Religious Attitudes in Moldova: The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and The Baptist Community

Abstract

This chapter examines the history and present-day status of two religious and cultural groups in the Republic of Moldova: the Baptist community and the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia. The lifestyle of the two communities will be discussed in terms of their members' dominant values, beliefs, worldviews and behaviours. The article offers a brief analysis of the specific nature of communication and relationships, both inside and outside the groups, as well as the attitudes towards them by government organisations, the media and other religious groups in Moldova. Since the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia (MCB) has broken away from the Metropolitan Church of Moldova (MCM), we also consider the conflict between the two Churches from a historical perspective by assessing its nature and effects both on believers and on the general image of Orthodoxy.

Keywords: Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, Metropolitan Church of Moldova, Evangelical Baptist community, Orthodox Church, religious and cultural groups

Introduction

The Moldova Republic is situated in the south-eastern part of Europe. It became independent on August 27, 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. During several decades of state-sponsored “militant atheism”, drastic methods were used...

---

1 Bessarabia is a Romanian historical region which, prior to the 19th century, comprised the southern area of the territory between the Prut and Nistru Rivers (Bugeac area), a component of the feudal state of Moldova. Since 1812 the entire territory between the Prut and Nistru Rivers was part of the Russian empire and was officially named Bessarabia; it was subjected to forced colonization, while the Romanian indigenous population was still a majority. In 1856 Russia retroceded some southern counties to Moldova (Romanian region) while, in 1878, it reattached these areas. In 1917 the Democratic Moldovan Republic (Bessarabia) proclaimed its independence and, in 1918, it rejoined Romania. In 1940 Bessarabia was occupied by the USSR and it became part of the Moldovan SSR. In 1941-1944, it was governed by Romania. In 1944 it became again a Soviet republic, which existed until 1991, when it declared its independence as a state, the Republic of Moldova (see Dicționarul enciclopedic ilustrat [Illustrated Encyclopaedic Dictionary], (1999). Chișinău: Cartier).
to suppress and prohibit any expression of religious life. Church officials were subjected to imprisonment, deportation, forced labour, persecution, restrictions and constraints of all kinds. Some churches were demolished and others desecrated by being used for other purposes (such as driving schools, sheds, gymnasiums, warehouses, restaurants and so on). Religious literature was burnt, religious educational institutions were closed and believers were deprived of their right to express their faith. Beginning in the 1960s, after the so-called “thaw”, a policy of “tolerant atheism” was promoted and lasted until 1988-1989. The policy of repressing religious worship and believers was replaced by an attitude of “peaceful coexistence” between the State and church. Direct control of religious groups was carried out by a structure within the Government. The process of democratisation and the creation of conditions for the free expression of basic human rights in the Moldova Republic was launched in early 1990s and served as means to accelerate the development and extension of religious life. This manifested in greater religious freedom, the emergence of several confessions, the restoration of old churches, the building of new ones and the revival of church attendance by believers. This tendency was observed within the traditional Orthodox Church as well as within other churches. In comparison with the recent past, freedom of religion in the Moldova Republic is demonstrated by the enormous increase in the number of officially recognised religious groups. By August 2007, there were 23 active religious groups within the territory of the Moldova Republic.

**Methodology**

The analysis is based on the principle of triangulation, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, we carried out in-depth interviews with a representative sample of members from the Baptist community (20 interviews) and the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia in Moldova (20 interviews) including those from both rural and urban areas. The surveys used were carried out in August-September 2007. In all 156 believers of MCB and 148 believers of the Baptist community were questioned using a structured questionnaire with pre-coded answers and open-ended questions. The gender composition across these two groups was 42% males and 58% females. The age of respondents ranged

---

Religious Confessions

from 13 to 80 years old. In terms of ethnicity, 97% of respondents from MCB are Moldovan/Romanian, while the Baptist community is represented by two major ethnic groups (53% Moldovan/Romanian and 33% Ukrainian). From both communities, 55% of the respondents came from rural areas and 45% from urban areas. The topics covered by the surveys included: values, ideas, collective activities, image and identity, relationship with society, tensions and relations inside the groups and participation in the groups.

