Later we learned that for a couple of years this house had been unoccupied and drunks had made use of it. As they say, welcome to the mission field!

Our friend said 'Goodbye' to us and set off on the way back. The sun was burning mercilessly and a breeze was blowing but it brought absolutely no relief as the wind was hot too. People who later on were in Bayandai said that the landscape and weather there are very similar to Kazakhstan. There is steppe, no rivers of any kind, no forest nearby and a constant wind, both summer and winter - whether there be scorching sun or terrible cold, always there is the wind. The climate is a sharp continental one – very hot in summer and very cold in winter. I remember one winter when it was minus 54 degrees Centigrade and the gusts of wind chilled to the marrow.

Our sojourn there was also overshadowed by the fact that Bayandai has a huge water problem. The place where the settlement is sited lies very far above sea level and is called a 'lens'. This means that ground water is located deep below the surface. So in Bayandai there is only one well with drinking water. To reach this water they had to drill 270 metres! The water is carried to the inhabitants on water-carts and people buy it. In 2003 it cost 15 Roubles for a 200 litre barrel.

Bayandai is a district centre, with a population of 3,500 people. However, it is in practice amalgamated with another settlement by the name of Pokrovka, which adds another 1,000 people. In Buryat, Bayandai means 'Rich valley'. It originates from the fact that the Buryats in summer drove their livestock into this valley rich in grass. Even at the present time, there are number more that 25,000 head of cattle in the district. It happened that the road from Irkutsk to Kachug was laid through this valley and in the place where there had been a summer cattle-shed someone put up a permanent farmyard; the remains of this house can be seen in Bayandai even today. This is how the settlement started to develop.

Several days later we were fully settled in. We cooked our food over a camp-fire and one of the neighbours kindly gave us a water bucket: that was all we had for cooking food, for washing and for whatever else we wanted to do. Of course this didn't last for long. My wife Lena and daughter Kate arrived and we found another house. In the course of our ministry we had to move house as much as ten times in five years.

Our plans were simple: in two years, or at the most three, we would organise a church here and would leave for somewhere else. To be honest, I was the last person on earth who wanted to live in a village. Had I not known 100% that this was God's will, I would have never stayed in Bayandai. At that time I didn't even contemplate the kinds of ways in which the Lord lead us or what marvellous truths we would understand and assimilate during our ministry in Bayandai. With the benefit of hindsight I see that this time was indeed an immense blessing for us as servants of His Kingdom. God left us there for seven years, and this was His school of mission.

We started off with a big evangelistic campaign. We rented a hall and put up posters everywhere. For a whole month before that we persistently prayed for Bayandai, twice a day for two hours at a time. When the evangelistic meetings started, I went into the hall and looked around. To my disappointment, instead of 100 people, I saw not even 50, but a total of five. The evangelism lasted for four days and each day five people came along, although they were different ones each time. After these meetings we organised services in that same hall of the community centre on a Wednesday and Sunday. The effect was just as small. We didn't lose heart but continued to pray and to preach the gospel. Some people came; we showed a video; we prayed for their needs. In short, we did everything we could. On top of that, we did it very zealously. A year went by. In our church, which we called the 'Way of Life' church of prayer, there were still five to ten people in all.

Our small church met for prayer meetings in the house where our family was living. All were praying and calling upon God. Suddenly the marvellous presence of God came among us, when there was no need to say anything but one just wanted to delight in His Holy presence. One after the other we fell to our knees and worshipped the Lord. In the middle of this sense of the Lord's presence, my wife Lena began to prophesy: 'I brought you here, God says, because here live Buryats: this people is your goal!' Indeed we didn't have any Buryats in the church, even though they made up 50% of the district's entire population. But even then we did not understand what the Lord wanted to say to us.

In 1998 we started a church in the village of Olzony, thirty kilometres from Bayandai. It was in that same year that our helper Yura left. Another year passed, but the numbers in the church hardly changed at all: there were fifteen to twenty of us, of whom two or three were Buryats. Gradually we began to recognise what the Lord had in mind when he said, 'I have sent you to the Buryat nation'. Very slowly, in the course of a year, we became saturated in the vision which the Lord had for us. Jesus said, in Matthew 24:14, '**And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.**'¹

¹ All biblical quotations are from the New International Version.

The Western Buryats are a nation to whom the gospel has not yet been preached! That was why God led us here to a village, when there are still towns in Siberia with no church! He wants to save this people group. God loves nationalities! This thought took my mind by storm one quiet autumn day in 1999. Up to this time we had endured a load of difficulties. There had been hunger, when for a whole month we had lived off mushrooms, and, had there been a little more of it, it looked as if we would have just given up. Who needs this heroism? Our third child – a son, Jacob – had been born and Lena was pregnant with a fourth. We experienced huge needs, and in all of this our church consisted of fifteen people in total. What was the point of suffering like that? My wife and I pondered over such things a lot. But now it looked as if everything was changing. God had revealed to us why we were here. We were here to reach the Western Buryats! At that time we received a revelation which changed all our subsequent lives and ministry. It went like this: ‘The Buryats are a different people to the Russians’. We were trying to win the Buryats in the same way as we had been doing with the Russians and we were not seeing any results. Of course it couldn’t have been otherwise. It was in such a clumsy manner we came to our mission. In October 1999 my wife and I dedicated together ourselves to ministry among the Western Buryats. I began to study the Buryats’ culture, religion, history and language. Everything in my missionary worldview changed. In this book I want to share these revelations. Now, as I write this book, ministry to the western Buryats is spread over several settlements, and more than 50 Buryats have become Christians.

First of all I understood that God loves ethnic groups. Yes, each of us has spoken these words, but to say them is not the same thing as to understand and to feel it with one’s heart. It’s just that ethnic groups are God’s heart-throb: this is where His heart is, this is His passion! From its first book to the last, the Bible speaks of people groups – and I hadn’t seen this!

In Genesis 12:3 God says: ‘I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and **all peoples on earth** will be blessed through you.’ In essence the blessing which God spoke to Abraham is in no way different from the blessing of any pagan god. All blessings reduce to one: ‘If you will follow me, then I will look after you, and such like’. But God said something which did distinguish His blessing from all the rest: ‘and **all peoples on earth** will be blessed through you’. God was not just caring for Abraham but He was concerned about all peoples.

If you speak for ten minutes with someone who is mad about computer games then he is sure to start talking about games. What is in a person’s heart is also on his tongue. When you look in the Bible, at the prophetic books and the historical books, it seems that if God speaks for more than ten minutes he speaks about people groups!

‘Then will I purify the lips of the peoples,
that all of them may call on the name of the LORD
and serve him shoulder to shoulder.’
(Zephaniah 3:9)

‘My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD Almighty.’
(Malachi 1:11)

This is the Lord's heart, this is His cherished dream! He created peoples, like cut diamonds in a royal crown, and desires that they serve and worship only their Creator. The sons of Korah knew the heart of God:

'Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.'

(Psalm 47:1)

'All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name.'

(Psalm 86:9)

It would have been possible to fill this small book only with passages from the book of Psalms but this is not our purpose. Let it suffice to look at just a couple of other passages from the Old Testament:

"Are not you Israelites
the same to me as the Cushites?"

declares the LORD .

"Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt,
the Philistines from Caphtor
and the Arameans from Kir?"

(Amos 9:7)

The greatest miracle that the Lord did for Israel was the exodus from Egypt. However, in this passage of the scriptures God says that He also did the same for other nations! This is simply shocking! It turns out that God did not forget the rest of the nations. Moreover, He has continued and still continues to care for them. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! God loves ethnic groups!

'And I, because of their actions and their imaginations, am about to come and gather all **nations and tongues**, and they will come and see my glory.

