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EVANGELICALS IN EASTERN EUROPE COMPARED

by Walter Sawatsky

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The preoccupations of Christians in Eastern Europe can be reduced to three major concerns. Most immediate still is the concern for the preservation, and perhaps even the renewal of faith. As unashamedly atheistic state authorities ease their pressures on the churches, Christians are becoming aware to what degree secularization, and in particular the mind- and spirit-numbing preoccupation with material comforts, are replacing interest in God. Do some Christian denominations experience greater success in the preservation and renewal of faith, than do others? Are there denominations that can be said to thrive in a Marxist-atheist society, whereas others prove to be too cumbersome? Might it be that the free churches, the evangelicals, are the wave of the future in Eastern Europe?

Frequently evangelicals have been perceived as a disturbance. Yet it has been a sociological phenomenon throughout recorded history that new thinking, or creativity emerges from the marginal groups or from the marginalized individuals in society. There is a widely held recognition, to put it in another idiom, that there needs to be a healthy tension between the prophetic and priestly roles if faith is to be preserved and also to be renewed in dynamism. Evangelicals have always been weak in affirming the priestly task, but are deeply committed to the prophetic one. It is therefore appropriate to ask, whether in the East European context, the role of the evangelicals offers promise, or whether it is merely an interesting but incidental story.

A second concern for which Eastern Europe already attracted attention in the nineteenth century, is the

continuing search for community. For Christians this has been expressed in terms of the nation or ethnos, the Corpus Christianum, or the Kingdom of God. Nationalism in Eastern Europe was a major factor in the wars of this century, in the disappointments following, and continues to be a factor to reckon with by those in power in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. What does it mean politically to state that to be Bulgarian or Russian is to be Orthodox? What does it mean theologically and politically that Cardinal Wyszynski developed the doctrine of the Catholic nation as a category distinct from the state? As he put it in 1974,

For us, next to God, our first love is Poland. After God one must above all remain faithful to the Homeland, to the Polish national culture. We will love all the people in the world, but only in such an order of priorities.¹

What point is there to dreaming about a Corpus Christianum in a post-Christian society, particularly in a socialist society where the church has been separated from the state, and where the church cannot claim that the entire population is Christian? Is there an understanding about Christian community epitomized by the evangelicals - who were committed to church-state separation theologically - which merits reexamination? Is it not too easy to dismiss the evangelical fringe as not a serious option for developing understandings about community that include immediacy as well as the necessary internationalism in a world divided by ideologies?

The third major preoccupation of Christians in Eastern Europe is the question about the role of a Christian in society. Very few of the ruling political elite have so far declared themselves ready to agree to recognizing any constructive role for the Christian church. The question is thus not the large question about being the culture bearer of the nation, but rather a more modest reflection about the ethical emphases of Jesus and about similar ethical themes in the epistles. The Marxist opposition to religion has focused heavily on the abuses of power associated with the church institutions. It was based on judging the churches a failure in their promises about

¹ Quoted in Bogdan Szajkowski, Next to God... Poland. Politics and Contemporary Religion in Contemporary Poland, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983) p. v. cf. Vincent C. Chrypinski, "Church and Nationality in Postwar Poland," in Pedro Ramet, ed. Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics. (Durham, NC: Duke Press Policy Studies, 1984) pp. 136-9.

social reform, about justice, about opposing human exploitation. Also on this question the evangelicals are of interest because of their particular ethical emphases. That included the emphasis of their forerunners, the Anabaptists, on personal and corporate ethics, and it also included the notion that once an individual had been truly born-again, his personal ethic would change. From this came the formula that what society needed was a majority of born-again Christians.

A major intention in this paper is to assume that the East European evangelicals merit consideration for the approaches that they offer to the major questions still being asked in Eastern Europe, and more specifically, to point out that to differentiate between the evangelical groupings may be a helpful caution. Further, I have sought to spell out some differences between the Soviet and the East European evangelicals within the general metaphor of seeing the communist countries as a new frontier for mission. It is a new frontier in the sense that these are areas of new paganism where a significant percentage of the population no longer has any meaningful knowledge of Christianity. It is also a new frontier in the sense that the nature of the mission envisioned is fuzzy because of quite different understandings about society and values that Christians are encountering. Quite appropriately the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have been called the "Second World" to contrast it to the world views of the western or "First World" and the Third World of the developing nations, a world to which both the first and second worlds are promising a way out of their poverty.

For many Western Christian groups, this area of the world became the region of the 'closed door', beginning either in 1929 or 1949, or at least after the last war. The more open climate fostered by political detente in the mid 1960s caused Western Christians to launch vigorous missionary campaigns. This meant fund raising in order to buy Bibles and to give financial aid to a suffering church "behind the iron (or bamboo) curtain". It also came to mean encouraging church planting efforts which often involved local evangelical groups.²

² See for example Edwin L. Frizen, Jr. & Wade T. Coggins, eds. *Christ and Caesar in Christian Missions*, S. Pasadena CA: Wm. Carey Library, 1979 with short chapters on "Aftermath to Persecution", "Special Problems under Totalitarianism", "Lessons to be Learned from the Church in the U.S.S.R." The politically partisan

Denominational church bodies characterize the story somewhat differently. They recall the pre-communist existence of their own denominations (which might be Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Mennonite, Church of God or Pentecostal) with which the ties were broken off, at least during the period from 1930 to approximately 1955. Following this, the new agenda came to be the resumption of fraternal relations, and of finding ways to assist in strengthening the life of the church.

Both the faith missions and the denominational agencies had some common assumptions that proved troublesome. It was assumed that a new frontier in mission in Eastern Europe meant to work in partnership with those Protestants that had an evangelical orientation. Evangelicals could be found around the world - it was an international fellowship of believers not restricted by local or national culture. Working in partnership with East European evangelicals meant a broad sense of commonality: common assumptions about conversion, about doctrinal priorities, about structure and about programs. Yet one of the most troublesome features about this partnership in mission has been the dependency relationships of the East European partner, resulting from the unquestioned assumption that North American (and to a lesser degree West European) evangelical values were universally appropriate.

Another troublesome feature was the tendency to assume that the larger churches were not legitimate representatives of God's church and must be supplanted, rather than that efforts at spiritual renewal might be shared. There is now a new mood of ecumenical sharing in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but the memories of previous persecution of free churches is still quite recent, forgiveness has seldom been offered or received. What has made ecumenism thinkable has been the common disestablishment of all the churches.

phrase "Iron Curtain" was first used by Winston Churchill in a speech in Fulton, MO in 1947. "Iron Curtain Countries" is now a widely used designation which has contributed to maintaining the fiction of totalitarian uniformity in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Avoiding such terminology on principle, I will be using the current geographic label "Eastern Europe" to refer to Poland, GDR, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania as well as Yugoslavia. The Soviet Union is included but I will usually refer to it separately. There are other historic ways of grouping these countries that draw attention to similarities and dissimilarities differently but my purposes here are to draw attention to dissimilarities between countries with a Marxist-Socialist regime. Culturally speaking, this area includes at least 24 cultures & languages, a source of difference that goes beyond the limited scope of this paper.

Examining the cultural imperialism of specific mission societies is not my task here. Rather I shall try to delineate some of the ways in which East European evangelicals did not fit the universal evangelical mold. Specifically I should like to draw attention to some basic differences between evangelicals or so-called "Neoprotestants" in Eastern Europe and the Soviet evangelicals, going so far as to suggest that it may be helpful to view Soviet evangelicals as generically different.

A great deal has been written to document the Soviet evangelical story³, but a systematic treatment of individual East European evangelical groups is only beginning. Although I have visited many of the East European groups frequently and have had occasion to observe them over the past dozen years through the reports of others, my comparisons will be weighted unfairly on the side of the Soviet evangelicals.⁴ Perhaps to test some theories of difference may stimulate further work on the NeoProtestants.

