

Spring 1984

## Review: Soviet Evangelicals since World War II

Donald L. Fowler

Liberty University, [dfowler@liberty.edu](mailto:dfowler@liberty.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/sor\\_fac\\_pubs](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/sor_fac_pubs)

 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [Epistemology Commons](#), [Esthetics Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [History of Philosophy Commons](#), [History of Religions of Eastern Origins Commons](#), [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#), [Other Philosophy Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Fowler, Donald L., "Review: Soviet Evangelicals since World War II" (1984). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 109.  
[http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/sor\\_fac\\_pubs/109](http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/sor_fac_pubs/109)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Religion at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact [scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu](mailto:scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu).

combatants in the debate. On the other hand, there are many quotations from notable contenders such as Calvin, Arminius, Baxter, Owen, Whitefield, Wesley, Toplady, and Gill.

A three-page glossary gives definitions of twenty-one key terms. Unfortunately, the definitions are too brief, too dated, and too ambiguous to be entirely satisfactory. There also seems to be some lack of consistency in the use of technical terms in the text itself. The term 'supralapsarianism' is defined in the glossary as "the view that the decree of predestination includes the decree to create man and to permit him to fall" (p. 101). By this definition Calvin would certainly be a supralapsarian and Sell properly labels this as the classical rather than the modern usage (p. 99). But in the text, Beza is represented as going beyond Calvin in "developing a supralapsarian scheme" (p. 3). It is later acknowledged that "Calvin inclines toward supralapsarianism" (p. 19), but the term "inclines" is far too weak if the classical meaning of the term is intended.

A similar problem appears with the term "universalism," which is defined in the glossary as "the doctrine that by the mercy of God all men shall at last be saved, albeit *via* the purgation of death" (p. 101). But when Amyraldism is discussed, it is noted that this view was later labelled as "hypothetic universalism" (p. 30) (I wish that it had been noted that this is an unfair and highly prejudiced label). Apparently the concept of "universal atonement" is later expressed as a "universalism," since there are frequent references to the "universalism" of the Arminians (pp. 76, 79), some Calvinists (p. 94), and of Wesley (p. 124).

Sell specifically places himself on the Calvinistic side of the controversy. This reviewer must disagree with his classification of limited atonement as a "crucial doctrine" (p. 41), and with his commitment to regeneration as antecedent to repentance and belief (p. 98). Sell does, however, plead for amelioration of Calvinism, and rightly labels Arminianism as "not strictly a heresy, but as a dangerous error" (p. 23).

This is not the book for one who is trying to develop convictions relative to the Arminian/Calvinistic issues. History buffs and professional theologians will find that the copious documentation provides a useful resource tool.

CHARLES R. SMITH

*Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, by Walter Sawatsky. Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1981. Pp. 527. \$19.95.

As a result of his observations made on his crusade in the Soviet Union, a well-known American evangelist proclaimed that there was religious liberty there. As might be expected, there was worldwide reaction to this pronouncement. While those responses were mixed, to say the least, they had one thing in common—few had taken the time to see for themselves what was the actual state of religion in Russia. Reading this volume would greatly resolve the state of ignorance characteristic of many in the West.

As the author points out, most people see the condition of religion in the Soviet Union in one of two extremes. The one pictures the Bible-believing church to be in a state of warfare with the atheistic government. The other

extreme is the view that there is plenty of freedom and believers can co-exist with the state peacefully. The purpose of the book is to examine these perspectives to see which, if either, is most correct. This leads to what is perhaps the most valuable feature of the book: ". . . it is both a history and descriptive analysis" (p. 15) of the evangelical movement since the turn of the century, with special emphasis on the movement since World War II. Another valuable feature which results from a reading is that "the Soviet evangelical experience sets one thinking about the way a church reflects its theology" (p. 13). While a great many questions are resolved in the book, this reflection does cause one to stand in amazement at the complexities which confront the Christian in a world like this.