Results

Cultural and religious specificity of The Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia

The majority of believers in the Republic of Moldova are Christian Orthodox (93.3%).3 The country’s historical and political background has facilitated the establishment of two distinct religious institutions – the Metropolitan Church of Chișițău and All Moldova (MCM) and the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia (MCB), which are canonically subordinate to the Russian Parish and the Romanian Parish, respectively. In terms of the separation of religious powers in Moldova, the relationship between the two Metropolitan churches is limited to conflicts, quarrels and mutual accusations. Domestically the MCB is often presented as disadvantaged compared to the MCM (in this respect, mention should be made of the observance of the freedom of religious consciousness, the right to pray and to meet in sanctuaries, spoliation of properties etc.).4

There are no differences in terms of religious doctrine between the two Metropolitan Churches; in fact the faith and expression of faith are identical. The only difference relates to the Christian liturgical calendar. Thus some churches of the MCB observe both the “Russian” liturgical calendar (religious holidays are celebrated using the “old style” calendar) and the “Romanian” liturgical calendar (religious holidays are celebrated using the “new style” calendar), while churches of the MCM observe only “old style” religious holidays.

Furthermore believers do not generally perceive themselves as members of different religious groups (although there are cases of interpersonal conflicts on grounds of membership).

3 As per the statistical summary in 2007 figures from Moldova, Chișinău
The MCB was canonically founded in 1925 under the Romanian Patriarchate. Its operation was suspended after the arrival of the Soviet Army in 1940-1944, and it was replaced by a new Metropolitan See under the Russian Patriarchate. The appointed hierarchs were of Russian ethnic origin. In 1992, shortly after the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Moldova, the MCB was reactivated. However, its official recognition and acceptance of its legality did not occur until much later on 30 July 2002 due to international pressure. The cause of this delay was the non-acceptance of MCB by the central and local authorities and by MCM. The conflict between the Government of the Moldova Republic and the MCM, on one hand, and the MCB, on the other hand, contains numerous historical, canonical, economic and political factors. In 2004 the national law-enforcement authorities recognised the position of the historical, canonical and spiritual successor of the MCB (which was initially not entitled to recover its property) in relation to the eponymous institution from the interwar period. The issue of the succession of property rights was resolved by the ECHR which ruled that the MCB was entitled to claim the goods that belonged to it.

There are several reasons why respondents chose to be part of MCB: 1) they thought that MCB best met individual expectations (35.9%); 2) they were influenced by parents/relatives (33.8%); 3) the MCB provided the best explanation of their faith in God (16.0%); 4) in this group, respondents learned the truth about faith (7.7%); 5) the MCB emphasised national (Romanian) values and ideals (7.0%) and, finally 6) other factors including that the priest gives a good service, there's a fair attitude towards people, misunderstandings with the clergy of the MCM, geographical proximity, economic reasons (no taxes, low price for services/candles) and others (44.2%).

The vast majority of respondents no longer participate in other groups except the one they belong to (87.8%), and those who were involved in other groups specified the MCM (12.2%).

---


6 If for some ethnic groups the spoken language is an ethnic identifier, this is not applicable to the Moldovans/Romanians in the Republic of Moldova, who speak the Moldovan/Romanian language. The fact that people in the Republic of Moldova speak the same language as people in Romania is not deemed to be sufficient to treat the majority of “Moldovans” as “Romanians”. The historical/ethnic/religious composition of MCB is obvious. MCB supporters promote Romanism in the Republic of Moldova (Tverdohleb, E. (2005). The Role of Religious Communities in Developing Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Republic of Moldova: Achievements and Problems. Religion and Democracy in Moldova (pp. 350-351). Chişinău.)
All respondents who had previously belonged to other religious groups were members of the MCM (50.6%). The most frequently reported reasons that made them leave this community were: immoral principles and an improper attitude towards priests from the MCM in contrast to the politeness, kindness and fairness in dealing with people and the dedication of priests of the MCB to their work; political reasons, namely the reluctance to honour the Russian Metropolitan Church; love and devotion to national (Romanian) values and other factors, cf., geographical proximity, failure to fulfil spiritual needs and others.

