

A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSION THROUGH PROFESSION AS A STRATEGIC FOCUS IN LEADERSHIP FORMATION AMONG YOUNG EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS (IN KIEV, MOSCOW AND ST. PETERSBURG)

Alexander Negrov

Alexei Belov

From 2016 to 2017, Hodos Institute, in partnership with the Graduate School of Leadership at St. Petersburg Christian University and other partners in Eurasia (countries of the former Soviet Union – FSU), conducted a study of Christian leadership in the workplace and Christian mission through one’s profession. The goal of the study was to find out what the young generation of Evangelical Christians of this region thinks and how they practice these themes in their lives. The aim of this article is to provide a brief report about our research project and offer our main conclusions and recommendations. The article is addressed to representatives of the international community who are interested in mission, leadership and Christianity in Eurasia. The article may also be interesting for individuals involved in leadership development and who also interact and partner with Evangelical communities, particularly in Russia and Ukraine.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF OUR STUDY¹

Hodos Institute began the research project in early 2016 and moved in three directions: (1) research interviews in St. Petersburg; (2) questionnaire surveys among Evangelical youth in Kiev, Moscow, St. Petersburg and other regions; (3) analysis of questions that have been asked by students and young adults at various forums under the umbrella of the international movement, “Mission in Profession.” These forums were held in 2015-2017 in the following cities: Belgorod (Russia), Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan),

1. This article is a short report of the materials published in our recent book Негров А., Белов А. *Лидерство и миссия христиан на работе: перспективы, исследования и рекомендации*. СПб. 2017 and in the following articles: Белов А. *Вера и труд: представление результатов интерпретации 24 интервью с евангельскими верующими из Санкт-Петербурга*. / Негров А., Пеннер П., Черенков М., ред. *Вера и труд: христианская миссия и лидерство в профессиональной деятельности*. СПб: Санкт-Петербургский христианский университет, 2017. С. 251-272; Негров А. *О взаимосвязи веры, труда, лидерства, призвания и миссии*. / Там же. С. 199-222.

Vladikavkaz (Russia), Ekaterinburg (Russia), Kiev (Ukraine), Perm (Russia), Poltava (Ukraine), St. Petersburg (Russia), Tbilisi (Georgia).

The arguments, conclusions and recommendations in this article are based on various materials. First, we conducted 24 interviews in St. Petersburg to find out how Evangelicals see and practice faith at work. Secondly, we collected data from online questionnaire surveys among Christian young adults from Kiev, Moscow, St. Petersburg and other regions. The questionnaire was completed by a total of 453 individuals. The list of questions included the open-ended question on how one understands the connection between calling and professional work. Thirdly, we analyzed questions posed by participants of the forums conducted within the strategic initiative, "Next Generation Leaders: Time of Professionals."² Attendees at these events were young adults who are interested and able to integrate professional activity and Christian faith. Participants were provided the opportunity to ask questions of speakers and moderators, and benefit from their responses. The organizers of these events collected and sent us these questions for analysis.

Before we report on our findings we would like to share what motivated us to conduct this research project.

PRIMARY RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH

The need to explore this theme became obvious in the process of our previous research on the phenomenon of leadership among Evangelical Christians in Eurasia.³ Here is what we found and what became motivational factors to study further how Christians see the connection of faith, work and mission:

1. **Surprisingly, Evangelical believers in Eurasia often do not associate leadership with the practice of Christian mission. For example, a pastor of a large Evangelical church stated the following:**

” It needs to be explained to young people that the choice is not between “in church” or “outside church” but rather how to minister not only in church. ⁴

2. **Evangelicals appreciate spiritual qualities more than professional skills.** However, the inner life and individual spirituality are not the only things that define the effectiveness of one’s leadership. Spirituality should not supplant the importance of knowledge and professional skills.

2. The given initiative has been developed by Spiritual Renewal Association to consolidate and motivate a new generation of Christian professionals for their active and effective ministry to Christ and His Kingdom through their professional work and social influence. For more, see <http://asr-rm.org/>, <http://mission-in.pro/>.

3. Research materials are published in the four volumes that are available at <http://www.hodosinstitute.com/publications>.