While this volume reflects the expertise of one who is well-versed in both the Soviet Union and the evangelical movement, it also is written from a distinct theological perspective:

I have also introduced my own Anabaptist-Mennonite viewpoints rather specifically along the way. These viewpoints differ from 'established evangelicalism' in emphasis—noticeable in such areas as discipleship, concept of the church and nonviolence. I feel close kinship with the 'New Evangelicals,' one of whom in particular has helped me see the potential value of applying an Anabaptist theological grid to the Soviet evangelicals (p. 18).

These presuppositions have not seriously altered the quality of the book as regards its historical information. The *interpretation* of that history is, however, another matter entirely. To this I will return later.

Evangelicalism has been present in the Soviet Union since the 19th century. It grew and prospered and at first welcomed the Communists, expecting their long desired goal of religious freedom. At first this was realized, only to be taken away in the great national upheavals of the 1920s and 1930s. For all practical purposes the church ceased as an identifiable entity. It is ironic, however, to note that the rebirth of evangelicalism can be traced to World War II. With the energies of the state directed against the invading Germans, the church became somewhat important to the state. The great War of Liberation united all the Russian people, including the evangelicals. As a result of their valuable participation in the war, they were given new freedoms by the state. This led to the foundation of the AUCECB (All Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists) which, to this day, remains the only officially recognized evangelical movement. That relationship continues only insofar as the church exists in symbiosis with the state. That contribution revolves around the willingness of the evangelicals to support the state, to project the view that there is religious freedom, and to support the peace movement fostered by the state.

Increasing state pressure on the church and especially its leadership led to a major split within the AUCECB and the formation of a new evangelical witness called the CCECB (Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists) in 1965. The split continues over the major issue of the relationship of the church to the state. The CCECB has argued vehemently that the leadership of the AUCECB has compromised itself irreparably in its dealings with the state authorities. The author's evaluation of this split takes up much of the book.

It is not possible for me to interact with the book's presentation of historical materials since that would take a Russian specialist. On the other hand, the strength of the book is clearly its value as a source book for studying the history of the evangelical movement in the Soviet Union.

I would like, however, to deal with Sawatsky's *interpretation* of those historical materials. For the most part, he is critical of the CCECB for its failure to register a "Christian" response to the olive branch extended by the AUCECB leadership in the post-split era. In insisting upon total separation of church and state, Sawatsky thinks the CCECB cannot survive in that country. Furthermore, it has violated the many scriptural injunctions toward unity—indeed, this is the one ". . . mystery which the church must demonstrate to the powers. . ." (p. 234). This is a curious use of Scripture. He quotes Eph 3:10, which has nothing to do with unity, but rather emphasizes the importance of communicating Christ. We might ask: is there a limit to the price to be placed on unity? Is it at any cost? He also refers to Eph 2:14–22, which has nothing to do with the hard issues facing these two movements. In other words, unity is exhorted in Scripture but never at the price of truth. The issue, then, is not really unity but the identity of truth. It is interesting that although the author grieves over the split and, on occasion, scores the CCECB for its intractability, he does not register an equal concern for the great issues which fostered the split.

The spirit of the book is irenic. It is in this same spirit that these comments are intended. The issues, however, should dominate the analysis of the book. If unity is so important, we might ask why the CCECB alone is errant. It might well be postulated that if the entire evangelical movement had cooperated (i.e., followed the CCECB proposals), then the state might have agreed to allow true religious freedom. If a common front is the goal, why is it that the CCECB is the guilty party? Is there no excess in cooperating to the point of compromise?

The central thesis seems to be that the only thing that matters is that the present evangelical movement must not arouse the opposition of the state. It is more important to preach the gospel under some limitations than it is to demand to be free of all limitations. In response to this, it is somewhat curious that the author should refer disparagingly to "American pragmatism" (p. 403), while arguing for Christian pragmatism within the atheistic state. It seems to be wrong to smuggle Bibles into the country because one must lie to do it. It is not wrong, however, to allow the state to manipulate the church for propagandistic purposes, to limit its ministries (for example, evangelicals may not contribute to social programs in third world countries), or to control its own budget (pp. 426–27).