In most cases, the decision to go to a particular church is not based on its membership in a particular Metropolitan See but rather on other factors such as proximity, the behaviour of the priest – his attitude towards people and the way he conducts church services – and the location where services or other religious activities are held (in the event there are no churches in the region).

In terms of attendance of the church, people are divided into two categories: those who attend the church regularly (on Sundays and on holidays) and those who only attend it occasionally. The highest level of attendance of Orthodox believers was noted during Lent, the Easter holidays, Christmas or the community holidays. The majority of believers developed the custom of going to church especially/only during Lent or religious holidays.

An indicator of the image and identity of communities refers to the most important symbols held by the group. For all Orthodox communities, the most important symbols are those of the Cross, Bible and Church. What makes the Orthodox different here is the importance it attaches to icons. These are liturgical objects (not carved faces), which facilitate communication, interaction with God, Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, the Saints and the Apostles. They are perceived as images that help the believer overcome impersonal feelings while communicating with divinity.

The Orthodox Church does not generally impose on parishioners any restrictions on interaction or communication with outsiders. Nobody is forbidden to come to church, although members of other confessions cannot enjoy the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church. If a person was baptised Orthodox, and then joined another confession and wants to return, he/she must undergo a penitence period to be accepted again.

However, there are groups belonging to MCB which impose restrictions on their members regarding communication or interaction with representatives of other confessions (in particular sects). Since sects are known for their great power of conviction, it is widely believed that they impose their religious ideas, something which the Orthodox Church deems to be wrong.

In addition to the restrictions of communication/interaction with other people, there are also other restrictions relating to the behaviour of community members.
In this case, there are also communities which tolerate some “violations” or “vices” of the people and those communities with higher requirements for the behaviour of their members. The first argue that Orthodoxy differs from other confessions by not prohibiting anything. Religion warns about the negative effect of vices or inappropriate behaviour, but it is up to individuals to choose the path that he/she wishes to follow. The restrictions on behaviour refer both to behaviour in the church (respecting the priest, being quiet, not coming to church drunk, keeping to the proper dress code) as well as outside the church (people must not abuse alcohol, go to the bar on Saturday night and on Sunday, must not work on Sunday and on religious holidays, curse or lead an immoral and dissolute life etc.).

Usually the religious groups do not experience any internal tensions (87.8%); however, certain divergences exist (12.2%). Disagreements within the group have, in general, an average intensity. The reasons for these contradictions are different: the financial and material problems the church faces, disagreements about the observance of certain customs and traditions, organisational problems, failure of parishioners to observe the remarks and canons set by the priest as well as the conduct within the church, the “weaknesses” of some priests etc. Another type of disagreement refers to the conflict between the MCM and the MCB. Thus the decision of the church under the MCM to join the MCB sometimes creates tensions within the religious communities they represent. These are conditioned by the scepticism or disagreement of the parishioners to adhere to another structure considering its difference in terms of manifestation of faith and religion. According to the opinion of MCB believers, the fact that makes it different from the MCM is its perception of history, identity and national values (especially in relation to Romanian or Moldovan identity of the citizens of the Moldova Republic) and obedience, for this reason, to different eparchies. Relations between the MCB and the MCM have always been characterised by disagreements and tensions. Firstly there is the attitude of the MCM towards the MCB that shows non-acceptance and a reluctance to resolve the dispute (via complaints to the Mayor, restrictions in obtaining the necessary documentation to build a church, letters to the investigating bodies etc.). Secondly clergymen from the MCM calumniate the MCB and encourage Christians to take a negative stance against it; they put pressure on clergymen and the believers of the churches belonging to the MCB. Thirdly both state authorities and those of the MCM fail to acknowledge the essence of the MCB, inadequately interpreting its relation to the Romanian Church. Fourthly there are tensions and disagreements between the clergymen under the two church structures. Finally there are struggles for sanctuaries (forced seizure of churches under the MCB by the MCM), and