I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to **the nations**--to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among **the nations**. And they will bring all your brothers, from **all the nations**, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD--on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels, says the LORD. They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the LORD in ceremonially clean vessels.'

(Isaiah 66:18-20)

It from this that mission is derived: no, it is not an invention of Bible teachers, neither has it been conjured up by the fevered brain of some pastor! Mission is taken directly from the heart of God Himself! This is what it means that God loves ethnic groups.

Some people raise an objection and say that the Old Testament is a thing of the past. For those who think like this, I would like to cite several passages from the New Testament:

'And as he taught them, he said, Is it not written:

'My house will be called a house of prayer for **all nations**'?

But you have made it 'a den of robbers!'

(Mark 11:17)

What was Jesus speaking about? He was talking about the church. The fact is that Jesus came so as to leave after Him a church that would reach all nations!

Romans 1:5 reads, 'Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people **from among all the Gentiles** to the obedience that comes from faith'.

In the book of Acts we see how this started to happen. The book of Revelation shows how it will end up:

'After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from **every nation, tribe, people and language**, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb."

(Revelation 7:9-10)

This is what God is dreaming about; this is what He is aspiring to! And it is precisely this that we as a church ought to be involved in. More and more this vision penetrated our hearts until they were fully filled with God's love to the limits, to overflowing. Today there are 6,322 unreached peoples on earth, of which 162 live on the territory of the former USSR and more than 35 on the territory of Siberia. Few have heard of such peoples of Siberia as the Kets, Itelmen, Koryaks, Selkups, Dolgans, Evenki and many others. The church should become a missionary church: this is the challenge God throws down to us and we cannot but respond to it.

'Who will go for us' asks God.

'Here am I, Lord, send me!'

Chapter 2

Identification with ethnic groups – the foundation of mission

I was standing on the road from the settlement of Lyura which is seven kilometres from Bayandai. We had had a wonderful meeting in this village and now I was standing in the hope of catching a lift to Bayandai. Hearing the drone of a 'Zhiguli' car, I turned and saw a blue car leaving the village of Lyura. The driver was Buryat. He was alone, without any passengers. I raised my hand and the car stopped.

'Could you drop me off in Bayandai?'

'Sit' was the terse reply.

I sat in the front seat and started a conversation about Christ. Five to seven minutes later the driver had neither asked anything nor affirmed anything. Then he remarked, 'You must be not completely Russian, more a mixture of Russian and Buryat blood. You think like us.'

For me this case was a confirmation that I had begun to understand the Buryat people. Not a single missionary can produce fruit from his ministry if he does not identify with the people to whom he ministers.

What does 'identification' mean? It means to become just like that people to whom the missionary ministers – not only outwardly but much more inwardly. It is important to think in the same categories by which people within this ethnic group think. It is imperative to adopt the values of the ethnic group, their mentality and their spirit. Until we are saturated with the values of that people group to whom the Lord has called us, it is difficult to count on any success. Many missionaries conduct themselves like little fish in an aquarium. When fish in an aquarium are moved, they are moved along with the aquarium, that is, with that environment in which they are used to living. Immense damage to the Kingdom of God has been inflicted by such missionaries. No – this is not for Christians! It is better for us to be like a chameleon: he takes on that colour which surrounds him. It is precisely this which helps him survive in this world. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul wrote:

'Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.'
(1 Corinthians 9:19-22)

This is our standard, as missionaries!

Each people group has its own set of values which are characteristic only of that ethnic group. If people conduct themselves according to these values, they are respected. For us as missionaries it is vital to learn these values. Some examples of the values of Western Buryats which I could cite highlight the great value they place on family relationships. I was a witness when the parents died in one family leaving two sons and an elder daughter. All of them were already adults – between thirty and forty years of age. However, the older daughter was the head of this clan. At first they had built a house for the youngest son, then, again all together, for the middle one, and finally for the older sister.

Throughout the whole of our time of ministry never once did we hear wives denigrating their husbands in conversations with other people in the way that often occurs among the Russians – ‘Mine’s an alcoholic, he’s drunk again; how I’m fed up with him; I’d rather not set my eyes on him.’ In conversations with other people, Buryats don’t complain either about their spouses or their children. Perhaps life may be very difficult for them, or maybe their son is a drug addict, but the parents will stand up for him in the eyes of other people. The majority of Buryats know their relatives up to the fourth, and even to the seventh generation. Buryats also consider all cousins and second cousins, male and female, uncles and aunts, to be close kin. It is in this manner that clans are spread among the Buryats.

After coming to Bayandai we began to minister in the local children’s home (or ‘orphanage’ for abandoned children). How great was our amazement when we found out that there were only Russian children in the home. So don’t the Buryats abandon children? They do, but the relatives – and remember this is a very wide circle of people – collect them and bring them up. Of course, nowadays a reduction in the significance of these values among the Buryats is taking place under the influence of Russian and Western cultures.

Another example of family relationships is as follows. If there are two sisters and one has, for example, three children, and the other has none, then the first sister shares her children with the second. This tradition permits better survival in this life. The children who had been given to the second sister call her their second Mum. It is considered to be normal practice and for there to be nothing at all strange in it for the Buryats.

It is vital for a missionary to become a Buryat in his or her own spirit so as to really effectively reach this nation. Sometimes cultural values of other peoples can shock us who are accustomed to our own reservoir, our own aquarium. This should not carry on! Smash your aquarium and stop being a fish which cares only about its own cultural values. Once I heard a wonderful example from a passing preacher. He related an incident which took place in Sweden. A team of Americans had come to a Swedish church. They were short-term missionaries. Showing hospitality to this team, the local Christians took the Americans to have a look at the sights of Stockholm. There were most beautiful castles and buildings as well as quite ancient cultural monuments. However, apart from a moderate curiosity, these tourist sights did not evoke any special interest in the missionaries. On the way back they suddenly noticed a café not far from the road, but it was not just any old café – it was an American hard rock café. A wild cry of excitement shook the bus, the American missionaries asked the driver to stop and they dashed into this café. It was a small

slice of their native America in far-off Sweden! Little aquarium fish can be moved around only along with their own water!

I also know of cases when Buryats have not accepted those of their own ethnic group because they have become ‘Russians’ both in their culture and in their behaviour. A similar case was recounted to me from the ‘Word of Life’ school in Moscow. Students from Tajikistan had come there and in the course of their studies had adopted the Moscow-Russian culture so much that on returning home the Tajiks did not want to listen to them. As far as the local inhabitants were concerned, they were traitors.

I believe that as a Christian church we have to re-examine our principles of mission, especially of cross-cultural mission.

Food constitutes an important element in the life not only of an individual but also of a society or ethnic group. If a missionary will not eat the food of the local population, he will most probably be not very successful in his ministry. The Buryat diet is also different from that which we were used to. We begin with the fact that in general they do not eat salads. They reply that Buryats ‘do not eat grass’. Meat is a priority in their diet. At the time of ‘usy’, when in the autumn the livestock is slaughtered, it is possible to treat oneself to one of the Buryats’ favourite foods. Fresh, frozen liver is cut into cubes, and the same is done with the intestinal fat. The diced up cubes are mixed together and piled up in a mound on a plate. You take the cubes by hand, dip them into salt and eat them.

Another dish is called *salamat*. It is cooked sour-cream. This dish is so fatty that the meat swims around on the plate and it very difficult to eat up for anyone who is not used to this food. The same applies to seal lard. A lot of Russians like salted pig lard, but salted seal lard is something altogether different. The freshwater seal primarily lives off fish and so its lard thoroughly stinks of fish, besides being very fatty. Whereas one can fry up pig lard on both sides, seal lard simply melts in the frying-pan. Frankly speaking, I can’t eat up a portion of this lard either!