It is not my purpose to force the reader to choose, as it were, between good and evil. It is incredibly difficult to live in this complex world. Sawatsky has shown the difficulties which the Russian believer faces. His analysis, however, has led me to suspect that he is a better historian than theologian. Having said that, let me close by saying that this volume ought to be read by every born-again believer. How shall we stand before God in a state of ignorance when such precious information has been made available?

DONALD L. FOWLER

## BRIEF REVIEWS

*Christian Perspectives on Sociology*, ed. by Stephen A. Grunlan and Milton Reimer. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

1. Milton K. Reimer, "The Study of Sociology: An Introduction" (pp. 11–27); 2. Paul V. Johnson, "Research Methodology in Sociology" (pp. 28–46); 3. Stephen A. Grunlan, "Biblical Authority and Cultural Relativity" (pp. 47–65); 4. Robert McCluskey, "Socialization" (pp. 66–89); 5. Russell Heddendorf, "Status and Role" (pp. 90–108); 6. Dawn McNeal Ward, "Social Stratification: Social Class and Social Mobility" (pp. 109–24); 7. Don Gray, "Deviance and Social Control" (pp. 125–49); 8. Winston A. Johnson, "Groups" (pp. 150–66); 9. Donald L. Conrad, "Marriage and the Family" (pp. 167–87); 10. Stephen A. Grunlan, "Economics" (pp. 188–203); 11. Stephen G. Cobb, "Politics" (pp. 204–25); 12. Marilyn J. and Charles E. Weldin, "Education" (pp. 226–44); 13. Richard J. Stellway, "Religion" (pp. 245–63); 14. Robert McCluskey, "Formal Organizations" (pp. 264–89); 15. Richard Perkins, "Minority-Majority Relations" (pp. 290–310); 16. Stanley A. Clark, "Collective Behavior and Social Movements" (pp. 311–35); 17. Donald L. Conrad, "Demography, Population, and Ecology" (pp. 336–61); 18. Kenneth Gowdy, "Communities and Urbanization" (pp. 362–84); 19. Ronald Burwell, "Social Change" (pp. 385–400); 20. Stephen A. Grunlan, "Sociology and the Christian" (pp. 401–14).

*The Jew and the Christian Missionary: A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity*, by Gerald Sigal. New York: KTAV, 1981.

I: THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES — 1. "Her Seed (Genesis 3:15)" (pp. 3–5); 2. "The First Human Birth (Genesis 4:1)" (pp. 6–7); 3. "The Seed of Abraham (Genesis 13:15, 17:8)" (p. 8); 4. "Until Shiloh Comes (Genesis 49:10)" (pp. 9–10); 5. "Sin and Atonement (Leviticus 17:11)" (pp. 11–17); 6. "A Prophet Like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18)" (p. 17); 7. "The Curse of the Law (Deuteronomy 27:26)" (pp. 18–19); 8. "The Virgin-Birth Myth (Isaiah 7:14)" (pp. 20–28); 9. "Who Is the Child? (Isaiah 9:5–6)" (pp. 29–32); 10. "The Messianic Age (Isaiah 11)" (pp. 33–34); 11. "The Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52:13–53:12)" (pp. 35–68); 12. "A Woman Encompasses a Man (Jeremiah 31:31–34)" (p. 69); 13. "Jeremiah's New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34)" (pp. 70–73); 14. "Hosea and the Second Coming of Jesus (Hosea 5:15)" (pp. 74–75); 15. "Bethlehem Ephrathah (Micah 5:1)" (pp. 76–77); 16. "One Ass or Two? (Zechariah 9:9)" (pp. 78–79); 17. "Who Was Pierced? (Zechariah 12:10)" (pp. 80–82); 18. "Elijah the Prophet (Malachi 3:1, 23–24)" (pp. 83–86); 19. "You Are My Son (Psalm 2)" (pp. 87–89); 20. "The Psalmist and the Resurrection of Jesus (Psalm 16:9–10)" (pp. 90–94); 21. "The Psalmist and the Crucifixion of Jesus (Psalm 22)" (pp. 95–99); 22. "A Familiar Friend