4. Henceforth the statements by our respondents are given in italics.



3. **Some believers think that leadership is needed in all spheres of life (church, work, family, etc.). However, leadership formation of Christians is focused mainly on life inside the church and is hardly associated with professional work.**
4. **While Evangelical youth regularly attend church gatherings and events, they spend most of their time studying and/or working.** Therefore, the Christian mission and leadership potential of youth can and must be put into practice in both the church and the professional sphere.
5. **Most young believers indicate that they practice leadership mainly within the church.** However, Christian mission **will not** expand if efforts are focused **exclusively** on life within local congregations.
6. **Young believers possess significant potential for leadership and mission.** Still, they need help in defining *goals* and *strategies* to realize their potential and apply their gifts and talents in the workplace.
7. **We found that for many church leaders the main question is not how to minister to their young adults but rather how to use them.** In light of the significant potential of Evangelical youth, along with their energy, amount of spare time (in contrast to older adults), and their desire to serve, interest in them must be driven not by the question of how to use them for church needs but rather how to help them to develop their potential and function both inside and outside of congregations, including in their workplace.
8. **Leadership formation must have a clear missional aspect.** There is no reason to talk about Christian leadership apart from mission. Mission is not merely evangelism. All spheres of a believer's life – including work and studies – must be characterized by service for the sake of God's Kingdom inside and outside of local congregations. A leadership focus on the church's

internal needs can consolidate communities but it can be ineffective in motivating Christians to spread the Kingdom.

9. **Leadership formation among youth must not be exclusively utilitarian.** It is not just preparing a person for further work in his or her native community. It is providing people with knowledge and skills for their own sake – wherever they find themselves later and in whatever work they do.
10. **Evangelical youth (high school seniors, university students and young professionals) are not the future of the Church – they are already the present of the Church.** One needs to invest in these young people something that will promote their growth and bear fruit both for their own sake and for the sake of the Church.

RESULTS OF INTERVIEWS AMONG EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS IN ST. PETERSBURG

This section provides a brief overview of the interviews carried out among 24 Evangelical believers in St. Petersburg (14 women and 10 men, ages 25 to 40 years old). Here is the list of the interview questions:

1. How do you understand the notion of calling?
2. How do you understand your personal calling?
3. How do you perceive your main activity?
4. What are your goals in your activity?
5. How do you understand Christian service?
6. What is your Christian service?
7. How do you understand Christian mission?
8. How do you practice Christian mission?
9. How does your local church help you in your work/studies/ministry?
10. Share your thoughts and comments on the connection between faith and work, and Christian mission through profession.

Most respondents understand a calling as a vocation from God that includes God-given qualities and talents that predispose a person to certain kinds of work. Only two respondents described a call as mission.

One out of every three respondents acknowledged a lack of understanding of his or her vocation. Only 4 out of 24 persons said that their call is their work.

Only a few connect their calling to Christian mission in general.

Most respondents see their work as a means for earning money, and to a lesser degree as ministry.

One out of every three respondents acknowledged a lack of understanding of his or her vocation.

Most respondents said that in their work they try to be diligent in their responsibilities and services (to God, colleagues, clients, family, etc.). Only 5 indicated that they try to accomplish Christian mission in their workplace.

Only one third of the respondents associated Christian ministry with mission. Also, many Evangelicals distinguish ministry in church from ministry outside of church. Work (job, employment), for the most part, is not seen as ministry.

Some believers prioritize evangelism over other kinds of ministry; others see evangelism as less important. Some believers think that ministry must be performed for God alone and not for people, while others see it in a contrary way.

” *The most important thing is that all work should be done primarily for God and not for people.*

” *Maybe the most important thing about my employment is just serving people rather than evangelizing.*

Many Christians reduce mission to preaching (evangelism by words), missionary trips and verbal witness.

Most Christians see mission as the verbal proclamation of the Gospel. Only a few pointed to the need and call to share the Gospel with words and deeds, including in the workplace.