One can’t fail to mention about a really wonderful dish, *posa*, or, as it is called in Buryat, *buzy*.

This chapter is probably a good place to acquaint the reader with some details about the Buryat nationality.

In Russia the total number of Buryats comes to 480,000 people. They live in the Buryat Republic and in the Chita and Irkutsk regions. In the Buryat language there are as many as thirteen dialects. However, one should point out that all Buryats can be divided into two basic groups – the Western Buryats and the Eastern Buryats. The western Buryats live on the west bank of Lake Baikal, that is on the territory of the Irkutsk province, in the Ust-Ordin Buryat autonomous region and in several other districts of the area. Conversely, the Eastern Buryats live on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal, in Buryatia and the Chita region. The difference between Western and Eastern Buryats is quite substantial both in language and in culture, and even in religion: among the Eastern Buryats is lamaistic Buddhism, whereas amongst the Western Buryats is shamanism. We were ministering among the Western Buryats and naturally we therefore know them better. Modern Western Buryats live in villages

and rural districts (*uluses*) – there is not a single town throughout the whole territory. They are occupied in agriculture and livestock breeding; those living on the shores of Lake Baikal are also involved in fishing and hunting. The great majority of the population live in poverty. The Buryat people have been simply overwhelmed by drunkenness, especially as *tarasun* (the local name for homebrewed spirits) and vodka are considered to be sacred drinks and are served to the spirits of the dead. The number of Western Buryats is around 90,000 people.

In the district centres and large villages the Buryats speak both in Russian and Buryat. In smaller villages and outlying hamlets one often encounters situations where the people do not speak in Russian at all but only in Buryat. Hence virtually the majority of the people (and 90,000 is not a small number) have not heard God's Word. The harvest is very great.

'Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.'

(John 4:35)

I believe with all my heart that the Lord is seeking workers for His harvest. Are you prepared to respond to His call? To go to the nations and bring forth fruit for the Lord Jesus? If we as Christians better understood God's heart for the nations, then there would be a lot more missionaries. An organisation named AIMS cites the following statistics on all full-time workers around the world: 95% work in the Christianised world, 3% are ministering among peoples living close by, and only 2% of all full-time workers are reaching the unreached peoples – but the latter constitute 40% of the planet's population. That is why we ended up as pioneers among the Western Buryats: there simply hadn't been another missionary there! Now the Lord is changing the attitude of the church towards mission and the purpose of this booklet is to pass on this call, this movement of the Holy Spirit. This is the fire of Jesus.

Chapter 3

The temple

One day the Lord showed me mission as like the building of God's house among the nations.

In 1 Chronicles chapters 28 and 29 and 2 Chronicles chapters 1 to 5 is described the constructions of the House of God – the temple. With all his heart David had wanted to build the house of God but the Lord said that it would be his son who would build this House. Then King David did everything he could to make his son's task easier. Solomon constructed the Temple. Let us remind ourselves that the old Testament is a foreshadowing of the New Testament, a prototype of life in the Spirit. Let us examine the shape of the House of God.

What is the 'House of God' for us nowadays? Is it the church as the Body of Christ? Yes and Amen! Even more than this, 'the House of God' is the presence of the Lord within a people. It is His dwelling place. It is His Glory in a nation. When we look at the construction of 'the House of God' from the point of view of mission, then we see that there is no House of God within many ethnic groups. Such a people group we call 'unreached'. In certain peoples the foundation of the Temple has already been laid, in others the walls are being built. God's purpose is that in each ethnic group there should be a 'House of God' – His presence, His predominance, His Throne and Glory. This is His purpose from creation to the second coming of Christ. It is His cherished dream, the aspiration of the heart of the Almighty.

In antiquity, large buildings were supported on several columns or pillars. Do you remember Samson? His last great feat was to shift the two supporting pillars of the building so that it collapsed, burying the Philistines beneath it.

'Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other.'

(Judges 16:29)

Let us represent mission as a building – a Temple. The foundation of this building is identification with the people, which we have looked at in the previous chapter. Upon this foundation stand two pillars, on which the whole building is based. These two pillars are (1) an intelligible preaching of the gospel to the people and (2) prayer or spiritual warfare. These are the themes of the following two chapters. All the rest of the building is missionary service in all its variety: churches, schools, children's ministry, sports ministry, Bible schools, evangelism, preaching by use of mass media, and so on. All these are supported by two pillars, which in turn stand solidly on the foundation of identification with the people.

Two pillars are essential for the building to be built. It is incredible how many missionaries do not erect these columns. One's efforts cannot produce fruit without working out a strategy for preaching the gospel. When we came to the Western

Buryats we began to preach to them like to the Russians. However, that kind of preaching did not work; all that we heard was, 'We have our own God'. We had to have a strategy for preaching.

Without prayer for the nation and without spiritual warfare, our efforts would not produce the expected result either. In Bayandai we had begun by speaking to the Buryats about the reality of the spiritual world, but they already knew about this. They know that spirits exist; the Buryats believe in a spiritual world. It is not to the Buryats that one needs to speak about the reality of a spiritual world but rather to Christians! Unreached peoples are more likely to take the gospel seriously than 'believers' to take spirits seriously. It is imperative that we pray for the nation and wage spiritual warfare.

Two pillars have to be erected before the rest of the building can be built. They have to be tough, powerful pillars, able to withstand the great pressure of the whole building. Therefore they have to be made out of a strong raw material. This material is called 'research'.

In order to work out an effective strategy for preaching the gospel it is indispensable to conduct research, together with prayer. Likewise, research is vital in order to pray effectively.

What is it necessary to research? Everything possible! This includes the language, religion, culture, history and way of life – in a word, everything. For almost four years I investigated the shamanism of the Western Buryats, finding out what kind of worldview they have. So we discovered several levels of spirits to which the Buryats offer homage or worship. The shamans have a concept of coaxing over various spirits through a complicated system of rituals. The devil has deceived the Buryats and they serve various 'heavenly deities' or 'sovereigns of the territory' – for example, 'The owner of Olkhon island' (that is, the spirit which controls the island of Olkhon in Lake Baikal) or 'The owner of the Lena' (that is, the spirits which control the basin of the Lena river). Apart from this, the Buryats also worship spirits of the dead and of the earth, and the spirits of the Mongols.

Studying all of this, we worked out the structure of the spirits which the Buryats worship.

The uppermost level is inhabited by Heavenly deities or celestial beings (Tengri spirits). These are powerful spirits which live in the sky. There are very many of them and they are divided into the Eastern evil spirits, of which there are 44, and the Western good spirits. There are more of the Western spirits: 99 in front, 55 in the middle and 77 behind. Chief of the Western spirits is Isege Malaan Tengri.

In the second level the Buryats worship the Heavenly Luminaries – the sun and moon.

On the third are spirits which come into the shamans and impart to them strength – the ongons.

Then there is the world of the air, the dwelling place of a spirit who is responsible for human vices and depravity. This spirit is the yellow he-goat Manzhilai.

The terrestrial world goes on the fifth level. Governing here are the Bumal burkhans and Ezhins. The Bumal burkhans are spirits which have left heaven in order to control certain territories. For example, there is the spirit which is answerable for the city of Irkutsk or the Angara river or the island of Olkhon. They are separated into the Eastern Khaat kings and the Western Khaat kings. The ezhins are the owners of specific places or homes - for instance, a certain stream or small piece of forest. They are reminiscent of house-sprites or wood-goblins in Russian mythology.

On the sixth level the Buryats worship the earth.

The underworld, which exactly copies the terrestrial world, goes on the seventh level.

All this helps to understand better the worldview of the Buryat people, and consequently to minister to them more effectively.

