

EVANGELICALS IN EASTERN EUROPE

Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II*, Herald Press, Pennsylvania, 1981.

Philip Walters and Jane Balengarth (eds.), *Light Through the Curtain*, Lion Publications, 1985, £3.95.

Philip Walters (ed.), *Religion in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, Keston College, 1985, £2.50.

Walter Sawatsky is eminently suited to analyse and describe the complicated developments that have taken place among evangelicals in the Soviet Union since their beginnings in the nineteenth century. Not only is he a trained historian who has made a careful study of the relevant literature, he has also had personal involvement as a Mennonite leader in many of the incidents he describes. He has a sense of history and a fine judgment of men and events which make this substantial book of over 500 pages a rich storehouse.

The story of evangelicals in the Soviet Union is indeed a tangled skein which the author manages to unravel with skill, disclosing not a few knotty problems on the way! One of these inevitably has to do with Church/State relationships. Descriptions of dire persecution, first under Stalin and then under Krushchev, highlight the continuing debate about the Christian's duty within an atheistic state, a debate which is often polarised in terms of Romans 13.1 about being 'subject to the governing authorities' and Acts 5.29 about 'obeying God rather than men'.

It was within this context that division arose in 1960 over a Letter of Instruction, sent out to the churches by the leaders of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. This was interpreted by many 'Reform Baptists' and others as a betrayal of the Gospel and an unnecessary submission to the state. As a result the leadership was deemed to be 'excommunicated' by their critics. This acrimonious dispute continued for many years, although now with a new generation and a new leadership a much greater degree of unity is being achieved.

Quite apart from this major debate which caused such a serious split in their ranks, the history of the evangelicals has been marked by much doctrinal wrangling which seems at times to have emphasised the need for uniformity based on authoritative pronouncement rather than for unity based on any kind of pluralism. Sometimes the differences have been over paltry disagreements concerning matters of practice, form or order - as in the use of leavened or unleavened bread at the communion service. This same conservatism and avoidance of pluralism is seen too in the Christian's relations with the state or 'the world' outside the Church. But here again a change is taking place and an attempt being made, not least by young people, to seek to apply the social message of the Gospel. But the difficulty will surely remain so long as atheism and the propagation of atheism remain an integral part of state policy.

A fascinating and indeed disturbing account is given of the methods and work of some 'missionary societies' which raise funds in the West for the claimed support of Christian witness in the East. The

sculduggery of certain named individuals and societies has not only brought the Christian name into disrepute but has also provided the supporters of militant atheism with plenty of ammunition which they use effectively against the Christian Church.

The life of the Church, and not least that of evangelical bodies within it, is regulated by laws of many kinds, some of which are so wide as to be 'catch-alls' for either the bold or the unwary. The outstanding problem still is that of the rights of unregistered congregations and, in the case of the registered congregations, the limitations surrounding those rights they do enjoy. It remains true that the sense of legality in the Soviet Union leaves much to be desired.

The author, in a concluding chapter entitled 'The Evangelicals in Soviet Society', looks hopefully towards the future. He sees the possibility of an increasingly prophetic role being played by the evangelical community in the days ahead. Their awakening social consciousness, their wider vision through ecumenical contacts, their awareness of the need for more adequate theological education and theological literature and their developing leadership - all these augur well for the future. But this opening up to society and to other church traditions carries with it its own dangers, and secularism as well as atheism exerts increasing pressure on the young. Only time can tell what the outcome will be; and only God will determine its result.

The second book is a Keston sponsored publication and is much smaller than the first (159 pages). It consists in the main of stories or excerpts from letters or *samizdats* relating to Christians in Poland, Czechoslovakia, the USSR and Romania, giving testaments of faith and courage in face of great adversity. By its very nature it has relatively little to say about the 'official' Churches in these lands, but concentrates on testimonies from unregistered congregations or dissidents. The tensions between 'Church' and 'world' become all too obvious here. As one writer puts it: 'We have to reject all political activity, all calculation, everything which flourishes in the vulgar world where there is no place for truth' (p.94). This is a humbling and moving book; but one would have wished that other voices might be heard also declaring that the Gospel has to do with every aspect of life.

The third publication is a booklet, compiled by Keston College, giving 'study materials, suitable for sixth formers, Christian Unions and Study Groups'. Most space is given to the Soviet Union. Helpful surveys are given of religious statistics, of Church/State relations, of legislation in the USSR and of the Russian Orthodox Church as a religious institution. The chapters that follow deal with anti-religious education, dissenters and conditions faced by prisoners of conscience. Once again the picture is presented through the eyes of 'the persecuted church'. This is right and proper so long as it is remembered that there are Christians in the Soviet Union and elsewhere who, with equal sincerity and dedication, are striving to find what is the will of God for the Church *within* the socialist state. The booklet concludes with a brief description of religion in other socialist countries in eastern Europe and portraits of four Christian leaders from different national and religious backgrounds. As a text-book for use in schools it is a

useful publication which would provide a more complete picture if it were placed within a wider setting.