” *[Mission] is what Christ said– take your cross and carry it... wherever you are – in church, at work, in evangelizing...*

An Evangelical student said:

” *I'm not a missionary in college or at my workplace, but I really want to... go somewhere far away... to take part in mission, to live like a missionary for a while...*

Many of our respondents said that their congregations help them to be effective in their professional activities through counseling and prayer; other practical assistance is provided much less often. Meanwhile, some of them do not have any support from their churches. For example:

” *My church does not help me at all in my work.*

” *My church does not assist me at all in this – this is the kind of culture that needs to be developed in church.*

” *...I am completely on my own. The church is like a scene to which I bring the fruits of my work.*

Only one third of the respondents associated Christian ministry with mission.

Most Christians see mission as the verbal proclamation of the Gospel.

” *The church does not help me in my job.*

” *...there is no mechanism in the church to help me with my work and studies.*

As to the question on how faith relates to work, half of the respondents were interested in how mission can be accomplished through professional work. However, most of them do not associate mission with their current studies and work. Only a few respondents indicated that they currently see the two working together.

” *I used to understand work and ministry as two completely different things but now I see that... Christian ministry is not only about singing in choir or preaching sermons from the pulpit... if you're a good lawyer, you can serve God; if you're a good driver, you are God's image and servant too...*

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REVIEW OF ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

We created an online-questionnaire that was filled out by 453 young believers from Kiev, Moscow, St. Petersburg and other regions. Along with the rest of the questions, the respondents were given a chance to answer an open-ended question («If you wish, please, share your thoughts and comments on how Christian faith relates to work, and how one can fulfill Christian mission through one's profession») and express the degree to which they agree or disagree with the following statements:

- ◆ «I have a calling»
- ◆ «I understand how my call is associated with my career»
- ◆ «I want to discover my calling»
- ◆ «I am in search of my calling»

Most respondents are confident that they do have some sort of calling. Half of them understand how their calling relates to their current work. One third indicated a lack of understanding of how it is connected to their professional activity. More than half of the respondents are still searching for their calling.

Young Christians have significant potential and believe in the existence of a calling to a vocation; however, most local churches do not possess the tools or practical knowledge that may assist them in finding their calling.

Most respondents understand the connection of faith and work as an opportunity to preach the Gospel and demonstrate Christ and faith in their workplace. Thus, many Christians see their work as an opportunity to share Christ and their faith with their non-Christian colleagues. However, professional work itself is not seen as a means to spread the Kingdom.

Most respondents understand the connection of faith and work as an opportunity to preach the Gospel and demonstrate Christ and faith in their workplace.

An enormous number of Evangelical Christians do not know how faith relates to their work. While they spend huge amounts of time at work, many Evangelicals still cannot express their understanding of labor and employment from a Christian perspective. Many of them do not even think about it.

Only 12 out of 138 who answered the open-ended question mentioned Christian mission in profession. 8 of these 12 live in Kiev. A minority of them describes the relationship between of faith and work in terms of calling.

Not all Christians know how to associate work with faith and how to apply Christian principles in the workplace.

” *...I learned to apply my professional skills to my ministry in the Church, but I don't know how to minister in my profession.*

Nevertheless, considering the constructive connotation of many answers, we believe that the Evangelical community has a huge potential for professional work as collaboration with God in His mission in the world. On the other hand, lack of a clear notion of the relationship between faith, work, spirituality in the workplace, mission in profession, etc. prevents many local communities and individual Christians from internal and external growth.

AN OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONS ASKED BY PARTICIPANTS OF “MISSION IN PROFESSION” FORUMS

This section presents a brief analysis of the questions raised in 2015-2017 by young Christians at the “Mission in Profession” forums. The events were held in large cities of Russia and Ukraine, as well as in the capital cities of Kyrgyzstan and Georgia. Pavel Tokarchuk and Denis Gorenkov, moderators of focus groups and Q&A sections, collected the questions. Hereafter, we quote and comment on main themes and questions that concern young Christians.

The most common questions relate to notions of Christian ethics. For example:

” *What if a boss openly insults his employees? How should I react to this?*

An enormous number of Evangelical Christians do not know how faith relates to their work.

Many believers also wonder about spreading the Gospel in the workplace.