Hence, in order to erect a Temple in an ethnic group, we have to have a foundation of identification with the people. The material from which the pillars will be made is research. The two pillars are an intelligible preaching of the gospel and prayer. All the rest of the building resting on the two pillars and the foundation is missionary service.

Chapter 4

An intelligible preaching of the gospel

A bright summer sun flooded the room full of people. It was already the third day of medical consultations by a team of doctors who had specially come for this purpose to Bayandai from the USA – thirty people together with interpreters. Here were specialists in many fields of medicine. There were even dentists who had come with their chairs and equipment. Each patient went through a medical examination and then went to a room for spiritual consultation, where we preached the gospel to them, and then they received free of charge the medicine prescribed for them.

Before me in the brightly lit spiritual consultation room sat a woman of about 30 to 32 years of age.

‘I want to talk to you about God and pray for your needs’, I said.

‘It’s not necessary, thank you’, the woman replied, and added, ‘I have my own god, the Buryat one. I don’t want to betray him and then get punished for it.’

This was the time to use the strategy which was rushing through my head. A ‘strategy’ – how briefly we refer to a strategy for preaching the gospel which had been worked out on the basis of the Buryat culture.

‘I am not preaching a Russian God’ I began, and ten minutes later the woman was prepared to accept Jesus Christ as her Lord. However, prior to the appearance of this strategy for preaching almost three years of research and torment had been necessary. A mountain of literature had been devoured and here at last the strategy was ready.

For us as missionaries it is vital to understand that each nation and ethnic group has its own indispensable approach. All too often in practice this is not the case. We are trying to break through into the hearts of people through the walls, but let us remember that God has already prepared gates into the city and the Bible speaks of these quite a lot.

At the basis of a Biblical strategy for the evangelism of unreached peoples lies the truth that God, who had made all people groups, has never ceased to be concerned for them. So in Amos 9:7 it says:

‘Are not you Israelites
the same to me as the Cushites?’
declares the Lord.

‘Did I not bring Israe up from Egypt,
the Philistines from Capthor
and the Arameans from Kir?’

The greatest miracle which God did for Israel was the exodus from Egypt. It is wonderful, but here God says that he did just the same for the Arameans and

Philistines. Think of it – for the Philistines who in later times would have to be annihilated. When the measure of God’s anger will be filled up, then sentence will be passed but meanwhile, with a loving hand, He leads out his own people – the Philistines from Caphtor.

Often we think that God used only Israel and loved only them. Yes, Israel was a people chosen by God and may they be blessed by the Lord, but God has not rejected the rest of the people on earth; on the contrary, he cares for them like he does for Israel.

This truth is a basis for searching and investigation so as to find the doors to the hearts of people.

The time has come and God has prepared Good News for the nations, has prepared a way of redemption. However, this is not all! The Almighty is doing something else. God has prepared and is continuing to prepare the nations for the Good News. Yes, indeed! The salvation of the nations is not our own initiative. God is in love with the world, with all ethnic groups. God ‘in the past... let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony...’ (Acts 14:16-17). In this way God has prepared all the earth, all peoples, for the Good News. The Bible clearly says that God gave a general revelation of Himself to the whole world so that not a single person could say, ‘I didn’t know that God exists’.

‘... What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men (all ethnic groups) are without excuse.’
(Romans 1:19-20).

In this way, coming to the evangelism of a people group, we have to understand that God has already given them a general revelation of Himself. Most probably it already exists in the culture, religion, legends or language. Now the ethnic group awaits a special, particular revelation of God – the Good News. But the Good News will only be accepted on the basis of the general revelation previously given. Too often missionaries think that nations are in darkness and we come and bring light to them. Dear ones, God has already been caring for the peoples to whom He has sent us.

When God prepared food for mankind, He did not forget to create a person’s stomach and complete digestive system. In other words, God prepared food for man, and man for food. In exactly the same way, **God, who has prepared the Good News for all peoples, has also prepared those very same ethnic groups for the Good News.**

An example is the story of the Flood. In a sufficiently well-known form this story exists among many peoples – and this is not surprising, considering that such a grandiose cataclysm annihilated the whole world, and it was from Noah, the one who knew God, that all ethnic groups are derived. Of course, we have every reason to believe that Noah’s children for some generations worshipped the One Creator of the universe.

Such stories of the flood among various nations, ethnic groups and tribes are found:

In North America – 59 peoples
Central and Southern America – 46 peoples
Europe – 31 peoples
Near East – 17 peoples
Asia – 23 peoples
Australia and South Pacific – 37 peoples

In this way it turns out that 95 different peoples and tribes around the world know a story of the Flood and on this general revelation it is already possible to construct a preaching of the Good News.

But this is far from all. It is most likely that there is also a word among the ‘pagan’ peoples which signifies or implies the word ‘God’ in its biblical sense.

God, who has prepared the Good News for all peoples, has also prepared those very same people groups for the Good News.

Let us look at a biblical instance of this:

This example we find in the Bible, in the book of Genesis. In the 12th chapter we meet a Chaldean by the name of Abram, to whom God through a covenant gave a vow that ‘**all peoples on earth will be blessed through you**’. By what name did he call God? **Yahweh**. Unfortunately this is not apparent in many of our translations; however, it is in the original text:

‘The LORD (Yahweh) said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Lift up your eyes from where you are...”.’

(Genesis 13:14)

In chapter 14 he meets with a Canaanite by the name of Melchizedek. Melchizedek calls God by a different term – El-Elyon.

It is necessary to point out that up to this point Abram had seen only bad things from the Canaanites – depravity and all kinds of evil. And so a Chaldean meets a Canaanite:

‘Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High [EL-ELYON], and he blessed Abram, saying,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High [EL-ELYON], Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High [EL-ELYON], who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.’

(Genesis 14:18-20).

Put yourself in the place of Abram. Some person comes up to you, indeed someone from what you know full well is a terrible society, and says, “You are blessed from Hananim”. What! These are demons! The real God can only be called Yahweh. By the way, Hananim is “God” in Korean. We are all glad for Korea – the revival, the biggest Pentecostal, Baptist and Presbyterian churches, and many other glorious deeds. But few know how this all started. And it began with research. When Protestant missionaries had spent a number of years in the study of the culture, language and religion of Korea, they suddenly ran across an interesting legend. This legend recounted that formerly the Koreans worshipped One God – the Creator of the Universe. Then something happened and people lost connection with God. By all

descriptions He is very similar to the biblical God. They called him in Korean 'Hananim'. Missionaries took this name as the word for God in the Korean language. Of course, their preaching also changed; instead of saying, 'Your gods are bad, whereas ours is the genuine, good one' they began to preach, 'Return to the God of your ancestors'.

However, let us return to Abram. In verse 22 of that chapter, addressing the king of Sodom, he calls God **Yahweh-El-Elyon**:

'But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High [to Yahweh-El-Elyon], Creator of heaven and earth...".'

(Genesis 14:22)

Abram adopted this Canaanite name of God so as to speak with the Canaanites.

Of course this does not mean that we have to accept everything that is said to us on first acquaintance; research is necessary for this.

Another example is from the New Testament. We find it in **Acts 17:22-24**. Paul took the name of God written on one of the sacrificial altars, having decided that this also is a witness of God to the Athenians. To all appearances, he knew the legend of Epimenides. (According to the legend, he was a prophet from the island of Crete who had saved the city from an epidemic of plague through the offering of a sheep as a sacrifice.) We can assume this with great confidence, as Paul cites part of a poem by Epimenides in **Titus 1:12**.

Here we also encounter the preaching "Return to the God of your ancestors".

God prepared the nations for the Gospel. He has given them his witness, which includes in itself an understanding of the true God and His name, in the same way as he has prepared the people for receiving the Good News. **Therefore we have to find this witness about God and on the basis of it preach the Good News.** This also will be an intelligible preaching of the Gospel.