1. COMMON AND UNCOMMON ORIGINS

East European evangelicalism has not been characterized by a profound sense of history. This is strikingly in contrast to the strong historical consciousness of East European nationality groups whose sense of identity and notions of destiny were forged through the cultural nationalism of the nineteenth century. Some nation states emerged out of World War I, eager to demonstrate their legitimacy. Others saw their destinies thwarted by the results of the Second World War. In either case, the language of nationalism very often came to be the religious language of a major confessional group. Thus a recent historian of Bulgarian nationalism remarked that "nationa-

³ See my Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 1981) for detailed references. When I refer to Soviet Evangelical developments without giving specific documentation, it can be assumed that I am summarizing a more detailed treatment in this monograph.

⁴Short country sketches, focusing primarily on current statistics, are included in the appropriate chapters of Trevor Beeson, Discretion and Valor. Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982, rev'd ed.). Cf. G. Keith Parker, Baptists in Europe: History and Confessions of Faith (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982) pp. 149-234 for the most informed and up-to-date survey of the Baptists; and William L. Wagner, New Move Forward in Europe. Growth Patterns of German Speaking Baptists in Europe (S. Pasadena, CA: Wm. Carey Library, 1978), especially his chapter "Eastern Europe 1856-1976", pp. 106-117.

lism has been a deeper faith for the Bulgarian Orthodox Church throughout the centuries than the gospel truth".⁵ Or as Dimitry Pospelovsky observed about the Christian orientation of Neoslavophiles in the Soviet Union: "It was in the course of their intensive study of Russia's cultural heritage and values, that is, an Orthodox Christian culture and Orthodox Christian values, that the Slavophiles gradually became converted to a personal Christianity." Such new Christians stated that "... we are against all forms of sectarianism which leads to an atomization of all Christian forces."⁶ The evangelical Christian was perceived as the sectarian, as an individual or at best a small group without historical roots in his culture.

All East European evangelicals, including those in the Soviet Union, have a separate history of little more than a century. They are part of the revival movements of the second half of the 19th century, movements not unrelated to the revivalism in America. They therefore have much in common with their western counterparts, especially in their emphases on the three main characteristics of evangelicalism: the need for a personal experience of rebirth, a commitment to the authority of the Bible, and a sense of urgency in seeking the conversions of other sinners to Christ.⁷

Just as is true of the American evangelicals, East European evangelicalism emerged within the context of the Pietist spiritual renewal. Continental Pietism was a reaction to rationalism in philosophy and to confessionalism in theology. Pietism only reached Russia in the 19th century, but then, the impact of Rationalism was also late. Pietism may have gone through distinct phases, and have had unique qualities depending on the local culture, but the persistent common element was the dissemination of personal devotional literature and a common experiential language of discourse. In addi-

⁵Spas T. Raikin, "Nationalism and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church", in Ramet, p. 205.

⁶Dimitry Pospelovsky, "The Neo-Slavophile Trend and its Relation to the Contemporary Religious Revival in the USSR", in Ramet, p. 44.

⁷Richard Quebedeux, The Young Evangelicals: Revolution in Orthodoxy (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) p. 4. See also James Leo Garrett Jr.'s acceptance of this characterization in James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson & James E. Tull, Are Southern Baptists "Evangelicals"? (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982) and the supplementary clarification by Hinson that Evangelicals should not be confused with Fundamentalists, pp. 61, 211 & 217. Cf. David F. Wells & John D. Woodbridge, eds. The Evangelicals (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, rev'd ed. 1977).

tion, the pietists of the 19th century engaged in numerous socially uplifting projects.¹⁰

A strikingly common feature in the origins of all East European evangelicals is the role of the Bible. The growth of evangelicalism is related to the emergence of a reading public. The first daughter society to the British and Foreign Bible Society that began in 1804, was the Russian Bible Society which was founded in 1813.¹¹ During its relatively short life (till 1826) the Russian Bible Society was responsible for the translation of the New Testament into Modern Russian. German and especially English pietists helped to introduce related voluntary societies such as a literature society, a prison reform society, and a society to establish schools for reading, using the Lancastrian model.¹² Here the textbook of instruction was the newly translated Russian New Testament. The Russian Bible Society was forcibly closed by Tsar Nicholas and Biblical study and translation moved into low gear within the Russian Orthodox Church. Christians of foreign nationality however, were permitted to organize a Bible Society in 1831 for their own needs. This became the important vehicle for introducing the Bible into Russia during the remainder of the century. Enterprising Bible Colporteurs began traversing the Russian and Ukrainian countryside, selling Russian language Bibles (the Old Testament had been completed abroad) but were forced to do so illegally.¹³ The almost simultaneous beginning of evangelical fellowships in various areas of the

¹⁰On Pietism, see F. Ernest Stoeffler, German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), and Dale W. Brown, Understanding Pietism (Grand Rapids MI: Wm Eerdmans Press, 1978). A thorough treatment of the impact of Jung Stilling and the Pietist movement in the regions of Eastern Europe and Russia in the 19th century is Max Geiger, Aufklaerung und Erweckung (Zurich: EVZ Verlag, 1963). See also Walter Sawatsky, "Prince Alexander N. Golitsyn (1773-1844): Tsarist Minister of Piety", unpublished PhD. diss. University of Minnesota, 1976, for a survey of the interaction of Protestant and Eastern Orthodox pietism in social reform.

¹¹See for example, Judith Cohen Zacek, "The Russian Bible Society and the Russian Orthodox Church", Church History, 1966, pp. 411-37; "The Russian Bible Society and the Catholic Church", Canadian Slavonic Studies, 1971 pp. 35-50 based on her unpublished PhD. diss. "The Russian Bible Society 1812-1826", Columbia University, 1964.

¹²Best described in Barry Hollingsworth, "Lancastrian Schools in Russia", Durham Research Review, Sept. 1966, pp. 59-74; Zacek, "The Lancastrian School Movement in Russia", Slavonic and East European Review, 1967, pp. 343-67; Zacek, "A Case Study in Russian Philanthropy: The Prison Reform Movement in the Reign of Alexander I", Canadian Slavonic Studies, 1967, pp. 196-211; Hollingsworth, "John Venning and Prison Reform in Russia 1819-1830", Slavonic and East European Review, Oct. 1971, pp. 538-57.

¹³Sawatsky, Soviet Evangelicals, p. 31-2.

Russian Empire can be explained by a newly self-conscious peasantry reading the Bible and drawing similar conclusions.

In virtually all of the present day countries of Eastern Europe, the story of the beginning of either a Baptist or Evangelical fellowship includes the role of a Bible colporteur. Some of the latter were English, most however were German and were close to the German Baptists who emerged after 1834, or were Mennonites such as Jacob Klundt. These helped to start small Bible study groups which found their own specific denominational coloration through later individuals or events, or by the Bible colporteur calling in others from his own denomination at the point where an organized church became necessary. Unfortunately, a systematic study of both the translation of the Bible and of the distribution of these Bible society agents still remains to be done.¹²

That is also true of another phenomenon of the late 19th and early 20th century - the mission activity of the Student Christian Movement and of some of the early mission societies to Eastern Europe.¹³ The impact of the Student Christian Movement was interdenominational but primarily Protestant. Only in Russia has the movement retained a significant Orthodox dimension. It was disproportionately influential because it focused on the educated young people in the universities and made provision for publications. It may well be that some positive experiences and personal relationships were established here which made it easier for Soviet and East European evangelicals to participate in the ecumenical organizations after World War II than appears to be true for American evangelicals. That subject needs further exploration, as does the general background for East European involvement in the World Council of Churches, in the Christian Peace Conference and in the Conference of European Churches. Western missionaries came to be more closely linked with the Evangelical

¹²I. A. Chistovich, Istorii perevoda biblii na russkii iazyk, St. Petersburg, 2nd ed. 1877; I. E. Evseev, "Ucherki po istorii slavianskago perevoda biblii", Khristianskoe Chtenie, 1912, pp. 1261-85, 1342-74; 1913, 192-213, 350-73, 469-93, 1329-40. A major monograph on the Bible in nineteenth century Russia, by Steven Batalden is expected in 1987. For Eastern Europe, sources are limited to scattered references in memoirs and short summaries in the annual reports of the United Bible Societies.

¹³Wilhelm Kahle, Evangelische Christen in Russland und der Sowjetunion. (Wuppertal: Uncken Verlag, 1978) p. 90-91; and Paul Anderson, "Reflections on Religion in Russia 1917-1967" in Richard Marshall, et al, Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union 1917-1967, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 11-33.