7 This conclusion and chapter is based on SAL related survey data, but these views are also valid for Moldovan Orthodox communities in general.
clergymen of the MCM assert that differences exist in the officiating and style of
divine service and calendar distinctions.

There are cases when group members leave their religious community for various
reasons (see Table 1).

Table 1. Reasons for leaving an MCB community by %
sample size = 156 respondents (multiple answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attracted by another religion (both from the doctrinal viewpoint and especially financial, material support or promises)</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influenced by people from outside the group (have a weak character and give in to the pressures from other people; they don’t know the real history and believe in calumnies about the MCB)</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No longer want to observe the principles and rules of the group</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations not met</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied with the affiliation to the group</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared, threatened by police or face constraints at workplaces, mocked</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: leave to go abroad, disappointed by the priest’s behaviour, join sects, priests unable to “retain” believers, proximity of the church to home etc.</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CIVIS Centre survey as part of the SAL project in Moldova, August-September 2007.

According to majority opinion, the ideas/world vision/attitudes of the religious
groups of the MCB are not that different from the values of the society as a whole
(63.5%). The individuals, in whose opinion these differences still exist (36.5%), referred
to meeting primarily spiritual requirements vs. satisfying material needs and carnal
desires, moral vs. immoral behaviour and observance vs. non-observance of rules
and church canons. There are cases when tensions and disagreements between the
group and society are the result of the politicisation of the conflict between the MCB
and MCM. Thus we have localities split into two adverse blocks. According to some
opinions, MCM clergymen encourage ordinary people to go against the MCB and its
fellows. At the same time, local and rayon8 public administrations allow themselves to
blaspheme against MCB churches via mockery, insults, non-acceptance, ignorance,
rejection, failure to observe legal judgments, discrimination and the like.

Communications with official, governmental representatives are often difficult.
Thus 82.7% of the members of MCB communities faced problems related to:
(a) direct rejection of the group – 77.8%, (b) its denial – 62.9%, (c) discrimination
(failure to register the parishes belonging to the MCB, not providing them with plots
of land to build churches) – 60.4%, (d) ignoring the group – 55.6%, (e) its erroneous/
wrong presentation – 48.1% and (f) physical violence, firing or threatening them,

8 Rayon refers to a territorial administrative unit of the second level, i.e., a district.
trials, putting obstacles in the way of organising different activities, illegal closure of churches in the localities, delay in building the church, calumniation of priests and such – 40.7%.

A large proportion of MCB members consider that the sole distinction between it and the MCM relates to its canonical affiliation to the Patriarchate of Romania rather than to Russia. However, there are also those who explain the differences between them, not just in doctrinal terms. Thus they point to different perceptions of national values; the use of fees for officiating different divine services, imposed to the Christian parishioners by the churches, or taxes levied by the MCM on churches (for blessing parishes, quarterly taxes from parishes, taxes for ordination etc.). Furthermore the MCM is blamed for megalomania in its relations with the MCB, and the MCB allegedly offers better moral support to its parishes than the MCM does. Finally communication with the Metropolitan of Bessarabia is said to be easier than that with the Metropolitan of Moldova.

During the SAL surveys, it was reported that there were cases when some priests renounced their membership in the MCM in favour of the MCB due to the support (spiritual rather than material and financial) provided by the latter. On the other hand, the MCM threatened to deprive priests of their parishes and of their right to serve as a priest (defrocking) if they moved to the MCB. Sometimes these threats achieved their goal, and priests give up the idea of joining the MCB or returning to the MCM.