We spent a long time looking for a little path to the hearts of the Western Buryats and it turned out that God had prepared a broad highway. Three basic witnesses to God have gone into the strategy for preaching to the Western Buryats: the legend of Ogtorgo, the 'Geser' epic and the sacrifices with sheep. Apart from this we came across a lot of small testimonies, such as the wood at the consecration of a shaman. The wood is placed in the smoke-hole of the yurt and it symbolises life and posterity. However, one of the names for this wood is 'rainbow', and nobody knows why. But on the other hand, we know! Remember how God concluded a covenant with Noah and as a witness of it created the rainbow. The rainbow truly is life and posterity.

Buryat sacrifices are detail to detail similar to Biblical ones. In the book of Exodus is described how the Hebrews had to sacrifice the Passover lamb:

'The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect...' (Exodus 12:5)

For their sacrifices, the Buryats use only the best sheep, without any flaws. It has to be, of course and male and one year old.

'Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire – head, legs and inner parts.' (Exodus 12:9)

This verse too is fulfilled literally. The sheep has to be cooked on a fire, and what is more they attentively keep an eye on it so that it well cooked. It is forbidden to eat it uncooked. It is eaten together with the intestines. In Buryat culture the head is generally fare offered to the most esteemed people.

‘This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt...’ (Exodus 12:11)

This part of the verse is also observed. At the time of sacrifices Buryats have to have their belts done up. All this served for working out a strategy of preaching the Gospel so that it would be understandable to the local population and accepted by them.

The Geser’s epic is astounding in its basic concepts. The epic is rather large; however, the cardinal theme of this work can be clearly traced. There was a Creator God. He created a being which rebelled against God. Then God threw him down to earth. When this being fell to the earth it broke up and was transformed into demons who began to harass people. Its head was stuck between heaven and earth. Then God sent one of His Sons to earth. Geser was born to an elderly couple through an immaculate conception. He wiped out the demons, saving people. Then he returned to heaven and will come a second time on a white horse with a horde of His warriors to establish forever a Kingdom of righteousness. What does this remind us of? The New Testament, of course!

The legend of Ogtorgo is simply unique; I decided to quote it in full:

“A long, long time ago the Buryats served one God. They did not worship any spirits or deities but only this Great God. The Buryats called him ‘Heaven’. He was strong and loved people. It was this very God who created the visible heaven, earth, people and all livestock. He supported life on earth and continues to sustain it to this very day. This God is the sovereign of heaven and earth. The Buryats decided to give him a name. They took three words - *ogto torkho ugy*, which means, “completely without boundaries at all” – and made a composite word: OGTORGO. So people wanted to emphasise the Omnipotence and Wisdom of their God. But one day a tragedy happened – the Buryats lost relationships with their god. People did something which was offensive to God and shut up heaven for the whole nation. God could no longer bless his people. Right up to the present time in shamanic invocations the shamans mention the name OGTORGO, but do not bring Him offerings and do not ask anything of him, because God no longer hears them.”

Based on these testimonies, we worked out a strategy for preaching the Gospel to the Western Buryats. I shall not quote it word for word but only the basic points:

- 1) We do not preach a Russian God. No, this is the Buryat God and the God of the whole world. He has given His letter, sent to the whole world: this is the Bible.
- 2) There exists a legend in which it is related that the Buryats formerly worshipped the one true God. This god created all people and the whole world and right up to the present sustains life on the earth. This God is the Sovereign of heaven and earth. (In Buryat: *Undyr ekhe tengerin urgyn ekhe deedyn ezhin isege.*) The Buryats took three words *Ogto torkho ugy* (“totally without any boundaries at all”) and created a name for God – Ogtorgo. People served Ogtorgo, but when they committed sins they offered sheep as sacrifices.

This ritual remains to the present day among the Buryats, and it is recorded in the Bible.

- 3) Later the Buryats, moving onwards and living as nomads, ran into problems – impassable Siberian forests or mountains – and began to no longer trust Ogtorgo but worshipped a spirit of the forest or a spirit of the mountains. In this way they came under the power of spirits. More and more spirits began to wield power over people. So people lost connection with Ogtorgo. But right to the present they offer sacrifices, but now these are not to God but to spirits.
- 4) That was how shamanism appeared. Allow us to pose a question: “Why do you splash drops of drink to the spirits?”. The usual answer is, “Out of fear of punishment [if it were not done]”. Conclusion: the spirits are not for us; they are out for themselves and use us for their purposes. There are a huge number of them.
- 5) Ogtorgo has not forgotten people but loves them. Therefore 2,000 years ago he came to earth and became like a man. (Remember the ‘Geser’ epic – it has echoes of this event.) He came to the centre of the earth; this was ancient Israel. In European languages he was called ‘Jesus’, which means ‘God is Salvation’. He was also called Christ, which means ‘anointed one’ – that is, invested with authority. Ogtorgo was called by the Jews ‘Lord Sabaoth’ which means ‘God is Strong’.
- 6) Jesus Christ lived on earth about 33 years, serving people and showing the love of Ogtorgo. Then he died on a cross, taking on himself the Buryats’ guilt for abandoning Ogtorgo and for all their malicious deeds and all their sins. The Bible says that He Himself was a Sacrificial Sheep. God Himself brought the sacrifice for our sins. It is this very sacrifice which is genuinely able to reconcile us with Ogtorgo. And this isn’t everything: He destroyed the power of spirits over people, not only those of the Buryats but of all nations, because He loves everyone.
- 7) You fear spirits because you don’t know that they no longer have authority over you. They are deceiving you and fear lest you know the truth. ‘My people perish for lack of knowledge’ says the Bible.
- 8) If you trust in Jesus, you can return to the faith of your ancestors and no longer serve spirits. Ogtorgo will again become your God. You have to ask forgiveness for your sins and accept Jesus as your Lord (Khan). As you believe in Jesus, Ogtorgo becomes not only your God, but also your Father.

Using this strategy of preaching we see how hearts are opened. I believe that God is raising up a new generation of missionaries who will have great success. That is because they will not break through walls but go in through the doors. They will find God’s footsteps in the ethnic groups and on the basis of these will lead peoples and tribes to the Father’s throne.

Chapter 5

Prayer

The sun was burning one's face and it seemed as if the scorching heat penetrated everywhere. Several people were going to and fro around a vegetable plot in the village of Bayandai. To the uninformed, it could look as if they were drug addicts, and there were some who did think so. And so they might think - it was hot, but every day, some with smiles, some with tears on their faces, waving their arms for several hours they were going around the garden plot belonging to the house where they were living. Who were they? What were they doing?

It was my wife and I, our son and daughter and also our co-worker Yura. The first things that we started to do was to pray. For two hours, morning and evening, we interceded for Bayandai. For a whole month we just prayed. Only after that we began to preach the gospel.

The theme of prayer is extremely important for mission. I would like to narrow it down a little to the theme of spiritual opposition or spiritual warfare.

It's amazing how many Christians don't consider this issue to be important. However, it's not only important but vitally essential for a successful spreading of the gospel to people. Demons and evil spirits are as real as you and I. We ran into demonic powers straight away, as soon as we came to Bayandai. The first ones to come to Bayandai were my son and I plus Yura, the musician introduced to you earlier. About ten days later my wife and daughter were supposed to come. I set off for Irkutsk to meet them while my son and Yura stayed in Bayandai. At this time the Sur-Kharban festival was going on. The day passed quietly for the lads, then night fell. At about three o'clock Yura and my son Paul woke up with a feeling of horror and panic. Suddenly a horseman appeared in the doorways connecting the rooms. There and then they knew who he was. At the entrance to the regional capital, Ust-Orda, stands a monument of a rider (which some say is a woman) on a horse. This was the horseman. He did not open his mouth but the lads heard the words, "What do you need here? Clear off!"