Christians a factor that helps to explain that movement's active, programmatic character, in contrast to the more doctrinally explicit Baptists.¹⁴

Still another more indirect common origin for East European evangelicals is their rootage in the nonconformist tradition of the Reformation period. This is most obvious in Czechoslovakia where several Brethren churches now identify consciously with the Radical Reformation of Jan Hus in the 15th century. The Hussite Church was a people's church which was nearly eliminated, however, by the Hapsburg sponsored recatholicization. The religion of Czechs and Slovaks today is predominantly Roman Catholic. But it is possible to read the history in such a way that one can say that to be truly Czech, rather than a vassal of the Catholic Hapsburgs, would mean a return to Hussitism. Is this why a self-consciously nationalist church (such as the Czech Hussite Church that separated from the Catholic Church in 1920) would find it more possible to share major goals with the socialist regime than would be true of a church closely tied to Rome?¹⁵

Soviet Evangelicals have spoken most specifically about their rootedness in the Left Wing of the Reformation. When Alexander Karev, General Secretary of the All Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists became involved in ecumenical activities within the Christian Peace Conference and finally when leading his denomination into membership in the World Council of Churches, he found it appropriate to explain their historical rootage to his fellow Baptists. He did so by writing an article on Jan Hus and another on the Anabaptists.¹⁶ More recently, a young Mennonite scholar has been writing about the

¹⁴See the summary chapter and stimulating footnotes in Kahle, "Einflüsse auslaendischer Gruppen und Missionswerke", pp. 90-104. See also the documentary extracts and summaries in Liudvik Shenderovskii, Evangel'skie khristiane. Vozrozhdennoe evangel'skoe dvizhenie v istoricheskoi khristianskoi tserkvi. (Toronto: Canadian Union of Evangelical Christians, 1980). On the ecumenical movements see Eckehart Lorenz & Theodor Strohm, Das Wagnis engagierter Friedensarbeit. Internationale christliche Friedensorganisationen im Spannungsfeld zwischen christlichem Glauben und politischer Wirklichkeit. Eine kritische Analyse. (Waldkirch: Waldkircher Verlag, 1985).

¹⁵Paul Bock, "Church and State in Czechoslovakia with Particular Attention to Protestantism", Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe, April 1982, p. 9-24; Albert Rasker, "Protestantism in Czechoslovakia", OPREE, May 1983, p. 1-21.

¹⁶Bratsky Vestnik, 2/1959, p. 74; 5-6/1962, 18-20; 6/1966 p.26f.

Anabaptists in Bratsky Vestnik in order to emphasize the ideological indebtedness of the AUCECB churches to the Anabaptists.¹⁷

Indeed, the ongoing history of the successors to the Anabaptists was related to the emergence of evangelicalism in Russia. For example, the first Russian Baptists were baptized by Mennonites living in the Ukraine, and the first chairman of the Russian Baptist Union was a Mennonite.¹⁸ That same individual later became the founder of the Bulgarian Baptists. The Mennonites that sensed close affinity with the Baptists, had just broken away from a larger Mennonite body in Russia as a result of a renewal movement in which the German Baptist, J.G. Oncken was a significant influence. Oncken had been influenced by British evangelicals from the dissenting tradition, then more specifically by Baptists whose roots were intertwined with those of Dutch Anabaptists and with whom there were common missionary interests throughout the 19th century.¹⁹ Individual historians may wish to weigh the Anabaptist or Puritan roots differently, but it is generally correct to see in the ecclesiology and practices of East European evangelicals the influence of such Anabaptist emphases as the separation of church and state, the freedom of conscience, a disciplined membership, the priesthood of the believers (a lay ministry), an ethic of love characterized by benevolence and nonviolence, and a nonsacramentalism that included a simple order of worship.²⁰

These ideological roots have been perceived differently by secular authorities. In the Soviet Union, for example, even though Friedrich Engels had spoken positively of the Anabaptists as a peasant movement, the distinctly bourgeois character of Russian Mennonite colonists in 1900 was the more immediate identification that caused Soviet authorities to seek to break up this religious commonwealth. When the Mennonites requested the historic right of conscientious objection,

¹⁷I. P. Dik, "Mennonity", Bratsky Vestnik, 2/1985, p. 45-49.

¹⁸Dik, p. 48.

¹⁹Most recently summarized in George W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions. (Hillsboro KS: Kindred Press, 1984) pp.16-21.

²⁰Donald Durnbaugh, The Believers' Church, (London: Macmillan, 1968) p. 32-33; cf. Franklin H. Littell, The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism (New York: Macmillan Paperback Edition, 1964) pp. 138-161.

the Soviet authorities pointed to their Self Defense League of 1918-19 as demonstrating their true bourgeois values and their disloyalty to Soviet power.²¹ Soviet authorities have, however, also recognized the unsettling influence of pacifism and other nonconformist emphases, by claiming that the ideological base of the Initsiativniki or Reform Baptists had been shaped by the Anabaptist heritage and that it was no accident that persons biologically linked to the Mennonites were active Initsiativniki.²²

The origins of Soviet Evangelicals are also significantly different from those of East European Evangelicals in general. Soviet Evangelicals are more deeply rooted in the national culture. On the one hand, a major wing of the movement was a logical development out of the Molokan sect, a movement that developed as a reaction to Orthodoxy in the 18th century, without outside Protestant influence.²³ The Molokany preferred to be known as Spiritual Christians. Many other converts to the evangelicals were reacting against the Orthodox Church, particularly against the moral decline of local clergy or the failure of the church to communicate a personal sense of worth before God. By 1917 many citizens of the Russian Empire had abandoned the church, or had turned to the dissenting stream that included Old Believers and Evangelicals whose ethical standards were notably higher. The perceived evil for both was the Russian Orthodox Church which instigated the persecution of sectarians.

For Eastern Europe, in contrast, evangelicalism constituted a reaction primarily against the Roman Catholic church, (applies less to the Orthodox Church except in Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania). Not only was the church aligned with the Hapsburg monarchy and the aristocracy, it was itself a major landowner in a setting of needed land reform on behalf of the peasantry. These were also the regions where there had been a brutal recatholicization after 1648 and the historic alternatives had been Lutheranism, Hussitism or Anabaptism. The most notable exception is Romania where evangelicals who initially flourished among the German minority, have become the major

²¹V. F. Krest'ianinov, Mennonity. (Moscow: 1967) p. 3.

²²A. N. Ipatov, Kto takie mennonity. (Alma Ata: 1977) p. 3.

²³Walter Kolarz, Religion in the Soviet Union, (London: Macmillan and Company, 1961) pp. 349-53; cf. Kahle, pp. 18f.

alternative to Romanian Orthodoxy, a development somewhat similar to that in the Soviet Union. This may be the appropriate moment to ask why Russian and Romanian evangelicals continue to grow in significant numbers, whereas elsewhere in Eastern Europe they are on decline. Is the answer to be found in examining the options for renewal within Orthodoxy? Is it because of the ongoing illegality of the Lord's Army, a lay Orthodox movement in Romania?

Another significant difference between Soviet and East European evangelicals is in the nature of the outside influences on the movement. The German Baptists were very influential in Russia and later in the Soviet Union. To the present day, the Baptist Unions of the two Germanies have maintained closer ties to the Soviet Union than they have toward Baptists in Eastern Europe. German Baptists were the major denominational missionaries to begin Baptist churches in the other East European countries, invariably beginning with the Germanic minorities.²⁴ During the early decades of the twentieth century when Slavic speaking congregations emerged, the latter attained a greater independence by resisting the German dominance and turning for assistance to American Baptists. In the twentieth century the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board became a major financial supporter for these struggling unions, an aspect that continued after the introduction of socialist governments when the German Baptists were in retreat both numerically and financially. In addition, the Southern Baptists sent missionaries and concentrated on assuring the existence of denominational seminaries.²⁵ In the Soviet experience, the linkage to the world Baptist family was always an anomaly since at first there seemed to be a greater affinity between the leader of the Evangelical Christians in the Soviet Union and the Baptist World Alliance than with the Russian Baptists. Throughout the postwar period the Soviet Evangelicals have seen themselves as members not only of the Baptist world body, but also of the Pentecostal, Evangelical Christian and Mennonite bodies. In the East European countries, the cooperation between Baptists and other evangelicals was usually more the exception than the rule.