” *Should I reproach my boss and get fired, or should I keep silent and continue working?*

” *What if my supervisors require me to prepare misleading information or reports?*

” *May Christians in executive roles manipulate in order to improve performance of subordinates?*

Many Christians ask questions on the essence of work and how to understand the need for work.

” *For believers, is work a part of Adam’s condemnation?*

Evangelicals in Eurasia need to emphasize that labor was instituted before the Fall, and as such, it was not given as part of Adam’s condemnation. Laboring “by the sweat of your brow” (Gen 3:19) speaks to the difficulties of labor in a broken world (post-Fall), while labor itself was given (pre-Fall) as an opportunity to be God’s coworkers in tending and stewarding His creation. The original and good essence of labor is retained post-Fall.

Many young Christians believe that working to pursue material well-being and to satisfy one’s own needs somehow compromises one’s trust in God.

” *Is wealth a blessing or a curse?*

We believe that such thoughts are a result of a sharp dualism between ‘worldly’ and ‘spiritual’ in the Evangelical community.

Many believers also wonder about spreading the Gospel in the workplace. For example:

” *Do I go to my workplace to work or to preach?*

” *What if I’ve been asked to “stop preaching and simply work”?*

Some Christians reduce such questions to a narrow context of specific professions:

How can one tell people about God in such professions as surgeon, dentist, or barber?

Many young Christians in Eurasia are interested in deeper questions regarding faith and work. For example, the question of calling:



” *How can I discover and understand my call?*

” *How can I discover what work God wants me to do?*

” *What if there is no opportunity to work in accordance with my calling?*

” *Isn't the call to serve Christ in church better than secular work?*

Such questions also relate to social problems in different countries, so answers to them depend on local contexts. As to the question about church ministry and ministry in the workplace, both are spiritual. Everyone has a calling.

The vast number of young Christians are interested in how faith relates to specific kinds of work.

” *Are there professions that are not appropriate for Christians? If yes, then which ones?*

” *Is it OK for a Christian to work as a secular psychologist?*

Christians should consciously distance themselves from known immoral activity. However, today even morally neutral professions can obtain impeachable motives. For example, working as a journalist to objectively inform people on current events instead of manipulating is what distinguishes a professional journalist (whether he or she is a Christian or not) from corrupt journalists. If a psychologist is driven by the desire to help someone in depression or properly respond to complicated circumstances, then this is respectable work. If a psychologist helps others to get rid of shame for obviously immoral actions instead of helping them to stop doing such things, then this kind of work is unacceptable for Christians.

One's definition of Christian mission can also be helpful in addressing this question. If mission is simply evangelism, then answers to these questions will be oriented around how one may share the gospel in any given profession, including those professions which for various reasons may seem immoral or unethical. However, if our definition of Christian mission is oriented around God's mission to redeem all of His creation, bringing healing and wholeness, along with eternal salvation, then perhaps Christians will think twice about employment in a company, for example, that genetically modifies crops, which in turn brings long-term ill effects on human beings.

” *Should a Christian get involved in politics?*

Politics is an unavoidable part of social life. Even avoiding politics reflects a certain political position. If a Christian has an opportunity to participate in political activity in a moral way, then this is acceptable to do so for the sake of service to society.

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Many young Christians raise practical issues of faith and work in general, with no attachment to specific occupations.

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” *How should you work if you have already misbehaved in front of unbelievers who know that you're a believer?*

” *When is it better to let colleagues see that I'm a Christian – immediately as a new employee or later on?*

More and more Christians raise questions like why work, how much time one should spend at work, etc.

” *How much time should one spend working per day if the workload is heavy?*

Work, just as any other sphere of life, must not damage relations with God, family and surrounding people, as well as one's own health. In addition to professional development, one ought to form appropriate boundaries between work, family, church, and rest to reach a proper life balance.

We found that nowadays Evangelical Christians in Eurasia are often not seen as an example when it comes to work ethics.