Yura and Paul began to pray with all kinds of prayers known to them and the rider left, dissolving into the darkness. That was our introduction to Bayandai.

What is the reason for such activity by demonic powers? Are there more evil spirits in the villages than in the towns?

Most probably we will find the answer in the open worship of demons. Demonic powers are called forth by their open proclamation and worship. Actually, this is a divine principle:

'Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.'

(Mark 16:20)

By signs and wonders, God backs up our word in preaching the Gospel. The devil too tries to do just the same: he corroborates open worship of him by “signs and wonders”. Martin Luther said that Satan is God’s great ape, as he tries to copy everything that the Almighty does.

The Buryats regularly enter into covenants with spirits. This is on at least three levels: the individual, the family and the community. The service of these spirits is accomplished with the aid of a complicated system of rituals and sacrifices. These are led by shamans. So, for example, on the 21st of May each year whole villages of Buryats assemble together in particular places for a collective sacrifice. The spiritual significance of the event in question lies in the consecration of the whole group of people to demonic spirits. Apart from this, every family once a year performs a sacrifice at their own home “to feed the Mongol” and also at those homes where they lived formerly, which sometimes requires journeys of many kilometres. The meaning of this is the dedication of one’s own home and family to demonic spirits. Finally, each individual Buryat (and also Russians and other nationalities living in this territory) also “sprinkle”. That is, prior to eating or drinking something, they throw some crumbs or drops on the ground or on the table or on the bonnet of a car, etc. Often this is done with vodka. In this way they pay obeisance to spirits of the dead and to divinities – in other words, to demons. On the roads you come across hundreds of special places called “borisa” where without fail one has to “sprinkle” – otherwise, according to their superstition, a serious accident and even death could take place – which, by the way, is a not infrequent occurrence.

A great number of times we have encountered supernatural manifestations of demons. One time some students from the Ukraine came to us for their practical experience. The lads – six of them – were living in a small hut. In the evening all lay down to sleep. One of the brothers felt as if someone were smacking him on the legs. Of course, he presumed that someone was just fooling around.

“Cut it out, kiddo”, he said, not raising his head, trying to brush it off.

But the smacks continued.

“Look, you’re being a real pain” the brother said, not standing for it any longer and sitting up in bed – but there was nobody around. All were asleep.

Many times we have been witnesses of such kinds of supernatural events. There have been times when the floor was rocking or small children were singing below the windows.

Unfortunately, as Christians we are more used to dealing with people’s sins than with demonic opposition.

As was mentioned previously, we moved house ten times in five years of residence in Bayandai, and virtually every house was under the influence of demons. Later we learned that several people had specially rented us their homes, as a rumour was circulating that, after we had lived in them, all evil spirits had departed. In one house there was the whole lot. A sacrificial altar to the spirits had been constructed in the yard. Then we found idols carved out of wood. After that were discovered strips of birch wood on which drops of vodka are poured out to the spirits of the dead. Besides that, the owner of the house also worshipped a fire spirit. We decided to cleanse everything, burned the idols, smashed up the sacrificial altar, prayed and gave

authority over this house to the Holy Spirit. However, soon my wife and I began to have pornographic dreams. We prayed, but the dreams continued. In the end we heard from the Lord that the problem was in the roof of this house. It was a strange revelation, and, to be honest, I didn't pay attention to it straight away. When we did climb up to roof we found that on each of the thirteen rafters depictions of naked women in various positions had been drawn with chalk. We wiped off these images and anointed the roof with oil as a sign of the lordship of the Holy Spirit. We did not have to wait for a result: the erotic dreams ceased.

However, my wife Lena complained of a severe headache. There was no time to do everything and we briefly prayed about it. An analgesic tablet should have put an end to this problem. By evening the headache had become many times worse. Lena just couldn't get up from the bed by herself. She was in a semi-delirious state. It was only then that I began to pray seriously and seek the Lord's face. Suddenly I caught myself thinking, 'Lena's dying'. This thought was persistent and did not allow me to concentrate. Late, Lena told me that she had had the same thought too. About twenty minutes passed, then unexpectedly the Holy Spirit came and I saw a vision. An arrow was sticking out of my wife's head. It was so real that it was difficult to put it into words. I stretched out my hand and took the arrow sticking out of her head and with the words, "In the name of Jesus Christ" I pulled out the arrow. Just then the vision disappeared, but within myself I knew that this had been done by a shamanic ritual. Two or three minutes later the pain abated and approximately half an hour later had disappeared completely.

I am describing all this so as to illustrate the indispensable need for prayer – both on the part of the missionaries themselves and also for the missionaries. The devil really does exist and like a roaring lion is seeking, continually seeking, those he can devour. God has given us a weapon – it is prayer. Any of us Christians can pray for a certain missionary or ethnic group. Sometimes in our intellect an image of prayer is depicted as if it were not obligatory, as if it were a secondary issue and that there is something more important. Do not let yourself be fooled! Prayer is the most important part of mission work!

I'd like to dwell in more detail on prayer of identificational repentance. There are many denominations and church movements which have accepted this revelation about prayer. The concept of identificational repentance is as follows: when a single person commits a sin then only he may repent of that sin. When a society sins, then repentance for this sin can be done by each member of the society or by a person who has identified him or herself with this society. From this comes the name of identificational repentance.

The prophet Daniel prayed such a prayer:
'We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.... Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame-the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.'

(Daniel 9: 5, 7)

However, we know that Daniel himself did not sin before God, but he identified with his nation and prayed for it, repenting on behalf of the nation.

Nehemiah also prayed a similar prayer:

‘Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.’

(Nehemiah 1:6, 7)

There has already been quite a lot written well about identificational repentance. I would advise those who would like a better understanding of this topic to read Peter Wagner’s books ‘Wrestling with dark angels’ and ‘Breaking Strongholds in your city’ and Cindy Jacobs’ book ‘Possessing the gates of the enemy’.² It is clear that it is extremely important to do such ministries as identificational repentance or, as it is alternatively called, the ministry of reconciliation.

For some years we researched the history of the colonisation of Siberia by the Russians and unearthed several strongholds which had taken shape out of the sins of Russia against the Buryats. These strongholds exert an influence on the entire region known as ‘ethnographic Buryatia’.

It is no secret that the spiritual movement in the Irkutsk region wishes for something better. For all the huge work carried out by the churches, the effect is very small, church growth is also insignificant and at times is absent altogether. Actually, the Irkutsk and Chita regions of today, as well as the Republic of Buryatia, are constituent parts of the so-called ‘ethnographic Buryatia’ as defined by the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation. (‘Ethnographic Buryatia’ is the territory on which Buryats have lived from time immemorial.) Moreover, the formation of the Buryat people out of different ethnic groups and tribes took place on the very territory of today’s Irkutsk region, specifically on the Western side of Lake Baikal.

Throughout the development of the Buryat people there occurred various events which involved the people in sins against God. The devil has used these corporate sins to establish strongholds on the territory inhabited by Buryats from ages past. We believe that these strongholds will be broken when the people of God stand before God in identificational repentance. Corporate sins will be destroyed by the Blood of the Lamb and strongholds will fall. We do not need to fight against the symptoms of the sickness but must wipe out the cause of the illness.

² I am guessing that ‘Wrestling with dark angels’ is the book to which Igor is referring; in Russian the title is ‘Confronting the powers of darkness’. Other possible Peter Wagner books which might fit the general theme and might have been translated in this way into Russian include ‘Confronting the Powers: How the New Testament Church Experienced the Power of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare’, ‘Confronting the Queen of Heaven’, ‘Warfare prayer’, ‘Shaking the heavens’ and ‘Territorial Spirits’. Likewise, the Cindy Jacobs book in Russian is literally ‘Possessing the cities’ and the nearest equivalent title of one of her books which I can find in English is ‘Possessing the gates of the enemy’.