²⁴Wagner, p. 106-117.

²⁵Robert G. Torbet, A History of the Baptists (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1950) p. 208-215. Following a decision of the London Conference of Baptists in 1920, the Southern Baptists assumed missionary responsibility in Hungary, Romania & Yugoslavia.

Elsewhere I have sought to demonstrate at greater length the fact that the Soviet Evangelicals who emerged after World War II were distinctly new.²⁶ Without ignoring the continuities, it is nevertheless true that the existing church unions (Baptist, Evangelical Christian, Pentecostal and Mennonite) had all collapsed during the Stalinist persecutions. That gave leaders and members a sense of beginning anew, under very different understandings, when it finally became possible to organize an evangelical church union in 1944. Not only were all the competing evangelical groups forced to start over, this was true for the Orthodox church as well which had been reduced to four bishops (from 163), a few hundred parishes and had only just elected a Patriarch and a church administration after an eighteen year pause.²⁷ There was therefore an atmosphere of equality even with the Orthodox, a quality of necessary respect for the persistent faith of each, often as encountered in the camps, which has not yet lost its force. Each church was more sensitive to the tenuousness of its own existence and was resolved to focus on the essentials of faith. There was an expectation of potentially necessary fraternal aid. In any case, all the recognized churches were soon involved in a commonly orchestrated peace campaign.

For the evangelical union, the new All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists (AUCECB), a denominational constellation had been created that included Baptists, Evangelical Christians, Pentecostals and later even Mennonites (1963). The requirements for union were provided externally. To some degree, Baptist doctrines and practices were adopted for all the others, with a predominance of Evangelical Christian leaders to carry them out and with the Pentecostals permitted to worship if they would agree to forfeit their distinctive practices. Nevertheless, as the ongoing tensions of that union have shown, a modified syncretism has become necessary for the sake of unity. Once forty years of forced union had passed, new habits of consideration

²⁶Soviet Evangelicals, p. 16.

²⁷Recent treatments are: Dmitry Pospelovsky, The Russian Church Under the Soviet Regime 1917-1982. (Crestwood NJ: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), and Lev Regel'son, Tragediia russkoi tserkvi, 1917-1945, (Paris: YMCA Press, 1977).

for each other had become ingrained.²²⁴

The new union of evangelicals has remained unique for external reasons as well. Isolation from fellow believers in the West was virtually complete between 1930 and 1955 - a generation of change. Since 1955 the interaction that became possible between Soviet Evangelicals and East Europeans, as well as with western counterparts, remained highly restricted. For Baptists and Pentecostals, the language of communication abroad was English, which meant that only a select few Soviet evangelicals had the opportunity to interact seriously with evangelicals abroad. The Evangelical Christians tended to have more Russian speaking contacts abroad whereas Mennonites had more extensive contacts with German speaking Mennonites and with German Baptists.

Soviet Evangelicals were forced to adjust their statutes by state demand in 1960. This resulted in a major movement of dissent. In major congresses during the next decade the AUCECB delegates and leaders struggled toward a new constitution and a restated confession of faith. At the same time, a competitive union, the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists articulated their organizational and theological understandings in the context of state pressure. These have become emotionally shaped reference points for Soviet Evangelicals which they do not share with their counterparts in Eastern Europe.

Similarly, as a result of persecution under Tsarism and the continuation of the same under the Soviets after 1929, the Soviet Evangelicals have remained a lower working class movement. This contrasts with the attractiveness of nonconformist Christianity to the emerging middle class in turn of the century Eastern Europe.²²⁵ By the time that a socialist regime unfriendly to evangelical Christians came to power, a cutoff from the urban working class had developed. East European evangelicals were less able to appeal in their style and attitudes to the simplest workers.

²²⁴At the most recent All-Union Congress (March 1985) Pentecostals were elected to senior leadership positions without the tensions that resulted in the rejection of Peter Shatrov on the Presidium in 1979. Participants commented positively (to this writer) on a more comfortable sense of union.

²²⁵Wagner, p. 132, who applied it most specifically to the GDR.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH MARXISM IN POWER

The Soviet Evangelical encounter with Marxism in power has been much longer than is true of East Europeans. Initially, the establishment of Soviet power meant liberation for the Evangelicals. They engaged in a very vigorous growth phase that included great creativity in techniques of evangelism, education, and organization including some successful communes.³⁰ As a result the Baptist, Evangelical Christian and Pentecostal unions came to represent over four million members and their dependents. The subsequent attack on their church institutions was also more thorough in the Soviet Union than was true in other East European countries. There was a complete breakdown of church structures. That included the loss of many capable leaders through death in the camps or also through the war experience. The resultant rebuilding of the structures took place in the context of a general loss of memory and the inexperience of the new leaders. Those few older leaders who reemerged were handicapped by suspicions in the rank and file about their faithfulness. Personally they had experienced the failure of their own efforts to preserve the church and they were not accustomed to the new Soviet ways. These were still the primary leaders when the second major attack on religion (1959-64) was carried out, an attack that reduced their operating churches by half.

A very profound learning for Soviet evangelicals has been the way in which they have survived and developed since the intense Khrushchev campaign abated.³¹ The older union received a younger, more sovietized generation of leaders during the seventies who have demonstrated a more contextualized style.

³⁰In its bi-lingual publicity magazine, Evangel'skie khristiane - baptisty v SSSR, 1979, the AUCECB named the following communes: "Fruit Garden" in Spat near Simferopol and others in the villages of Astrakhanka, Tokmak and Novo-Vasil'evka in Melitopol Region appeared before 1905. Others appearing after 1918 were: "The Awakening" and "Bethany" (Riazan Province), "Gethsemane", "The Morning Star" and "Bethany" in Tver (now Kalinin) Oblast. Some agricultural artels were: "Priliuchie" (Novgorod Province), and "Vassan" (near Minusinsk). Cf. Paul Steeves, "The Russian Baptist Union, 1917-1935: Evangelical Awakening in Russia." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1976, p. 510-27.

³¹In 1966 a more steady program of atheist publications, systematic monitoring of religious activities, and special pressures on dissident church groups set in. A revision of the Legislation on Cults (1975) confirmed the moderated conflict. At the time of writing, there was some expectation of further changes in religious legislation. Since the ouster of Georgi Vins (1979), the number of dissident Baptists in prison has climbed steadily, with 155 in prison in January 1986 and 10 of the leaders in hiding from the authorities. Gefangenen Liste der Evangeliumschrsten-Baptisten in der UdSSR 1986. (Gummersbach: Friedenstimme, 1986).

Secondly, the evangelicals have gained some bargaining power in discovering the limits beyond which state pressure on evangelicals was counter-productive, driving persistent believers into the ranks of the illegal Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists (CCECB) or even into independent house groups. Those evangelicals who early opted for resistance to state pressure, have been reshaped to the core by suffering, by expectations of martyrdom, and by suspicions about the more flexible Christians around them. Their links to the West have been even more restricted. Furthermore, they have received their strongest support from intensely anticommunist groups in the West, even though this may not have been their choice. Noticeable is also that their earlier affirmation of the intentions of socialism has been muted.³²

Initially, Soviet evangelicals were involved in debates and dialogue with Marxists. Best known was Vladimir Martinkovski, who had been active in the Student Christian Movement.³³ On the Orthodox side it was primarily individuals such as Vvedensky from the Renovationalist or Living Church Movement that had engaged the Marxists in dialogue.³⁴ When that movement collapsed, not only it, but also the memories of dialogue, were placed under a dark cloud because the Renovationalists, who had been committed to subservience to the Bolshevik state, were also unable to save the church.