The mass media treats the issue of the two metropolitan churches as mainly political. Certain publications are often accused of misinforming the population by aiming to spoil the image of the MCB deliberately. With regard to the dispute between the two metropolitan churches, mass media coverage focuses on the following issues: involvements of believers in primarily political conflicts, the decrease in the population's confidence in the Church as an institution, deterioration of the image of Orthodoxy as a model for peaceful coexistence and deprivation of the right of membership/access of believers to the desired religion. Competition between the two metropolitan churches has thus far made it impossible to address issues of tolerance and dialogue between the parties involved in the conflict.

**Evangelical Baptist Community in the Republic of Moldova**

According to the most recent census conducted in the Republic of Moldova in 2004, Baptists represented 1.0% (or 32,754) of believers who revealed their religious affiliation; thus this is the largest minority religion in Moldova. During the Soviet period, there were 85 Evangelical Baptist communities in the Republic of Moldova. Currently there are approximately 500 established religious groups of which 385
are officially registered communities. The attitudes of people outside the Baptist community regarding its members became more tolerant and friendlier. The increase in the number of churches is due to the spiritual awakening after 1989 and the higher religious freedom associated with this period. At the same time, the number of Evangelical Baptist believers has been in a continuous decline since 2002 because of their emigration, especially to the USA, largely because of poverty.

Although, after 1989, there were positive changes for Baptists, there were also some negative trends including material and financial difficulties, discrimination and the marginalisation of Baptists in comparison with Orthodox Church members, problems of “image and credibility” of members who established Baptist communities (especially in localities where, until 1989, people did not know anything about them and where there were no followers of this confession). The Baptist cult was and is often confused with a sect (sometimes in a deliberate way).

For the majority of Baptist Christians (64.2%), their religious group is hereditary (since they are from Baptist families). The “new” believers mainly come from the Orthodox religion. Most often the shift from Orthodoxy to Baptism is explained by the fact that Baptist churches better satisfy individual interests and the spiritual, pious necessities of the believers. In this context, a special role is played by evangelical actions (missions) that Baptists organise and carry out. And, last but not least, there is the importance of the Baptist community’s image in society – ethical and moral behaviour, decent clothes, benevolent attitude towards people and such.

According to the CIVIS Centre surveys in Moldova, which are part of the SAL project, a member of the Baptist community could be recognised, first of all, by decent, modest, simple clothing with no elements of extravagance, vulgarity or such; absence of jewellery; absence of make-up and a decent hairdo. There are communities which advise believers to buy cheap clothes, so that they can “invest” the money saved for the church or for people in difficulty.

The evangelical Baptist communities are composed of different categories of people from different social groups – from children to the elderly, from people with an education to the illiterate, from “degenerate” people (alcoholics, drug addicts and such) to people “without vices” and people of different nationalities and different religious confessions. At the same time, Evangelical Baptist communities also attract people hoping to take advantage of their membership by getting some help (financial and in-goods support, help in going abroad on religious grounds) and so forth.

Some people joined the Baptists to find refuge from daily problems and from their sins. Others were attracted, because these communities are more receptive, more responsive or more open to the “evangelical voice”. Still others sought peace of mind, love, reconciliation and support in these communities; some were impressed by certain Baptist activities or services.
There are cases when the community imposes restrictions on people wishing to join the group such as affiliation to another religion, the age or political affiliation of people wanting to join, previous excommunication from other churches, some types of immoral behaviour and the no debt requirement, including unpaid state taxes.

Baptists own self-characterisation and characterisation of their communities are generally positive; whereas, for those outside, views are mainly negative, not on a personal member level but because they are a religious minority treated as a sect. Baptist groups are blamed for attracting people into their community with material and financial help.