We do not expect that revival would come immediately after prayers of identificational repentance in the Irkutsk region but step by step the spiritual atmosphere would improve and be filled by a Holy Lord!

THE SIN OF IDOLATRY

‘Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.’

(Exodus 34:13-14)

‘They angered him with their high places; they aroused his jealousy with their idols.’

(Psalm 78:58)

It is well known that the Buryats had indeed inhabited the contemporary Irkutsk region. Did they also live in the territory of the present-day Bratsk, Ust-Kut and Ust-Ilimsk districts? Without a doubt! The Buryats, and the tribes out of which the Buryats were formed, as well as tribes living alongside the Buryats - such as the Sakha (Yakuts) and Evenki – were all shamanists. Archaeological excavations testify that in the second century BC, among the tribes inhabiting the Western side of Lake Baikal, shamanism was already widespread. However, from the Word of God we know that all peoples derived from the descendants of Noah. It stands to reason that Noah’s offspring did not forget God straight away, and it is more likely that this was a gradual process. People migrated and on the way found a huge mountain with no way to pass it. It was then that they worshipped the spirit of this mountain and were able to get through, but already they were slaves of this spirit. In this way, people began to worship a whole pantheon of different spirits, trying to survive, and this is shamanism. Instead of worshipping the One Sovereign of heaven and earth they began to serve demons.

The sin of idolatry produced, I believe, some kind of spiritual stronghold on the territory of the Irkutsk region. We call it “unbelief”. With all this, there has never been a radical cutting off and repudiation of shamanism in the Irkutsk region. When, in the seventeenth century, Russia expanded to the area west of Lake Baikal and the territory of the present-day Irkutsk region was annexed, there was a forced conversion of the local population to Christianity but the problem of shamanism was not resolved. On the contrary, what was created was an amalgamation of shamanism and Russian Orthodoxy.

As those who are descended from Noah, God’s people must repent of the fact that our ancestors went away from God and became shamanists.

THE SIN OF DENIGRATION AND THE SHEDDING OF INNOCENT BLOOD

‘You have plotted the ruin of many peoples, shaming your own house and forfeiting your life. The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime!’

(Habakkuk 2:10-12)

Unfortunately, in our modern mentality we are so used to thinking that Russians live in Siberia, particularly in the Irkutsk region, that we don't even remember, or simply don't know about, the indigenous people, the Buryats. Yet this land was conquered by the Russians in the seventeenth century. Initially the annexation was peaceful, especially as the Buryats themselves wanted to be under Russian power. In 1626 Maxim Perfilev, the Cossack leader with the detachment of Cossacks who reached the Shamans' Rapids in the upper Angara river, wrote, '... The Bratsk lands are rich and there are many people on them... and the Bratsk people [OR does it mean something like 'brotherly people' ?] are awaiting your civil servants, and want to offer obeisance [Is this the meaning in this context of поклониться?] to you, Your Majesty Most Great, and to pay tribute (the *yasak*) and to trade with persons belonging to the service classes' (*i.e.* those bound by obligations of service, especially military service, to the Muscovite Russian state). After this, however, a bloody tragedy occurred on the Buryat steppes. Jacob Khripunov's detachment, which had failed in its search for silver ores, compensated for the loss by the devastation and robbery of Buryat settlements. These acts of violence coincided with an incursion of Cossack outlaws from the stockaded outpost town of Krasnoyarsk, which had been established again.

It was just at that time, in the course of building the Lensk (1630) and Bratsk (1631) stockaded forts, that the attitude of the Buryat princes began to change. They came out against the Russian outposts with weapons in their hands. 'Siberian towns of the 17th century pursued one basic goal: they had to serve the military-administrative centres for the collection of tribute from the natives, and for the further seizure of "unpacified lands". So the Bratsk outpost was built primarily as a military fortress and for a long time the population consisted predominantly of people from the service classes. A number of times it participated in battles with the Buryats but in 1635 was burned down in the course of military actions and afterwards built up again. From the Nizhnyundinsk stockaded town a campaign against the Buryats was conducted by E. V. Tyumentsev.

In this way, a lot of innocent blood was shed. There was also a great deal of denigration, even if one only takes as an example the forcible relocation of Buryats to new places of residence.

As Russians and as citizens of Russia we must repent of the fact that, conquering these lands, we shed innocent blood and sowed hatred and nationalism.

This is what we did in Bayandai at such as meeting for repentance: we called the Buryats to the front of the church and, as Russians, asked forgiveness of them for the shedding of innocent blood and for the humiliation of the Buryat nation (and likewise of the Evenki and other indigenous peoples). After this we sensed an immense joy in the Holy Spirit. In Irkutsk in 2002, at the invitation of the 'Word of Life' church, we again conducted such a service. There were five Buryats at that service, all of them were saved, and we put them in front of the church congregation with Russians facing them. These were the leaders of the church, who identified themselves with all of Russia and with those people who had killed and stolen, who had humiliated and laughed at the Buryats, while the Buryats identified themselves with the entire Buryat nation.

The Russians began to ask forgiveness. At first this was difficult, but then it was as if something crashed down and was broken through. There were floods and floods of tears; they hugged one another and again wept. The Russians repented, the Buryats forgave. After that everyone in the church went up to the Buryats and asked their forgiveness on behalf of Russia.

This was an unforgettable sight, as if the heavens had opened and God's river, the river of love, was flowing. It flowed with deliverance and healing, reconciling two nations by the Blood of Jesus. The Glory of God was poured out on this place.

THE SIN OF FALSE CHRISTIANITY AND FORCIBLE CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY

‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.’
(Matthew 23:13, 15)

The penetration of Christianity into Buryatia began in the 20s – 30s of the 17th century with the appearance of the first Russian explorers. Originally a “conversion to Christianity” was accomplished by means of the forcible baptism of Buryats who had been taken captive. After that there wasn't any really forced conversion but there was a ‘policy’ of Christianisation. So poor people were let off their obligations if they converted to Christianity. Not uncommonly they were resettled to monasteries, the number of which increased. Criminals were also able to escape punishment even for such crimes as theft and murder, if they had been baptised and relocated to a monastery. Rich people and princes were granted various privileges and favours, and were given ranks and medals, for their assistance in the baptism of Buryats.

The overall results of Christianisation of the Buryats, as determined by the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation, were:

- 1) A certain supplanting of shamanism and its transformation under the influence of Christianity.
- 2) The appearance among the Buryats of a dual or triple, syncretic religion (shamanism-Christianity or else shamanism-lamaism-Christianity) and an increased complexity of the cultural-ideological system in Buryat uluses (districts or settlements)...
- 3) ... Christianity as embodied in the Orthodox church came out against all that was Buryat and belonged to the national identity; it demanded a repudiation of the heritage of the past.”

All of this formed a spiritual stronghold in the area to the West of Lake Baikal: “A Buryat could not be a Christian; a Christian could not be a Buryat”. In the Irkutsk region this sin probably also served to form a stronghold which hinders acceptance of the Good News by the local population.

God's people have to repent for having identified themselves with Christians who had converted Buryats to Christianity and had brought a religion under the guise of bringing Christ.

THE SIN OF DISOBEDIENCE AND OF NEGLECTING THE OPPORTUNITIES TO BRING THE LIFE OF CHRIST TO PEOPLES INHABITING THE TERRITORY OF WHAT IS NOWADAYS KNOWN AS SIBERIA

‘I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so that I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD.’
(Ezekiel 22:30-31)

It is apparent from history that time and again God gave opportunities or opened doors to bring the life of Christ to the Buryats and other peoples inhabiting the territory of the present-day Irkutsk region.