Renewed dialogue attempts in the sixties were made by the Initsiativniki, but this was more specifically an attempt to appeal for concessions on behalf of believers by means of direct conversations with top party officials.³⁵ There have been scattered reports of debates between Christians and Marxists taking place during 1985, and reports about numerous private conversations with seeking persons wanting to

³²After the arrest of Vins (1974) there have been numerous leadership struggles and splits. With the most authoritative leaders either in prison or in hiding, effective leadership has been difficult. The Council of Prisoners' Relatives has fared better till the summer of 1985 when its female leaders were greatly restricted. During the past decade a growing number of churches have chosen to be autonomous, avoiding partisanship between either the AUCECB or the CCECB unions.

³³John S. Curtiss, The Russian Church and the Soviet State 1917-1950. (Gloucester MA: Peter Smith, 1965 reprint from 1953) p. 199. Cf. Kahle, p. 97f; Shenderovskii, p. 451-53.

³⁴Anatolij Levitin-Krasnov, Boese Jahre: Memoiren eines russischen Christen (Luzern: Rex Verlag, 1977) p. 162f.

³⁵Herman Hartfeld, Irina. A Love Stronger Than Terror (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982) preface, pp. 118f, 187-9.

examine the Christian position, but these incidents are too recent for any serious evaluation. Suffice it to say that in general, Soviet Evangelicals, like other Soviet Christians, assert that they have an interest in discussing mutual coexistence with state ideologues, but there is no interest in dialogue.

Most efforts at comparing the experiences of evangelical groups in the individual eight socialist countries of Eastern Europe distort because of the unique history and special religious situation within each country. Some observations should be helpful, nevertheless, to point out the degree to which their experience was quite different from that of the Soviets. Even though the new authorities were officially atheist and regarded the churches as bastions of conservatism and the believers as prisoners of an old fashioned world view, they found it much more difficult to destroy the church institutions. As in the Soviet Union, the evangelicals fared better than did the Catholic Church but not even in Czechoslovakia did the authorities turn to the nonconformist churches to become the new culture-bearers of the nation. There was a modified form of restraining the churches and of seeking to manipulate the churches through left wing clergy. But the church institutions, including those of the evangelicals, were not destroyed, even though there were some arrests and even a large show trial in Bulgaria. In those countries where the evangelicals had been stronger they retained even such extra religious institutions as senior citizens homes (Poland & GDR) and youth camps (Hungary & Yugoslavia also).

Nevertheless, the overall lines of Soviet policy on religion were applied in nearly all the fellow socialist countries.³⁴ That meant the equality of all confessions, the separation of church from state, the separation of the schools from the churches. Legislation on religion often followed the Soviet model. Some effort was made to produce the kind of atheistic reeducation program that the Soviet Union had established in the

³⁴See the solid articles by Otto Luchterhandt, and the relevant legal documents in Die Religionsfreiheit in Osteuropa nach Helsinki. Eine Dokumentation. (Kuesnacht-Zuerich: Glaube in der 2. Welt, 1977); Eugen Voss, ed. Die Religionsfreiheit in Osteuropa (Zollikon: G2W Verlag, 1984). For an English language summary and analysis of Luchterhandt's earlier writings, see my "The Legal Status of Churches in the Soviet Union", Review of Socialist Law, 1978, p. 159-164.

thirties and which it reestablished in 1957, but with much more limited success. One might say that for the East Europeans, their own more advanced reading public was less likely to accept the simplistic and philosophically old-fashioned atheist slogans that have remained the stock in trade in the Soviet Union. Put differently, a more serious secularization was able to develop in countries such as the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary because of the longer Protestant tradition which led naturally through such religious dissent to dissent from religion.

Marxist-Christian dialogue which was in vogue in the sixties involved those East European Marxists who have been described as Marxist Humanists - those who sought a philosophical revision by examining the earlier writings of Marx.⁹⁷ This included the so-called Budapest School identified with György Lukacs, the Praxis group in Yugoslavia, and some revisionist thinkers in Poland (Kolakowski) and Czechoslovakia (Mahovec). From the Christian side, it involved primarily individual theologians coming from one of the main line churches, whose agenda emerged out of the old Constantinian assumptions about the cultural task of the church. Aside from a few prominent theologians such as the Czechs Josef Hromadka and Jan Milic Lochman, the Christian side of the dialogue was pursued by Westerners.⁹⁸ For our purposes, it suffices to point out that East European Evangelicals, with a very few exceptions, lacked the academic credentials or interest to become involved. It may well be that current interest in dialogue will emerge more naturally from younger evangelical spokesmen such as Peter Kuzmich (Yugoslavia), but evangelical theologians cannot involve themselves as freely as mainline Protestant theologians because the evangelicals are more dependent on the direct support of their own church body. The abortive attempt of Josef Ton to offer Romanian officials a dialogue on the place of the Christian in a socialist society

⁹⁷See the careful analysis in James Satterwhite, "Varieties of Marxist-Humanism: Philosophical Revision in Post-War Eastern Europe", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Seattle: University of Washington, 1982. Informative but excessively critical is Vladimir Tismaneanu; "Limits of Critical Marxism", Problems of Communism, Jan-Feb. 1986, p. 67-76.

⁹⁸Recent summaries are: Paul Mojzes, Christian-Marxist Dialogue in Eastern Europe (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981); Nicholas Piedisicalzi & Robert G. Thobaben, eds. Three Worlds of Christian-Marxist Encounters. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

(1974) may be the more likely paradigm.³⁹ That is, to become isolated from both church and state.

A precondition for dialogue must be a sense of potential value or benefit for both sides. Marxists in power have seen little value coming out of dialogue with Christians for the sake of building their own national society - more recent experiences in Poland and East Germany suggest what such dialogue could lead to. But in the context of reflections on the necessity of coexistence on a globe threatened by a nuclear holocaust, Marxist authorities have begun viewing the churches as important contributors to bridging the ideological gulf between East and West.

3. EVANGELICALS AND PEACE

As a minority religious group in all East European countries, the evangelicals could at best play an auxiliary role to the peacemaking activity of the Orthodox and Protestant churches. The Catholic Church has pursued a more independent course. The auxiliary role was augmented in the seventies with the recognition of the strong influence of American evangelicals on American policy. This alone gave the Soviet Evangelicals a unique role in East West peacemaking.

Soviet Evangelicals are unique among East European evangelicals in their historic propensity toward pacifism. Individual leaders such as Prokhanov may have been influenced toward pacifism through his sense of linkage to Jan Hus, or to the points of cooperation with pacifist Mennonites, or as a response to the general increase in pacifism after World War I. Whatever the influence, forcing the Evangelical Christian Union, the Baptist Union, and even the Pentecostal union to reject pacifism, and instead to declare an unquestioning loyalty to Soviet power was the last major issue for those unions, before they collapsed under the Stalinist persecution.⁴⁰

When Soviet evangelicals reemerged after the war, they had been transformed into vocal proponents of defending the Soviet motherland with weapon in hand. Following their isolation during the height of the Cold War, Soviet evangelicals became part of the Soviet peace campaigns in which the nuclear armaments

³⁹Published as a special brochure by Keston College in 1974, its discussion within Baptist circles in Romania remained restricted. Ton finally emigrated and soon rejected the open stand toward socialism that he had presented in the article.

⁴⁰For details, and a summary of the literature, see Soviet Evangelicals, p. 115-120.

preparations of the Americans and their allies were condemned, the AUCECB trying to appeal to the conscience of fellow evangelicals such as Jimmy Carter. In subsequent inter-church delegations travelling to USA, the Baptists were included. When Patriarch Pimen called together religious workers from around the world for peace conferences in Moscow in 1977 and 1982, the Baptists held prominent associate positions in the planning and followup structures. When a sub-commission for religions was created for the official Soviet Peace Committee (1983), the chairman was Orthodox and the vice-chairman was a Baptist.