Evangelical Baptist groups do not impose, in general, any type of restrictions on interaction/communication with other people; in some communities, they even encourage doing this. However, they prefer avoiding relationships with people with amoral behaviour contravening not only the Biblical Code but also the law. Another type of restriction refers to marriage with a person of another religious confession. Baptist churches address this issue differently. Some Baptist communities do not permit marriages with a person of another religious orientation or an atheist. Meanwhile others allow marriages to those of other confessions with one condition; the spouse should live according to Christian values. The third type of restriction relates to attending churches (religious sects) which do not observe the Bible’s requirements to avoid infiltration of false knowledge into the Baptist community.

Albeit very rare, there are also certain tensions and different opinions within Baptist communities. These are largely related to organisational and administrative issues. However, there are also instances of behavioural non-conformism by some community members leading to warnings, castigation and, in extreme cases, excommunication. In some cases, members themselves decide to leave for a variety of reasons such as the influence of people from outside the group, like close relatives (usually Orthodox), scepticism towards non-Orthodox religious communities, not wishing to observe the behavioural principles of the group, the influence of other religious groups (especially sects promising material or financial support), a change in value orientation from spiritual to material, a sense of superiority over other members of the community, marriage to a person of another religious confession (thus no longer attending church to avoid family conflicts), relocation of residence/leave to work abroad or disappointment regarding the material or financial support they thought they would but did not receive by becoming members of the community.

Sometimes there are disagreements/misunderstandings/tensions between the Evangelical Baptist communities and other religious groups (Orthodox, Jehovah’s Witnesses) for two reasons: different understanding and interpretation of the
religious doctrine and intolerance. According to the results of our survey, Jehovah’s Witnesses represent the religious group least acceptable to Baptists (81.1%) (see Figure 1).

Source: CIVIS Centre survey as part of the SAL project in Moldova, August-September 2007

Figure 1. Which religious groups are not acceptable to you as Baptists? (multiple answers)
Sample = 148 respondents (by %)

Over half (50.7%) of the Baptists consider that there are some tensions between them and society, because people do not know the specifics of the Baptist cult, considering it a sect, and do not know the Holy Scripture. Therefore, such people behave differently and have other concepts and attitudes. Baptists do not accept other religions than the one they believe in, because society accepts and tolerates certain social phenomena considered as inadmissible by Baptists (libertinage, homosexuality, premarital sexual intercourse, smoking, use of drugs and alcohol, discotheques and the like). Baptists encountered more negative than positive reactions including non-acceptance/rejection of Baptists (50.0%), ignorance (33.1%), exclusion (8.1%) or other negative reactions such as suspicion, envy, insults, hate, mockery, aggression, criticism, intolerance, obstacles in organising different events and others (21.0%). Among the positive reactions, tolerance for the members of the Baptist community (33.8%) should be mentioned along with others, like acceptance and satisfaction (4.1%).
Additionally 21.6% of the Baptists stated that they had encountered some difficulties in communicating with governmental bodies and their representatives due to religious and/or ideological discrimination against the Evangelical Baptist communities, the often purposely erroneous presentation of the group, neglect and ignorance, or direct rejection of the group. The greatest difficulties arose at the time of church establishments (registration of a religious community, obtaining building authorisation or building a church) and during the organisation of some public events/manifestations.

Various factors impacted the formation of the Baptist religious group including its member recruitment strategy, the personal interest in evangelical teachings and the opening of a new cult building in the locality, a matter which always attracts new fellows. Some have argued that people’s interests in spiritual and religious values have decreased lately; therefore it is now more difficult to attract people, because they are more concerned with their own material-financial wellbeing.

Conclusions

In conclusion, as aforementioned, Moldova’s historical and political background facilitated the establishment of two distinct religious institutions – the Metropolitan Church of Chişinău and All Moldova and the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, which are canonically subordinate to the Russian Parish and the Romanian Parish respectively.

The existence of two different church systems in the context of the same religious doctrine defines specific relationships between them, mainly based on political reasons. To that end, reference should be made to the ongoing conflict in which the conflicting parties are, on one hand, the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and, on the other hand, the Metropolitan Church of Moldova and the state.