So, for example, Kublai Khan, a descendant of Chinggis Khan, hearing about the gospel, sent emissaries to the Pope asking him to send preachers who could teach the Good News of Jesus Christ to the entire population of the empire. Of course, they did not keep on waiting for the preachers.

And even when in 1819, in the area east of Lake Baikal, a mission of the Bible Society of England began to operate among the Selenga and Khorin Buryats, it was actually the Irkutsk diocese of the Orthodox church which rose up against this mission. The Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation reports that this mission “was actively engaged in cultural-educational work: it translated both theological and secular literature into the Buryat-Mongolian language, published it, supported with its own resources a college for the Buryats and provided medical help.”

In 1842 this mission was obliged to depart on account of impediments by officials of the Irkutsk diocese, but notice that they had already finished a translation of the Bible in the Buryat-Mongolian language thirty years prior to the publication of the Synodal translation in Russian.

We need to repent for having identified ourselves with Christians of previous centuries – Christians who, in disobedience to the Lord, had, instead of life, brought “death” – that is, religion.

THE SIN OF REBELLION

‘To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.’
(1 Samuel 15:22-23)

‘Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been

established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.’

(Romans 13:1-2)

Unfortunately, since ancient times the territory to the west of Lake Baikal and of today’s Irkutsk region has served as a place for exiles and as a refuse for rebels.

So even as long ago as 110 BC there is information in the Chinese chronicles that emissaries who had committed offences or been insubordinate were banished to Baikal “to tend sheep until they lamb” – that is, for life.

At the time of Chinggis Khan’s Mongol Empire part of his imperial forces rebelled and fled from the Khan. After escaping, they settled in the area where nowadays is located the town of Nizhnyudinsk. Although this territory was also a part of the Mongol empire, it was as if it were on the margin.

Once this territory had been joined to Russia, various “outlaw” type people headed this way – insurgents, and criminals too, going into hiding to escape punishment.

In Soviet times Siberia was renowned for its huge collection of labour camps and prisons. In addition, after serving their sentences, the prisoners were often sent to a “deportation settlement” for a certain period of time. People had to stay another five or ten years and live in some village or other.

All this formed in the Irkutsk region a stronghold for *rejection*. A spirit of rebellion is at work among people, trying to prevent the love of God from touching hearts.

It is vital for God’s people to repent, once they have identified themselves as inhabitants of this land in rebellion.

We understand that this is a far from exhaustive list of strongholds. However, it is a distressing fact that Christians give little time and energy to this. We must pray; we must go on prayer walks and journeys; there must be services of reconciliation and intercession. All this is extremely vital if indeed we want to see revival in Russia!

In Acts chapter 12 are described the events when Peter was captured and held in a dungeon.

‘So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.’
(Acts 12:5)

What also happened? God released Peter in a miraculous manner. It is the same for people today who have been held captive by the devil and imprisoned in the dungeons of Buddhism, shamanism or atheism. Satan does not want them to make use of that plan which the Lord has prepared for them. But if the church prays assiduously the devil has no chance whatsoever. The fetters will be smashed, the doors thrown open and the people will come out of the dungeons to fulfil that for which God had created them. Once God gave us a promise for the Buryat people and we believe that it will be fulfilled in full:

‘The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.... For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you

have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.’
(Isaiah 9:2, 4)

So, to sum up a little:

We have seen that in missionary service there are two pillars, like in a temple: these are an intelligible preaching of the gospel and prayer. The material out of which these columns are made is research. The pillars do not stand on bare ground but on a foundation: this is acceptance of the people to whom the Lord has sent you, and identification with them.

Chapter 6

The Fire of Jesus

‘I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!’
(Luke 12:49)

God’s fire, God’s passion, God’s heart strives for thing – that all nations hear the Gospel and can receive the forgiveness of sins for which God Himself was crucified on a shameful cross. His blood was shed so that all peoples of the world may be saved. This is also the Lord’s message at this time for the church. The church must become a missionary church! Who must reach the peoples? Churches – not some kind of strange organisations, and not missionaries by themselves. The reaching of unreached peoples has to be a planned ministry of each local church. We in Russia have been looking a lot to the West, expecting help and missionaries, but the time has come when the church in Russia has to recognise its responsibility before the unreached ethnic groups and itself become in truth a **missionary Church**. The time has come when we must take on the anointing and power, the courage and consecration, so as to accept the call from our Lord. It is a task for the whole Body of Christ. For example, if a weight-lifter lifts up a weight bar, he doesn’t do it with just one muscle, or even with one group of muscles, but many muscles and organs have begun to function merely so that they should lift up the weight. The salvation of a nation is not a matter for some single church or ministry; reaching a nation is possible only in co-operation by many churches.

We believe that **every** local church, in the whole world, has been called to missionary action. One could object – what if a church is small and cannot send missionaries? That means it can pray and help to finance those who are already labouring among the nations, in whom the church has begun to get an interest.

One man of God has said, “As fire is for combustion, so mission is for the church”. Imagine a camp fire. Bright tongues of flame are licking the wood, the combustion good and pleasant. You can warm yourself by it and cook food. What would happen, though, if you too away the fire from the bonfire? There would only be smoking, charred logs! They are good for nothing; all they do is sting the eyes and make breathing difficult. Just like charred logs are churches without mission activity.

God’s heart is burning with a fire of pain for each unreached people group. He is calling to us: “pray for the nations, go to the peoples”. His eyes are looking around the world seeking a person who would stand in the gap for the land. This is His voice, “Go and make disciples of all nations”. Voices can be various: quiet or loud, pleading or commanding, desperate or confident, sad or joyful. How can one characterise the voice of the Lord to us? It is the voice of one crying out! When a person is in an extreme situation he yells and it is only in the most critical moments that his voice turns into a wail. God is not merely shouting at us at the present time: His call to us is a wail from a heart overflowing with compassion. People groups are perishing.

Those whom He strongly loves and for whom He gave us His own Son, are going to hell. Do you hear this cry in his heart? How will you answer to His call?

In November 2001 our ministry among the Buryats began to be called the “Voice of one Crying Out” Mission. The reason for it is this. A month prior to this there had been a conference and there was a wonderful presence of God at one of the sessions. Everyone there was simply in worship to God. At a certain moment the Holy Spirit told me to go up to the map of the Irkutsk region which had been hung up in front of the stage. I went up and when I glance at it I saw a face – precisely just the forehead, eyes and nose. It was a Mongoloid face. It was a person from some unreached ethnic group. The eyes left the strongest impression – eyes full of despair and sorrow. They were the eyes of a person who is going into the abyss. It was a mute cry for help. The Holy Spirit touched me and I simply fell to my knees and began to sob. After that I once again glanced at the map and saw hundreds, thousands of such faces. God’s compassion and love overflowed me and I just lay on the ground and sobbed. God then said to me, “Now”.

It was this very vision which gave the impetus to our ministry under the name “The Voice of one Crying Out”.

‘But if I say, I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.’

(Jeremiah 20:9)

We cannot – we must not – be silent about the Lord. Jesus, when He was on earth, dreamed that the fire would flare up. Today the fire is within us, and it depends on us. Will we keep it in or will we unleash this fire of Jesus, so that the nations will see the Glory of the Lord?

‘To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.’

(Exodus 24:17)

God has said that His Glory will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea – that is, full, to the limits, in abundance. However, this He will do through me and you.

“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” The question posed by God hundreds of years ago remains to this very day important and all the more urgent. Our loving Father is calling to each and every Christians, wanting to see in us the fervour of his heart for unreached peoples. “Here am I. Send me!” – that is the kind of answer God wants to hear from His children.