At another level, it has been the Soviet Baptists who have taken the lead in raising the issue of peace at meetings of the European Baptist Federation in which they are important members, and at meetings of the General Council of the Baptist World Alliance. Serious discussion seminars were also organized and hosted by the AUCECB to which European and world Baptist leaders were invited.⁴¹

It is still difficult to assess the motives for such activity or even to determine what assumptions about peace are primary for the Soviet evangelical leadership. Drawing pacifist conclusions from the New Testament has been regularly condemned by the leadership in their journal, Bratsky Vestnik.⁴² This aspect continues to strain relations with foreign Mennonites, obviously, but it appears to remain a point of tension within the Ukrainian and Central Asian brotherhoods. Those few leaders that have attended the innumerable peace conferences around the world, have amassed a thorough fund of knowledge about the urgency of at least a deescalation of the arms race. All Soviet citizens are deeply concerned about avoiding the kind of suffering that World War II meant for them, to say nothing about the horrors of nuclear war. Nevertheless, thus far neither Orthodox nor the surprisingly prominent Baptists have been able to develop new initiatives for peace that church leaders in the West would need to take seriously - it is still fairly easy to dismiss their positions as closely aligned with that of existing Soviet foreign policy. Given the continued prominence of evangelicals in positions of power in America and equipped with an eschatology that

⁴¹As reported in Bratsky Vestnik, 6/1984, p. 56.

⁴²The earlier ignoring of the pacifist phase is referred to obliquely by I.S. Gnida in a recent speech that still emphasizes the duty of military service. Ibid. p.54.

allows the thinking of the unthinkable, a serious theological response by Soviet evangelicals might have the possibility of inviting a reconsideration by American evangelicals - but that has not yet developed. Perhaps a contributing factor is the failure to recognize the significant bridge between east and west that evangelicals from the superpower countries could provide.

East European evangelicals have participated in peacemaking in a much more limited fashion. In most East European countries they are indirectly involved in the Christian Peace Conference through their representatives in the national ecumenical councils, or at least through the council of free churches as is true in Hungary. The more common attitude in the pew is one of apoliticism, possibly spiced with a secret hope for some national or international military exchange that might remove Soviet hegemony.

During the past decade attention has focused on the strange peacemaking role of the American evangelist Billy Graham. His visits to Eastern Europe and a dialogue with Bishop Karoly Toth of the Christian Peace movement apparently prompted a new emphasis on peace that was described by some observers as a conversion.⁴³ Perhaps this made possible two visits to the Soviet Union, one to attend a peace conference (1981), and the other as preaching tour (1984). East German authorities quite consciously explained the importance of his visit to East German churchmen (1983) with the comment that observations imparted to Graham might then be heard by President Reagan since the latter seemed to include Graham among the few to whom he showed an open ear. It was a moment when channels of communication between the superpowers were down to a minimum.

The results of such activity of evangelicals in high places appear to be mixed. Perhaps it muted the western Christian anticommunist voice somewhat, but careless remarks by Graham, and journalists' distortion of Graham's trip resulted in a very negative press after the first Soviet trip. Graham's speech on peacemaking which he had delivered to the conference in Moscow, was therefore not widely circulated or discussed in America. The response has been noticeably more positive toward

⁴³Sojourners, August 1979, p. 12-15, later circulated as a peace tract: "A Change of Heart".

Graham following later trips to the Soviet Union, East Germany and Romania.⁴⁴ His Soviet and East European evangelical hosts have been euphoric. It was an opportunity for a public Christian witness till then inconceivable. In Poland at least, Graham's 1978 preaching tour (together with the Polish crisis) contributed to at least a temporary reversal of the declining membership.⁴⁵ The Graham visits also raised the status of minority evangelical groups in the eyes of fellow citizens, which may encourage evangelicals toward more purposive planning for growth and involvement in society.

4. EVANGELISTS ON THE FRONTIER OR CHURCH RENEWAL

Soviet evangelicals have always been frontiersmen. The movement came to birth in South Russia and the Caucasus which were settlement frontiers at the time. Due to tsarist persecution, numerous leaders were sent into Siberian exile where they set about establishing new fellowships. By 1926, the Baptists, for example, had organized themselves into eight regional unions that included the Far Eastern, Siberian, Central Asian, and Transcaucasian frontier areas. In the new Soviet evangelical era, this sense of being on the frontier continued.

Because of restrictions on missionary work, creative techniques were developed for evangelism including evangelistic preaching at funerals, weddings, and other approved social occasions such as birthday parties. In the newly created industrial cities in the Ural regions and beyond in the northern and far eastern regions of the Soviet Union, evangelicals organized churches. They were able to do so more readily than could the Orthodox because they relied less on a central institutional structure and did not even need ordained clergy for church planting. Continued ministry on the frontier was a theme at the last two AUCECB all-union congresses. Aside from their supporting base in the Ukraine, the Reform Baptists, and the independent Pentecostals also have clusters of church fellowships in the Eastern part of the Soviet Union. Still another frontier is that of the city. In contrast to usual Soviet atheist rhetoric, the sociological studies of the

⁴⁴Graham's trips were Soviet Union (1984), GDR (1983), Romania (Sept 1985). After the negative press following Graham's attendance at the peace conference, he engaged in more careful preparation and listened to briefings from knowledgeable experts before venturing into Eastern Europe again.

⁴⁵Bill Yoder, "The Papal Visit and Protestants in Poland", OPREE, III, No. 7 (Nov. 1983), p. 22-30; see also Yoder's "Billy Graham Tours the GDR", OPREE, III, 2 (1983).

1970s showed an increase in the number of urban congregations for the evangelical sectarians, a sure sign that the dying out of this religious vestige would be delayed.⁴⁶

For East European evangelicals the frontier metaphor is much less apropos. They are better understood as a renewal movement within a Christianized society. In their presocialist phase the growth was at the expense of the dominant Roman Catholic Church. Churches were formed in villages, often adjacent to those of the German settlers. With the introduction of socialism it was the established church in Poland, Hungary, and Romania, for example, that became the promising alternative to what soon became a conformist socialist society. The struggling free churches often escaped state pressure because the state gave them privileges in notable contrast to the larger churches. The minority churches have not dared to risk these privileges for the sake of speaking truth to power, expecting the larger Catholic Church (in Poland in particular) to do that more effectively.

That has meant that East European evangelicals no longer offer a comprehensive alternative to a stagnant majority confession. To some degree the tables have been reversed and the evangelicals have been struggling with declining statistics. A modification may be the renewed Bible interest after Vatican II, when evangelicals were often more able to supply literature than could the Catholics.

A striking exception to the generalizations for Eastern Europe are the Baptists of Romania. Begun as German language fellowships during the late nineteenth century, the Romanian speaking phase only began in 1910 under the leadership of an American missionary. By 1930 there were 43,763 Romanian Baptists, organized in a union since 1923.⁴⁷ They had experienced some toleration from 1928-37, had even organized a foreign mission society, but under the fascists, all churches were closed by December 1938. Severe punishments were exacted if the Baptists refused to return to the Orthodox worship services. Nevertheless rapid growth continued so that by 1947 they were reporting about 200,000 members.

In 1954 the socialist Ministry of Cults imposed a Regulari-

⁴⁶Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma, No. 24, 1980. p. 98. This was a special issue on sectarianism.

⁴⁷Torbet, p. 209.

zation of Services that also applied to the Baptists.⁴⁸ In ways strikingly similar to the treatment of the Soviet churches in 1960, the Romanian Baptist Union was forced to implement the Regularization as if it was something that the church desired. At a national congress of the Romanian Baptist union in 1955, malleable leaders were forced on the congress delegates, and a conflict within the Romanian Baptist leadership has persisted to the present.⁴⁹ In contrast to the Soviet Initsiativniki schism, Romanian Baptist pastors and lay persons who resisted did not go into schism, except perhaps as individual congregations, appealing to the tradition of congregational independence. A more active dissent in the seventies resulted in some imprisonments and exiles to the west of spokesmen and the Union leadership gradually recovered some independence from the state. Southern Baptists and leaders of the Baptist World Alliance offered assistance in negotiating for more freedoms with the authorities with minimal success. Mutual aid or sharing of experiences between Soviet and Romanian evangelicals did not take place.