D. S. RUSSELL

H. Wayne Pipkin, *Zwingli - The Positive Religious Values of his Eucharistic Writings*, Yorkshire Baptist Association, 1 South Parade, Leeds LS6 3LF. 37pp. £1.00.

Up until the publication of G. R. Potter's work on Zwingli in 1976, there had been a dearth of material in English which reflected up-to-date scholarship on the importance of this Zurich Reformer, but since then there has been a considerable increase of materials in English.

Zwingli has considerable significance in the Reformation because he was a first generation reformer, contemporary with Luther, yet almost certainly largely independent of him. What we have in the pamphlet produced by the Yorkshire Baptist Association are two brief articles by Wayne Pipkin, who is on the staff of Ruschlikon and who has, for a number of years, worked on Zwingli material.

The first few pages of this pamphlet are taken up by a sermon 'Resonating with Zwingli' in which Dr Pipkin speaks of the relevance that he finds in Zwingli for the Christian church today. He emphasises the importance of Zwingli's pastoral teaching, his biblical orientation, his connection between theology in theory and Christian ethics in practice, and his genuine concern for the whole community in Zurich, including the marginalised.

The second and weightier article is entitled, somewhat ambitiously, 'The Positive Religious Values of Zwingli's Eucharistic Writings'. It offers an interesting summary of Zwingli's eucharistic development, laying stress on the danger of simply looking at Zwingli's eucharistic teaching in the light of his well known dispute with Luther at Marburg in 1529. There is no doubt that the final years of Zwingli's life did show a development of his eucharistic theology which is often ignored.

The particular relevance to Baptists is that the Zwinglian teaching on the Eucharist is often taken to be that which is most nearly reflected in such Baptist eucharistic theology as has been articulated. In these present days of ecumenical discussion, particularly in the light of the Lima document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, it behoves Baptists - rather more seriously than heretofore - to consider what they do believe about the theology and practice of the eucharist. So to do inevitably involves some consideration of the Reformation tradition of which they are heirs. At least as important as the ecumenical discussion is a helpful understanding of eucharistic theology which will enrich Baptist celebration of the Communion Service.

The pamphlet published by the Yorkshire Baptist Association will go some way, at least, to stimulating such thought.

W. M. S. WEST

G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, Grand Rapids; Eerdmans/Exeter; Paternoster, 1986. x, 446 pp. £19.95.

New Testament scholars owe a considerable debt to the former Principal of Spurgeon's College and Professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville for his major works of interpretation on *Baptism in the New Testament* and on the apocalyptic teaching of the New Testament in his studies on Mark 13 (*Jesus and the Future, A Commentary on Mark Thirteen*) and in his commentary on *The Book of Revelation* in the New Century Bible. His latest work, a substantial piece of scholarship, concerning the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God, belongs in the same general area of apocalyptic. The book is notable for its lucidity and ease of style, for its comprehensiveness and detail, and, above all, for its usefulness for the preacher for, whilst not lacking in scholarly rigour and interest, time and again the discussion of individual texts provides helpful insights that can be taken up in exposition.

Offering a review of the most significant passages on the teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom of God (p.338), the book commences with the usual discussion of background, but what is of special interest here is the attention paid to theophany, the day of the Lord and the coming of God in the Old Testament and in early Judaism. Narrow attention simply to the concept of God's reign is rejected in favour of a broader approach that will be significant for what follows. This fits in with the author's concern, reflected in his earlier popular work on *The Coming of God*, that the message of the Kingdom of God (henceforth KG) is about God himself coming into the world in sovereign, saving power.

The major part of the book then examines in turn sayings of Jesus about the present coming of the KG, parables on the same theme, sayings on the future coming of the KG, parables on this theme, teaching about the Son of Man in relation to the KG, and the discourses of Jesus in Luke 17 and Mark 13 about the parousia. A brief conclusion discusses the contemporary relevance of the teaching.

The bulk of the book is thus a detailed commentary on all the significant texts, arranged thematically, and covering the major questions of authenticity and interpretation in the light of modern scholarship; there is constant and fruitful critical interaction with the scholarly literature throughout the book. Moreover, as the list of contents shows, the author has not fallen into the trap of looking only at texts that specifically refer to the KG. The result is that his book is a full guide to the teaching in the synoptic Gospels on the KG, the Son of Man and the parousia.

Dr Beasley-Murray rightly recognises that Jesus taught both the present and the future comings of the KG, and it is difficult to see how after his massive presentation of the evidence there can be any going back on this position. He is also very clear about the implications of the message for the position of Jesus himself *vis-a-vis* the KG, and this comes out especially in the discussion of the Son of Man, where he accepts that Jesus identified himself with the Son of Man (understood both as a self-reference and also as the figure in Daniel 7); Luke 12.8f