

Title – Sacred Samizdat: The Prevalence and Impact of Self-Publication Among Soviet Evangelicals

Program of Study – History

Presentation Type – Choose one of the following: Three Minute Thesis

Subtype – Choose one of the following for poster or oral presentation types:

Mentor(s) and Mentor Email – Dr. Benjamin Esswein (btesswein@liberty.edu)

Student name(s) and email(s) – Abigail Coker (acoker6@liberty.edu)

Abstract example: *Samizdat* (“self-publication”) emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1950s as an underground publication form which allowed dissidents to publish their work while evading official government censorship. Evangelicals soon adopted samizdat for the printing of Bibles, hymnals, and religious literature. Evangelical samizdat became a source of doctrinal teaching and spiritual encouragement, as well as a mechanism for protest against government repression. Despite the presence and importance of evangelical samizdat, historians have largely ignored the study of evangelical samizdat. This is unfortunate, as evangelical samizdat of the 1960s – 1980s sheds important light on the history of evangelical life and protest in the Soviet Union. This research seeks to explore the prevalence and impact of evangelical samizdat by examining its historical context, content, and impact. A significant portion of this research focuses on a case study of the evangelical periodical *Vestnik Spaseniia* (renamed *Vestnik Istiny* in 1976). Initially released in 1963, the periodical’s content and development over time provides insight into Soviet evangelical life and thought. This textual analysis examines over twenty issues, published over a period of twenty-eight years, and describes their subjects, influences, and aesthetics. The analysis reveals the doctrinal focus, historical interest, and family-centered nature of *Vestnik Spaseniia*. This case study sheds light on the usefulness of evangelical samizdat as a primary source for information about Soviet evangelical life and thought. Future research will use evangelical samizdat to examine various aspects of the Soviet evangelical experience, such as

the experiences of evangelical children in the Soviet Union and the removal of parental rights from evangelical parents.

Christian worldview integration: My walk with Christ has pushed me to act with integrity in my historical pursuits. Proverbs 10:9 says, “He who walks with integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will become known” (NKJV). I seek to walk with integrity by verifying my research sources before using them, by scrutinizing my writing to ensure that I am accurately portraying the meaning of my sources, by seeking to avoid plagiarism, and by citing my sources frequently and accurately. My walk with Christ also allows me to engage with the theological content in my research due to my experience interacting with the Bible. Although many theological debates and terms are still beyond my understanding, my familiarity with the Bible allows me to better understand the theological debates and controversies that have played a role in the history of Soviet evangelicals. My walk with Christ has also influenced my research topic. Growing up as a missionary kid in Russia, I was fascinated by the remnants of the Soviet culture that I found around me. Old movies on TV, anecdotes about Soviet bureaucracy, and stories of government repression opened my eyes to a world different, and yet similar, to the one in which I grew up. Despite my interest in the Soviet past, I struggled over how I could research the Soviet Union as a Christian. I wanted to avoid any research topics which would in any way glorify the system that had caused so much pain to so many Christians and had been the cause of so much anti-God propaganda. Researching Soviet evangelicals became my solution. Finally, my walk with Christ has allowed me to see how my research can be impactful within the culture at large. By examining the lives and struggles of Soviet evangelicals, perhaps non-religious scholars and readers will gain a deeper appreciation for the importance and impact of faith. Hopefully evangelical examples of godly living, patience, and endurance under persecution will even spark Gospel conversations, encouraging others to follow the path of these brave men and

women.