5. NOT YET AN EAST EUROPEAN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

Free churches have not been noted for their theologizing. This has been true of Soviet and East European evangelicals as well. But they have been influenced by the prevailing theologies, some more than others. Out of this diversity of influence differences developed, South European Baptists being closer to the Calvinist tradition whereas those in the northern areas were influenced by Arminian trends.⁵⁰ But it is generally safe to say that Soviet and East European evangelicals have espoused a conservative theology that has been affected only minimally by the major theological controversies of the twentieth century. Even the recent evangelical 'Battle for the Bible' made no serious impact. Soviet evangelicals regularly express anxiety about keeping out modernism, but do not become specific in saying what they mean.

⁴⁸Iosif Ton, "The Present Situation of the Baptist Church in Romania". Supplementary Paper No. 1, Religion in Communist Lands, November 1973, p. 5.

⁴⁹Alan Scarfe, "Romanian Baptists and the State", Religion in Communist Lands (RCL), Summer, 1976, p. 14-21; "Romanian Baptist Congress", RCL, Summer 1977, p. 94-104; "Dismantling a Human Rights Movement: A Romanian Solution", RCL, Autumn 1979, p. 166-77.

⁵⁰Parker, p. 25.

Soviet evangelicals are best characterized by an absence of theologizing. No common confession of faith was approved until 1966, and then only provisionally. Work on a new confession of faith proceeded slowly, delayed by the concern to satisfy the diverse denominational traditions within the union.²¹ A correspondence course on doctrine was based on material obtained from Moody Bible Institute. The impact of doctrine via religious radio programs from abroad is extremely difficult to assess. It appears that they have now become more consciously dispensational than the mild dispensationalism attributed to them a decade ago. Further during the past decade there have been signs of more caution, of attempts to screen out foreign influences by both Soviet evangelical unions, the AUCECB and CCECB. This may be due to negative reporting from Soviet evangelicals who immigrated to West Germany during that time period.

East European evangelicals, in contrast, have had access to seminaries and even to the theological academies of the larger confessional bodies. For example, a few Baptists and other evangelicals have attended the Polish Protestant Theological Faculty (CHAT), the Comenius Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague, and a Baptist and a Pentecostal scholar initially participated in the establishment of a Protestant Theological Faculty in Zagreb, Yugoslavia. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has maintained a significant influence on seminary education in Eastern Europe, through assisting with funds and faculty at Baptist seminaries in Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary and Poland, and through the high quality seminary maintained in cooperation with European Baptists at Rueschlikon, Switzerland. That includes the summer SITE program which has been geared especially for Eastern Europe, but no Soviet Baptists have been able to participate so far. Access to theological literature was also easier for East Europeans, than was true for the Soviet evangelicals. Knowledge of German or English is more widespread among East European evangelicals than is true of the Soviets, thus providing a further bridge to the theological writings of the west. Indeed evangelicals in Yugoslavia and neighboring countries have very intensive western contacts, and tend to focus their own work on producing

²¹J. A. Hebly, "A New Confession of the Evangelical Christian Baptists in the Soviet Union," OPREE IV, 1984.

translations of western evangelical writers. But apart from a few evangelical scholars such as Adolf Pohl (GDR), serious theological work by East European Protestants came from the Lutheran and Reformed establishments. In short, an East European or Soviet evangelical theology in context is yet to come.

6. A DIFFERENT ECUMENICAL INTENTION

Although Soviet and East European evangelicals may seem to have a great deal in common, their interaction is surprisingly limited. At the extreme is the absence of contact between Soviet and Yugoslavian evangelicals following Tito's break with Stalin in 1948. There is a language barrier to close ties with Romanian and Hungarian evangelicals. Contacts have been closer to Polish, Czech and Bulgarian evangelicals. In Poland however, Evangelical Christians and Baptists have separate competitive unions, both of which are historically linked very closely to the groups now constituting the AUCECB. In Bulgaria, the Baptist membership has remained very small whereas the Pentecostals, whom the AUCECB has invited to congresses instead, have been thriving with relatively minimal state interference. But even then the personalities involved (Soviet and Bulgarian evangelicals) do not seem to be close. In addition to governmental restraints on all foreign relations, including within the socialist sphere, there are a number of elements of difference that make ecumenical unity different.

Most East European countries established ecumenical councils which provide the major liaison to the state and to the churches in other parts of the world. In Hungary a separate Free Church council, in which the Baptists are dominant, serves an intermediate function. Such an ecumenical council does not exist in the Soviet Union. Instead the Russian Orthodox Church maintains a foreign affairs department, as does the AUCECB, the latter expected by the government to coordinate foreign relations for other evangelical groups that are not part of the AUCECB. Most East European evangelicals became members of the Christian Peace Conference and the World Council of Churches indirectly via the national Ecumenical Council. This enabled East European evangelicals to distance themselves from uncomfortable activity, only periodically taking their turn at the national and hence international representa-

tional levels.

For the Soviet Union, the ecumenical linkages are quite different. In 1958 the AUCECB became a member of the Christian Peace Conference in Prague and sent its newly appointed foreign department staff member as representative. In 1962 the AUCECB followed the Russian Orthodox Church into membership in the WCC. In 1963 they joined the Conference of European Churches (CEC). Gradually the Baptist representatives to the WCC became active on committees, Gen. Sec. Bychkov in particular making many lasting personal friendships. As a union of four evangelical traditions, the AUCECB also sent representatives not only to the Baptist World Alliance, but kept some links with the struggling International Alliance of Evangelical Christians, with the Pentecostal World Congress and with Mennonite World Conference. The point of greatest inter-European contact was within the European Baptist Federation. In this organization the East Europeans had major influence due to membership size, most of the union presidents or secretaries taking a turn at the presidency of the EBF, although being hampered financially by their inability to send money abroad.

Several observations follow from this ecumenical interaction. For many of the East European evangelical groups, participation in the national and international structures is viewed as a state requirement which is discharged with limited enthusiasm. In contrast, for Soviet evangelicals, participation in the ecumenical and even in the world denominational bodies, has served as a safety net in case new state pressures against churches should come. They have demonstrated some usefulness to the state by fostering the peace issue in such international forums. They in turn expect that the world church will not remain silent if their own situation becomes too difficult. And finally, it is through such international activity that a sense of sharing in the thinking and mission of the church around the world becomes possible, even if their own activities are restricted to national boundaries, or even to the boundary of the church door.

Within the world evangelical forums, the Soviet evangelicals have been able to participate only rarely. At the Congresses on Evangelism (Berlin & Lausanne), for example, there were East Europeans present, but not Soviet representatives. When it became possible, as in Amsterdam in 1981, then the genuine

interest of the Soviets became evident by the calibre of the representatives sent - namely their primary leaders.

An additional problem for the Soviets has been that the anticommunism of many western evangelicals has had the effect of isolating them from the Soviet evangelicals. Some western evangelicals sought ties to the unregistered Soviet evangelicals but this was never very effective. As the size of the latter group dwindled and the authority of the AUCECB increased, western evangelical leaders have spoken more reflectively about their own responsibility for forcing Soviet evangelicals to find their friends through the WCC. Personal friendships that AUCECB leaders formed with church leaders through the World Council of Churches have been more enduring than the fact of having a greater theological affinity to western evangelical groups that have chosen to oppose the WCC.⁵² The fact that mission work is forbidden by Soviet law, a restriction less thorough in Eastern Europe, has helped to isolate the Soviets from the main forum for international evangelicalism: the foreign mission societies and conferences.

Still another difference between Soviets and East Europeans involves their financial relationships. One way that the AUCECB offered to contribute to the budget of the Baptist World Alliance was by paying in rubles for the air tickets on Aeroflot of fellow East European Baptists, or to host meetings in the Soviet Union. The AUCECB has remained financially independent of the West except for receiving some donated literature. A number of the East European evangelical bodies, on the other hand, have had a greater financial dependence on western counterparts. East European Baptist seminaries are subsidized by the Southern Baptist Foreign Missionary Board, and other evangelical projects are subsidized by a variety of evangelical mission societies from Western Europe or America.

PROPHETS ON THE MISSIONARY FRONTIER or MAINTAINING THE CATCHINGUP SYNDROME.