Initially the conflict focused on recognising the legality of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia and, later, on its claim for the church patrimony which had been seized, confiscated or nationalised in Soviet times. While the first problem was resolved in favour of the MCB, the problem with patrimony remains unsolved. It should be noted that the official recognition of MCB’s legality was enforced by an ECHR decision.

In terms of the separation of religious powers in the country, the MCB is often presented as disadvantaged compared to the MCM (to this end, we should recall the observance of the freedom of religious consciousness, the right to pray and to meet in sanctuaries, spoliation of properties and such).

Settlement of disputes between the two metropolitan churches is/will be affected by the political orientation of the Moldovan state.
Among the other religious communities active in the Republic of Moldova, the Baptists are the most numerous. They consider themselves more religious in comparison to the majority Orthodox group due to their own regular church attendance, thorough Bible readings complete with participation in group discussions about the readings, abstention from immoral behaviour and the like. The doctrinal aspects of Baptist ideology are very close to Orthodox ideology; however, differences result from different interpretations of the Bible messages, observance/non-observance of certain religious rites and ways of administrating Christian sacraments. A Baptist’s appearance is always modest in terms of both clothing and hairdo. Women of this community (especially the married ones) wear kerchiefs and don’t put on make-up. The Baptist community does not generally impose any restrictions on communication and interaction with outsiders but, at the same time, discourages relationships with immorally behaving people. Some Baptist churches prohibit marriage to a person of another religious confessions or an atheist. Another restriction refers to attendance of foreign (non-Baptist) churches. However, this restriction applies only to some churches. Communication is very reserved with other religious communities such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses (an unacceptable group for most Baptists especially due to the promotion and aggressive imposition of a “deliberately erroneous” religious doctrine by Jehovah’s Witnesses). The attitude of the general public towards Baptists became more tolerant and friendlier over the last 15 years.

Policy recommendations

- Provide objective academic research about minority religion to policymakers and the public.
- Provide cultural sensitivity workshops for those in management positions, as well as for other social actors.
- Increase communication/dialogue between government organisations and minority religions.
- Government organisations should be more friendly, positive and supportive towards religious communities.
- Discourage special treatment or privileges for any religious organisations.
- Mass media should provide unbiased and verified information about religious groups.
- Inform mainstream culture about other religious groups as a way of decreasing stereotyping.
- Support information about all religions to develop critical minds/discerning approaches.
- Encourage dialogue between minority religious groups and the dominant churches to avoid/minimise misunderstandings.
- Create a proper environment for cooperation between religious communities and other social actors to performing certain important measures/programs (e.g., charity).

References


Union of Christian Evangelical Baptist Churches of Moldova, Discussion with Prelate (Bishop) Valeriu Ghiletchi regarding establishment of the Baptist Community in Moldova (unpublished) with permission for publishing.

Natalia COJOCARU
Centre of Sociological, Political Science and Psychological Analysis and Investigation CIVIS, 20A Renasterii avenue, mun. Chisinau, Republic of Moldova. E-mail: natalia.cojocaru@list.ru

Ruslan SINTOV
Centre of Sociological, Political and Psychological Analysis and Investigation CIVIS, 20A Renasterii avenue, mun. Chişinău, Republic of Moldova. E-mail: civis@moldnet.md

Received 23 January 2009
Accepted 30 April 2009
Religiniai požiūriai Moldovoje: Besarabijos metropolijos bažnyčia ir baptistų bendruomenė

Santrauka

Autorių teikiamose rekomendacijose pabrėžiamas tyrėjų, valstybinių organizacijų ir žiniasklaidos vaidmuo siekiant mažinti religinius konfliktus.

Raktažodžiai: Besarabijos metropolijos bažnyčia, Moldovos metropolijos bažnyčia, baptistų evangelikų bendruomenė, stačiatikių bažnyčia, religinės ir kultūrinės grupės, konfliktai ir įtampas.