” *I hear quite often: “Do not hire Christians.” Why?*

” *In the USSR, in the past, believers were exemplary in their work ethic. Today we have to talk about that again because we're not examples anymore. What's the cause of such changes?*

Many Christians today work “by grace,” assuming that their lack of professionalism and ineffectiveness must be gracefully excused. However, Christian faith includes the belief that one should work “as for the Lord” which implies professionalism and effectiveness.

Many Christians experience unemployment. This problem varies depending on regions and particular locations. Anyhow, many Christians ask how to deal with unemployment and how Christians can create new jobs.

PRIMARY CONCLUSIONS, PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Evangelical community is characterized by a sharp distinction between “secular/world” and “spiritual/church.” Activity within the church is considered Christian ministry, while activity and work outside of church are not, because this is not ‘spiritual.’ This contributes to the notion of work as not ministry or mission, but rather “Adam’s condemnation,” “mere earning,” etc.

The idea of evangelism in the workplace is seen quite narrowly. Many Christians do not see work as a way of spreading the Gospel or expanding the Kingdom.

Many churches do not have the notion of professional work as a calling and work as a tool and a place of Christian mission.

Many Christians in Eurasia think that to influence others one should have a formal position and power. Christians must realize that both top managers and workers practice leadership at their organizations. Senior positions at work are not a guarantee or condition for successful spreading of the Gospel or having a positive impact at one’s workplace.

Christians – whether they are administrators or regular employees – must know the particulars of their working process, attentively and carefully reflecting on the situation at their workplace, performing their duties well and remembering that God is near and carrying out His mission. True collaboration with God happens when a Christian fulfills God’s will, lives out his calling and appropriately performs his work.

One ought to consider the nature of human interaction to perform Christian mission in the workplace. Collaboration with God implies both spiritual maturity and effective professional and interpersonal interaction with colleagues.

A Christian at his or her workplace is accountable to both people and God. Therefore, a believer works not only with his colleagues (or alone) on his duties but with God as well.

While at work, Christians should keep in mind the following questions, seeking reasonable answers to them:

- ◆ Is God present in my workplace? Do I see His work in my professional sphere?
- ◆ How does His presence impact my work?
- ◆ Do I see His work in myself and in my labor?
- ◆ Do I note His presence in the lives and work of my colleagues?

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- ◆ Am I God's co-worker in what He performs at my workplace and through my labor?
- ◆ Do I thank God for success, and what can I learn from my mistakes at my workplace?

In general, Christian mission and leadership must be seen as encompassing Christians' daily lives along with their interaction with God and other people. Mission and leadership for Christians means following Christ as God's co-workers and fulfilling His will for His entire creation.

If Christians work according to their calling from God, then they serve Him and people not only in church on Sundays, but also through their efforts in their various workplaces from Monday to Friday.

Christians need to clarify the understanding of Christian vocation as an external call from God to this or that professional activity, as well as an internal call defined by the person's talents and gifts.

Churches need to form a holistic biblical notion of Christian vocation, help Christians realize their gifts and talents, and help them live out their call from God to this or that work, including professional activity.

Both individual believers and congregations need to know the connection between work and mission. A Christian's workplace is his or her missionary field. This may promote the formation and improvement of congregational practices for helping church members to spread God's Kingdom more effectively, including in the workplace.

Evangelical churches should promote the formation of a holistic notion of ministry inside and outside of local congregations.

Churches must develop an understanding of professional activity that promotes a harmony between the Christian's striving for professional growth and the performance of Christian mission.

Christians are called to demonstrate a worthy example of leadership in all spheres of life, including professional activity.

In general, Christian mission and leadership must be seen as encompassing Christians' daily lives along with their interaction with God and other people.

Both individual believers and congregations need to know the connection between work and mission.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



ALEXANDER NEGROV, PhD

*founder and president of Hodos
Institute, USA*



ALEXEI BELOV

*associate researcher at Hodos
Institute and
the Sociological Institute of the
Russian Academy of Sciences*



Design by KukaDoro
kukadoro.ru

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by:
Beatriz Perez Moya
Christopher Sardegna
Shane Albuquerque
Ben White
Adam Sherez
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Matteo Vistocco
Ethan Sykes
Anna Dziubinska
Greg Raines