The temptation to try to catch up to the style of Western evangelicals remains a factor for both Soviet and East European evangelicals. A helpful question for focussing

⁵²Elwyn Davies, "The Church is Alive in Russia" Europe Pulse, March 1, 1976, p. 6. The CCECB circulated some information on evangelical missionary work via its Samizdat-produced journal Vestnik Istiny.

the task ahead is to ask: what are the prospects for risking new efforts for growth on the unexplored frontier. Even though the Soviet evangelicals have had a more difficult experience of survival, have suffered losses, and are deficient in the training deemed necessary for charting a good course in the post-Christian era, they may well be the ones to lead the way on a new missionary frontier. Soviet evangelicals have become a unique evangelical church, sufficiently large in size to chart their own course for survival and growth within the Soviet Union. This will involve serious historical awareness combined with a deliberate effort to establish a legitimate role in the direction that Soviet society is taking. In contrast to their counterparts in Eastern Europe whose place in the national culture is somewhat foreign, Soviet evangelicals as a church of the workers and as a bearer of the tradition of nonconformity, can be expected to make a legitimate contribution to the larger societal culture.

East European evangelicals, generally speaking, are in a greater crisis of meaningful survival, even though they may be less plagued by imprisonment, fines, and public discrimination. They have a less clear sense of their own unique role in the national history, often not knowing their own history. Any new aggressive phase for such evangelicals within their society will require a serious effort at discovering the meaning of their own history. It will also require severing ties with the paternalism of their western counterparts, especially the financial link.

Given the persistence of faith, something that is most strikingly evident in the Soviet Union, responsible state leaders need to consider whether the evangelicals could be a reliable church partner with whom to share the task of constructing a more just society. A reliable partner from the perspective of the state, can not really be that church body which does the state's bidding, but rather one that is indeed able to provide leadership for the faithful with integrity, and to pursue social justice with conviction. It is at this point where the recent record of the evangelicals is not very promising, veering as it does between apoliticism and confrontation, but it is at least somewhat more promising than that of Orthodoxy.

From the perspective of the church, the record of state authorities, especially in the Soviet Union, shows virtually no

reason for hoping that the state will grant honorable living space to believers. Believers will need to assume a legitimacy of existence, and to act as if the Divine promises are certain. They will need to press forward with the assumption that to be evangelical and to be Soviet is possible, and that this is perhaps their unique calling.

S U M M A R Y S T A T E M E N T S

1. The rise of the free churches (known as evangelicals or Neoprotestants) in Eastern Europe during the past century represents one form of search for community, as does the symbiosis of religion and nation represent such a search for community in the dominant culture. An examination of the minority religious grouping - namely the evangelicals - is instructive for understanding the attractiveness of a counter culture and to note its potential for influence.

2. In the Soviet Union the evangelicals are more deeply rooted in the culture and are statistically a more serious alternative to the dominant culture - both the Orthodox and the atheist cultures - than is true in Eastern Europe where the Neoprotestants have become a protected fringe religious culture, benefitting from state opposition to the dominant Roman Catholic or Orthodox culture.

3. Evangelical growth has been the strongest in the Orthodox cultures of the Soviet Union and Romania. Growth was significant in the more Protestant territories of the GDR and in those areas earlier affected by the Hussite and Anabaptist movements (Hungary, Bohemia & Slovakia, and Transylvania (Romania)).

4. Which specific evangelical denomination proved to be more successful appears to be due to the accident of denominational origin. Origins coincided with the development of a reading public, the role of the Bible societies and the denominational affiliation of the Bible colporteur were crucial. German Baptist missionaries were notably active in the German diaspora in Eastern Europe, later Slavic origin Pentecostals returned from America as missionaries. The more aggressively organized Baptists appear to have the strongest church structures in Eastern Europe, whereas the Pentecostals have been relatively successful in Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union; that is, in more predominantly Orthodox regions.

5. Soviet evangelicals have developed a stronger sense of their own indigenous history. Eastern European evangelicals, generally speaking, lack this sense of denominational history and therefore feel themselves less deeply rooted in the culture, more ready to see their denomination as a foreign import.

6. During the socialist era, Soviet evangelicals have been more thoroughly separated from fellow evangelicals in the West, and even from East European evangelicals, hence the financial and educational dependence of East European evangelicals on their western counterparts is more striking. A closely related observation is that Soviet evangelicals have provided a more unique contribution to international evangelicalism than can be said for the East European evangelicals.

7. Soviet Evangelicals were a frontier evangelizing movement in intent, whereas the East European growth of evangelicalism is better understood as a form of renewal within the Catholic Christian culture.

8. Soviet evangelicals were, and, in contrast to the usual pattern, have remained a lower working class movement; most East European evangelicals seem to be part of what was a middle class.

9. Not having experienced the violence of the state attack on the church institution as did the Soviet evangelicals in the thirties and sixties of this century, East European evangelicals have not been forced to be as creative in organizing for survival and growth as is true for the Soviet

evangelicals. The rapidly growing Romanian evangelicals prove the rule, not the exception, since their experience of state pressure on church institutions parallels that of the Soviets in striking ways.

10. A biblically based pacifism was more noticeable in Soviet evangelical circles, than is true for their East European counterparts, whose participation in peace conferences has been more perfunctory. The a-politicism emphasized by all evangelicals underwent strains more noticeably by the dissident evangelicals in the Soviet Union, and, in a different way, by the officially approved Soviet evangelical union, which, like the Orthodox church administration, was forced into a position of proclaiming loyalty to the Soviet regime and demonstrating its usefulness to the state. Nevertheless, the harsh experience with the Soviet state makes it difficult for Soviet evangelicals to develop the degree of active participation in the social reconstruction of society that their historic and theological roots might suggest. It remains limited to the memory of a few communes and participation in the Peace Fund.

11. All East European evangelicals emerged in a context of devising creative methods for communicating the Gospel, organizing common fellowships out of disparate cultural groupings, and writing confessions of faith that were often required to gain state recognition as legitimate church. Soviet evangelicals have been forced to retain this quality of evangelizing creativity on the frontiers of the Eastern and Northern areas of the Soviet Union, on the frontier of the new industrial cities, and on the more subtle social frontier by converting funerals and birthday parties into opportunities for evangelism. But a conservative ritual expressed in songs and sermonic language makes it difficult for converts from the secular world to be integrated into the evangelical fellowships.

12. Whereas East European evangelicals are often part of national ecumenical councils and duly send representatives to meetings, Soviet evangelicals have participated in an increasing variety of ecumenical settings, finding in this a safety net should state persecution be renewed. The All Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists (AUCECB) is active in the world organizations of its member groups (Baptist, Evangelical Christian, Pentecostal and Mennonite) as well as in the World Council of Churches. The Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian-Baptists (CCECB) have gained a saving visibility through contacts with and assistance from interdenominational evangelical mission societies.

13. Where East European evangelicals appear to be trying to catch up with western counterparts and with fellow Protestants in their own country through common theological academies and with denominational assistance from abroad, Soviet evangelicals appear currently to be returning to a more self-consciously isolationist position, seeking to train their workers within a Soviet context by means of self-taught teachers, and even trying to persuade the membership to participate locally in civic efforts at social and moral uplifting of society.

STATISTICAL TABLE OF EAST EUROPEAN EVANGELICALS

	USSR	POLAND	DDR	CZECH	HUNGARY	ROMANIA	BULGARIA	YUGOSLAVIA
<u>Total Population</u> <u>in billions:</u>	26.5 _a	35 _a	17.3 _a	15 _a	10.7 _a	22 _a	9 _a	21.9 _a
Baptists	" "	2,500	22,000	4,000	12,000	160,000	650	3,500
Ev. Christians or Brethren	550,000	8,000	" "	8,000		120,000		2,000
Pentecostal	150,000	" "			5,000	200,000	6,000	6-7,000
Methodist	2,200	4,000	35,000	1,500	1200		1,300	3,000
Adventist	26,000?	8,000	11,000	7,000	500		3,000	3-4,000
Reformed	100,000?			170,000	2mill	700,000	5,000	
Lutheran	620,000	80,000	8mill	415,000	400,000	200,000		71,000
New Apostolic			80,000					
Ev. Czech Brethren				240,000				
Moravian Breth.			5,000	8,000				

(Source: Trevor Beeson, *Discretion & Valour*, 1984, plus miscellaneous sources).